

**EXPLORING COMMUNAL MATURITY: A THEOLOGICAL  
AND ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A CHRISTIAN  
CONGREGATION**

**by**

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis describes and theorises processes of communal maturity from concrete experience in a Christian congregational setting.

The research question is grounded by explaining the gap in knowledge in personal and denominational practice and academic theory in critical conversation with Fowler and other psychological writers, all focused on individualising concepts of maturity and development.

The ethnographic research methods prioritise the theological ground of the enquiry – specifically the intention to hear the voices of the congregation, guided in particular by Hopewell.

An extensive narrative of their story begins the interpretation of the data, attending to the complex experience and narratives of the participants, before developing this as a theorising of communal maturation in terms of otherness, drawing particularly on the work of Irigaray.

The conclusions turn to implications for further research and development in practical theology and congregational pastoral and missional practice.

The thesis demonstrates the centrality of communal maturation in relationship with personal because of the importance of differentiated relationship with the 'other'. It offers creative and critical application to individualised approaches to formation and mission practice in the Church of England, articulated in a practical theology rooted in Scripture.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>SITUATING THE RESEARCH THEOLOGICALLY AND MYSELF AS A REFLEXIVE, ACADEMIC PRACTITIONER</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1	Introduction	4
1.2	Why research maturity?	6
1.2.1	Introduction	6
1.2.2	Ministerial practice – limitations and potential for maturity	6
1.2.3	Theorising maturity through psychology	9
1.2.3.1	Fowler and ‘Faith Development’	10
1.2.3.2	Psychodynamic theories - attachment	14
1.2.4	Defining Christian maturity through social psychology and integrative psychology: gaps in theorising Christian communal maturity	15
1.2.5	Researching context within the Church of England – communal formation in the midst of concern for numerical growth	19
1.3	The theological shape of the research journey	21
1.3.1	Doing theology from practice	22
1.3.2	A question of methodology – correlation and practical theology	24
1.3.3	A question of authority – attending to Scripture in practical theology	28
1.3.3.1	Criticism and confidence – an epistemological question	29
1.3.3.2	Reading behind, within and in front of the text – a hermeneutical question	30
1.3.3.3	Use and abuse of Scripture – an ethical question	31
1.3.4	A question of relationship – congregational studies and the narration of stories	33
1.3.5	A question of spirituality – ethnography and practical theology	38
1.3.6	Does Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) focus on maturity?	44
1.4	Research question	46
1.5	Conclusion – messiness and complexity	47
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>RESEARCH METHODS</b>	<b>49</b>
2.1	Introduction	49
2.2	Research structure and design	50
2.2.1	Ethnography and practical theology	50
2.2.2	Narrative interpretation	52
2.2.3	Inductive and deductive approaches in narrating maturity	52
2.2.4	From design to field work	55
2.3	Research techniques	56
2.3.1	Gaining access	56
2.3.2	Field work and field notes	57
2.3.3	Interviewing	62

2.3.3.1	Focus groups	62
2.3.3.2	One-to-one interviews	64
2.3.3.3	Community interviews	64
2.3.3.4	Written documents	65
2.3.3.5	Interview practice	65
2.3.4	Analysis – coding and narrative	66
2.3.5	Trusting outcomes in qualitative research	71
2.3.6	Reflexivity and ethical practice	73
2.3.6.1	Good practice	73
2.3.6.2	Negotiation of power	74
2.3.6.3	Reflexive awareness of roles	76
2.3.6.4	Authenticity in writing	78
2.4	Conclusion	79
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>TELLING THE STORY – THE JOURNEY WITH ST X</b>	<b>80</b>
3.1	Introduction	80
3.2	Journeying outwards – prioritising relationship; crossing boundaries	83
3.2.1	Introduction	83
3.2.2	Journey with community	85
3.2.2.1	Reality check 1 – How did the wider community see it?	86
3.2.2.2	Reality check 2 – nuancing and critique within the Church	87
3.2.2.3	What is community involvement? – the totemic symbol of the Holiday Club	89
3.2.3	Conclusion	92
3.3	Relating to others – a new relationship with the human other	93
3.3.1	Introduction	93
3.3.2	Passivity and resistance towards the other	94
3.3.3	Dwelling in the World – what is it and how did it develop?	98
3.3.4	What happened to evangelism?	102
3.3.5	The “Cinderella” Practice – Announcing the Kingdom	103
3.4	The interplay of personal and communal in the story of growth	105
3.4.1	Introduction: researching home groups	105
3.4.2	Home groups stories	106
3.4.2.1	Journey with PMC	106
3.4.2.2	Home groups – safe space for support and learning	108
3.4.2.3	What did growth mean for home group members?	109
3.4.2.4	The “missing” home group	110
3.4.3	Year 2 plan and meetings in Lent 2017	111
3.4.4	“Connect Groups”	115
3.4.5	Hospitality – a conclusion	116
3.5	What is learning and how does it happen? – a new relationship with the ‘otherness’ of Scripture	118
3.5.1	Introduction	118
3.5.2	Established patterns of learning and growing	119
3.5.3	A new way of learning?	122
3.5.3.1	Positive	122

3.5.3.2	Negative	124
3.5.3.3	Negotiating the practice	125
3.6	How the practices of reflection and discernment encourage lay people to take responsibility – a new relationship with the ‘otherness’ of God	129
3.6.1	Introduction	129
3.6.2	Corporate Spiritual Discernment	130
3.6.3	Two experiences of Corporate Spiritual Discernment	132
3.6.4	Learning to reflect – the practice of discernment	136
3.6.5	The impact of the reflective life	137
3.7	Conclusion	141
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>MATURITY THROUGH COMMUNITY – A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION</b>	<b>144</b>
4.1	From findings to reflection	144
4.2	Introduction – overview of the argument	145
4.3	The ubiquity of individualism: strengths and weaknesses	147
4.3.1	The importance of individuation	147
4.3.2	The limits of Individualism	149
4.4	The journey with the ‘other’ in community as maturation	153
4.4.1	Attending to the ‘other’ as the pathway to maturity	153
4.4.1.1	Social psychology – a gateway to thinking about communal maturity	153
4.4.1.2	Maturity as contextual	154
4.4.2	Otherness in relationships	158
4.4.3	Community formation, differentiation and the journey with God	160
4.5	The interplay of the communal and the personal in the journey of maturity	168
4.6	Conclusion – maturity as a communal task	171
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>OUTCOMES AND FURTHER RESEARCH</b>	<b>173</b>
5.1	Introduction – the purpose of this chapter	173
5.2	Christian maturity: where this research has arrived at and where it might develop from here	174
5.3	Maturity, resistance and missional practice – learning for PMC	175
5.3.1	Growing a public Christian identity	175
5.3.2	Conflict, power and maturity	179
5.3.3	Leadership and maturity	181
5.3.4	Reflective practice and expertise	184
5.3.5	What happens when a leader moves on?	185
5.4	Practical theology	186
5.4.1	Theological anthropology	187
5.4.2	Attending to Scripture in practical theology	188
5.5	The Church of England and congregational studies	190
5.5.1	Introduction	190
5.5.2	External and internal reading	190
5.5.3	Numerical growth and maturity	192

5.6	My development as an academic practitioner – a maturing journey	193
5.6.1	Desire	194
5.6.2	Discipline	195
5.6.3	Testing	196
5.6.4	Finding form – what endures?	197
<b>CONCLUSION</b>		<b>199</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>		
Figure 1	‘Brainstorming’	131
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		<b>202</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>		<b>226</b>
Appendix 1	Marks of maturity	226
Appendix 2	“Alongside” groups	226
Appendix 3	Partnership for Missional Church	227
Appendix 4	Partnership for Missional Church – A Proposal for Parishes and Benefices	230
Appendix 5a	Email to the vicar of St X	233
Appendix 5b	Letter to the Parochial Church Council of St X	234
Appendix 6	Participation during field work	235
Appendix 7	Denotation of interviewees	236
Appendix 8	Excerpts from field notes	237
Appendix 9a-d	Indicative focus group guides	247
Appendix 10	Information sheet for focus groups	254
Appendix 11	Consent form for focus groups	255
Appendix 12	Interview guide for one-to-one interviews	256
Appendix 13	Information sheet for one-to-one interviews	258
Appendix 14	Consent form for one-to-one interviews	259
Appendix 15	Community survey – information sheet	260
Appendix 16	Consent form for community survey	261
Appendix 17	Community survey questions	262
Appendix 18	Excerpt from interview with E, 8-15: 31.05.17	263
Appendix 19	Excerpt from focus group 4, 59-78: 23.11.16	267
Appendix 20	Thematic analysis of field notes [Research Log: 5-6, 8-11, 12-14]	277
Appendix 21	Analytic notes and memos [Research Log, 2, 6-7, 20]	285
Appendix 22	Coding and categories for interviews and focus groups	287
Appendix 23	Attending to narrative, relationships and tone [Research Log, 21-38]	289
Appendix 24	Further excerpts from chapter 3: Telling the story	305
Appendix 25	Integrative complexity	317
Appendix 26	Story and counter-story at St X	319
Appendix 27	Parish Dashboard 2007-2016	321
Appendix 28-35	DPT submissions and unpublished papers	322



# ABBREVIATIONS

AtK	Announcing the Kingdom
CofE	Church of England
CS	Congregational Studies
CSD	Corporate Spiritual Discernment
DitW	Dwelling in the Word
DitWorld	Dwelling in the World
DPT	Doctorate in Practical Theology
FG	Focus Group
FGs	Focus Groups
FN	Field Notes
FW	Field Work
GTM	Grounded Theory Method
IC	Integrative Complexity (in the work of Sara Savage)
MIT	Missional Innovation Team
MVS	Missional Vocation Statement
PCC	Parochial Church Council – decision-making body in an Anglican Church
PMC	Partnership for Missional Church – based at Church Innovations in St Paul’s, Minnesota, USA
PMC-UK	Partnership for Missional Church in the UK – based at Church Mission Society
PT	Practical Theology
SGPF	Setting God’s People Free – Church of England report on lay ministry
St X	Church that was the context for the research
X1, Y1, Z1	Different areas of the church’s parish
Vicar 2	Previous vicar
VE	Vision for Embodiment

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis represents the outcome of an ethnographic and theologically reflective study of a church which had opted to join an accompanied process of missional change over three years.<sup>1</sup> I spent two years with them at the point where the guided process had finished and they were exploring their own journey with what they had discovered.<sup>2</sup> My interest was in processes of growth and maturity, which might be highlighted most clearly in a church that was involved in a change process.

This is a practical theology (PT) thesis, committed to doing theology from practice. The idea of the transformative power of practice has become a significant thread in contemporary PT. In adopting a narrative approach to analysis and writing, I have sought to amplify the voices of the congregants in all their complexity and difference in a way that gives both content and structure to the theological interpretation.

In my interest in what fosters and inhibits growth to maturity in Christian congregations, I considered that the communal dimension of this was both important and under-researched. What this research has demonstrated is that communities have their own journey of maturity as much as individuals, journeys that are interdependent because the process of maturation depends upon genuine engagement with the 'other', whether this be God, Scripture or human others – both proximate and distant. It has also shown the dominant power of individualisation in understandings of growth and maturity and hence the obscuring of communal maturation in both theory and practice. As this has been a participative process and researching of my own practice, there is a parallel and interrelated

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<sup>1</sup> 2012-2015.

<sup>2</sup> 2015-2017.

personal and ministerial journey with the 'other', which can be also seen in terms of communal maturation.

The chapters that follow are both story and theological interpretation of the two years that I spent with the congregation of St X.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 1 situates the research in my personal and ministerial experience, the wider Church context in which I work, and in the gap in knowledge this research seeks to address. It also explains the theologically grounded methodology for the research, seeking to take up Cameron's challenge to be 'theological all the way through' – something which is not always a mark of PT.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 2 explains the research methods that I followed, offering this within an account of the field work [FW] experience that is reflective and reflexive, supported by appendices that evidence the FW.

Together they provide the theological and methodological backdrop to chapter 3 – an interpretative narrative of the church's journey based upon the analysis of the data.<sup>5</sup> Here I seek to narrate their story faithfully, whilst grounding it theologically, supplying the contextual material for theological reflection on practice that follows in chapter 4, where I offer my answer to the research question:

**What are people's understanding and experience of change and development when their church journeys with the PMC process?**

**What light might this shed on issues of maturity through community?**

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<sup>3</sup> The church chosen for the research was a Church of England congregation in a suburban setting in the diocese of Southwell and Nottingham.

<sup>4</sup> Cameron, H., Bhatti, D., Duce, C., Sweeney, J. and Watkins, C. (2010). *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. London: SCM, 51.

<sup>5</sup> The constraints of the thesis length has meant that this chapter has had to be succinct, though not in a way that undermines its argument. Further material from participants that could not be included can be found in Appendix 24.

In chapter 5, I explore the contributions of this research both for the academy and practice, whilst suggesting areas for further research. Finally, the conclusion draws the threads together.

# CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE RESEARCH THEOLOGICALLY AND MYSELF AS A REFLEXIVE, ACADEMIC PRACTITIONER

## 1.1 Introduction

The focus of this research is an exploration of the understanding of maturity expressed through the life of a Christian community. The research involved participation in the lived experience of a community as well as articulation of the concept of maturity, through reflexive theological and academic engagement with my own ministerial practice and academic perspectives characteristic of the Doctorate in Practical Theology (DPT). The thesis culminates in a summary of the key discoveries about communal maturity in the research.

This chapter situates the thesis in personal, professional and academic practice grounded in an iterative relationship between theology and practice. I will begin by answering why this question is important from the perspective of ministerial and academic concerns and within the context of the Church of England (CofE), demonstrating the gap in both practical and theoretical knowledge in terms of communal maturation. First, I describe my own journey with individualised approaches to ministry and my attempts to develop communal practice.<sup>1</sup> I continue with an assessment of psychological theories about growth and maturity, in which I both validate and critique what is offered in terms of personal development, but demonstrate the absence of attention to communal maturation.<sup>2</sup> Finally, this is evidenced also in Church of England practice.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See section 1.2.2

<sup>2</sup> See sections 1.2.3 and 1.2.4

<sup>3</sup> See section 1.2.5

This will be followed by an explanation of the theological commitments of the research and how these support the exploration of maturity. It is positioned in practical theology (PT) and more specifically within congregational studies, dealing with ideas of maturity, questions of biblical interpretation, and of divine as well as human agency – all of which are central to the interpretation of the research question. One of the aims of the project has been to be ‘theological through and through’.<sup>4</sup> This reflects my own theological commitments in narrating and interpreting the journey of St X. The methodology of the research is guided by two principles: to be theologically articulated in all aspects of the research and to be shaped by the intention to narrate ordinary people’s experience of their journey with God together.<sup>5</sup>

I will explain why Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) was chosen as an appropriate vehicle for a theological engagement with the question of maturity.<sup>6</sup> At this point, I will present the research question with the summary of the aims of the project.<sup>7</sup>

The research journey has involved critical reflection on my spiritual and theological identity as an Evangelical as well as questioning and re-framing PT in relation to evangelical perspectives – not least in relation to attending to Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Though this story is related to my whole ministerial journey, the bulk of this chapter is based on work done in part 1 of the DPT. I developed the heart of the theological argument in that early work, but because of the iterative nature of the relationship between theology, practice and reflexivity, it has been shaped and refined by ongoing reflection not just before but during and after the FW.

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<sup>4</sup> Cameron et al., *Talking about God*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> See section 1.3

<sup>6</sup> See section 1.3.6

<sup>7</sup> See section 1.4

<sup>8</sup> See section 1.5

## **1.2 Why research maturity?**

### **1.2.1 Introduction**

This research is grounded in my own professional history as a CofE minister and theological educator. I have always been passionate about the formation of community and the full participation of the laity in helping people grow as human beings and followers of Christ. I have seen people and communities flourish, but this is not irresistible; churches can both foster and inhibit development. My purpose in the DPT was to articulate something about communal formation which might be of value to myself and the wider church; Stage 1 began the process that led to the context-based research that is the substance of this dissertation.

In this section, I argue the importance of the question of maturity in three respects: the potential and limitations of the practice of formation in my own ministry experience; the strengths and weaknesses of psychology as the primary language for articulating maturity and the gap in knowledge for describing communal maturity that this reveals; and the lack of attention to personal and communal formation in my wider denominational context.

### **1.2.2 Ministerial practice – limitations and potential for maturity**

I found faith through the influence of lay communities in my school and home town, which forged a life-long commitment to understanding and promoting community formation. Nevertheless, my curacy experience<sup>9</sup> showed how we were focused upon personal solutions to systemic problems – a characteristic of individualised culture where

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<sup>9</sup> Aston, Birmingham – 1982-1986.

'how one lives becomes the *biographical solution of systemic contradictions*';<sup>10</sup> but I was not clear on how to do this differently.

In the 1980s and 90s, Evangelical Christians in the UK were deeply influenced by the ministry of John Wimber with his emphasis upon healings as works of the gospel. Despite the focus in much Pentecostal and early Charismatic teaching upon physical healing as a 'front-of-text' response to the ministry of Jesus,<sup>11</sup> increasingly pastoral practice in the Charismatic tradition focused on in-depth psycho-spiritual counselling ministry towards the wholeness of the individual and was fuelled by an eclectic range of popular writing.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside this ran a more measured academic tradition in Christian pastoral counselling, which if not directly influencing these writers was part of the atmosphere that shaped Christian ministry in this period and were influential in my own practice.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1950s, a new approach to PT began to understand the task in terms of two sources for theology, 'Christian texts and common human experience', seeking some form of correlation between the two in which a variety of academic disciplines might be brought into critical conversation with theology, thus recognising the 'theory-laden' nature of experience.<sup>14</sup> Beginning with Hiltner, the dialogue with psychology was developed for

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<sup>10</sup> Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society – Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage, 137.

<sup>11</sup> John Wimber saw the gospels as a ministry practice text and encouraged people simply 'to do what Jesus did' (Signs and Wonders Part 1, Westminster Central Hall, London, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> Powell, J. (1975). *Why am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* New York, NY.: Fontana. Sandford, J. & P. (1982). *The Transformation of the Inner Man*. Plainfield, NJ.: Bridge Publishing. Marshall, T. (1983). *Free Indeed!* Chichester: Sovereign World. Seamands, D. A. (1986). *Healing of Memories*. Amersham: Scripture Press Foundation. Pytches, M. (1987). *Set My People Free*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. White, J. (1991). *Changing on the Inside*. Guildford: Eagle. Payne, L. (1992). *Restoring the Christian Soul through Healing Prayer*. Eastbourne: Kingsway.

<sup>13</sup> Lake, F. (1966). *Clinical Theology*. London: DLT. Bryant, C. (1983). *Jung and the Christian Way*. London: DLT. Clinebell, H. (1984). *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling*. London: SCM. Narramore, S. B. (1984). *No Condemnation: Rethinking Guilt Motivation in Counseling, Preaching and Parenting*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan. Hurding, R. F. (1985). *Roots and Shoots: A Guide to Counselling and Psychotherapy*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

<sup>14</sup> Tracy, D. (1975). *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 43-48. Hiltner, S. (2000). The Meaning and Importance of Pastoral Theology. In J. Woodward and S. Pattison (eds.). *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 27-48. Oxford: Blackwell.



ministerial practice through Boisen and the Clinical Pastoral Education Movement.<sup>15</sup> I see in my own ministry the impact of the ‘turn to the human’ and the valuing of psychology in Western theology which was embraced in the church’s practice in the late twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> It can be placed in cultural context in terms of ‘avoiding suffering’ and the ‘stress on human welfare’.<sup>17</sup>

This led me, in my practice in Stoke and St Albans<sup>18</sup> to articulate a discipleship strategy – my “marks of discipleship” – that I felt constituted the characteristics of growing Christians<sup>19</sup> and also a model of the “building bricks” of a community in which growth would have the potential to be nurtured; I called them “alongside communities” – based on the idea of *‘paracletos’* in 2 Corinthians 1.3-4.<sup>20</sup> The outcome of this approach led to strong communities of mutual commitment in which people participated fully in the life of the church and had the opportunity to journey honestly with each other in their spiritual formation. However, this was still fundamentally an individualist model with an approach to spirituality that owed much to both psychology and prayer.

I became uneasy with the individualised nature of my “marks of discipleship” and the fact that they focused mainly on the development and flourishing of people within the church community with only the final mark having implications for the outward-facing nature of the church’s life. In practice, this mark was the most attenuated and ill-formed of

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<sup>15</sup> Hiltner, S. (1958). *Preface to Pastoral Theology*. New York, NY.: Abingdon Press. Miller-McLemore, B. J. (2012c). *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 46-69.

<sup>16</sup> Pattison, S. (2007). Practical Theology: Art or Science? In *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 261-289.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Stoke and St Albans – 1986-2001.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>20</sup> Appendix 2

the five, leaving people to work out their relationship with the world as individuals rather than as a community.

On moving to be a vicar in Cambridge,<sup>21</sup> I developed an approach which encouraged people to engage as communities in the wider community, hoping to generate a form of discipleship that was more outward-facing, communal and socially engaged beyond the boundaries of church. Moving to a training role for the CofE,<sup>22</sup> I explored with ordinands and lay students the possibility that mature formation would develop more healthily through the integration of personal and communal formation with mission.

My experience reflects developments in PT, both in the challenge to the narrowness of a psychologising focus and in a growing desire for more communal and socially-engaged approaches.<sup>23</sup>

### **1.2.3 Theorising maturity through psychology**

Turning to resources of psychology offered further confirmation of the individualising emphasis on spiritual maturity I had observed in my own practice, whilst affirming the help it brings to attending to pastoral complexity.

The idea of development offers something important to the spiritual journey, giving time for transformation that is not couched in terms of a failure of obedience or faith and recognising a relationship between faith formation and ego formation. Psychodynamic

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<sup>21</sup> 2001-2009

<sup>22</sup> St John's Nottingham – 2009-2017.

<sup>23</sup> Browning, D. S. (1976). *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster Press. Oden, T. C. (1984). *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*. Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Press. Pattison, S. (1994). *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology*. Cambridge: CUP. Pattison, S. and Lynch, G. (2005). Pastoral and Practical Theology. In D. Ford (ed.). *The Modern Theologians* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Oxford: Blackwell, 420-421. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology*, 25-45.

perspectives generate openness to the complex and hidden questions of the human self – something that is central both to Scripture and the Christian tradition<sup>24</sup>

This section considers psychological resources integrated with spiritual and theological perspectives in the work of practical theologians. Drawing on developmental, psychodynamic and social psychology perspectives, it will demonstrate the strengths this offers to understanding maturity, whilst highlighting the limits of broadly individualising perspectives.

### 1.2.3.1 Fowler and ‘Faith Development’

Fowler is the key thinker in the application of developmental psychology to faith formation. His work has had and continues to have broad influence: in the USA, particularly in education and development<sup>25</sup> and in the UK on pastoral care, leadership, spiritual direction, ministerial training, child development and church leavers.<sup>26</sup>

Fowler’s roots are in ‘American functionalist, pragmatist and symbolic interactionist traditions’, drawing on a range of thinkers.<sup>27</sup> His primary sources are the developmental

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<sup>24</sup> Oden, *Care of Souls*, 26-74.

<sup>25</sup> Cully, I. V. (1984). *Education for Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper and Row, 131. Wilhoit, J. C. and Dettoni, J. M. (1995). *Nurture that is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 75-90. Regan, J. E. (2002). *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation*. Chicago: IL.: Loyola Press, 42-70. Goodman, R. L. (2006). Entering the World, Eating Torah: Moving from the Natural to the Sacred in the Jewish Life Cycle. In K. M. Yust, A. N. Johnson, S. E. Sasso and E. Roehlkepartain (eds.), *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality*, 143-156. Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 143-156. Roehlkepartain, E. C., King, P. E., Wagner L. and Benson, P. (2006). *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. London: Sage, 19-103. O’Murchu, D. (2012). *Adult Faith: Growing in Wisdom and Understanding*. Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 109-118.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs, M. (1988). *Towards the Fullness of Christ: Pastoral Care and Christian Maturity*. London: DLT, 21-46. Church of England. (1991). *How Faith Grows: Faith Development and Christian Education*. The National Society and CHP. Lyall, D. (2001). *The Integrity of Pastoral Care*. London: SPCK, 108-130. Jamieson, A. (2002). *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys beyond the Churches*. London: SPCK, 108-125. Watts, F., Nye, R., and Savage, S. (2002). *Psychology for Christian Ministry*. London: Routledge, 109-115. Lamont, R. (2007). *Understanding Children Understanding God*. London: SPCK, 56-65. Parker, S. (2009). Faith Development Theory as a Context for Supervision of Spiritual and Religious Issues. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 49, 39-53. Runcorn, D. (2011). *Fear and Trust: God-centred Leadership*. London: SPCK, 7-9. Whipp, M. (2013). *SCM Studyguide to Pastoral Theology*. London: SCM, 40-48.

<sup>27</sup> Broughton, J. M. (1986). The Political Psychology of Faith Development Theory. In C. Dykstra and S. Parks (eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler*. Birmingham, AL.: Religious Education Press, 90-109.

psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg and the psycho-social theory of Erikson, correlated with the theologies of H. Richard Niebuhr and Tillich.<sup>28</sup> After his seminal work based upon extensive empirical research,<sup>29</sup> Fowler wrote a number of pieces based on his theory,<sup>30</sup> in many cases as a 'response to theological critique'.<sup>31</sup>

Over the years, Fowler's work has been subjected to wide-ranging critique of its research methodology;<sup>32</sup> and the universalising tendencies of its structuralist approach.<sup>33</sup> In particular, the criticism of Piaget and Kohlberg as too cognitive applies to his work also.<sup>34</sup>

Fowler proposes a six stage process of development, drawing heavily on the structuralist psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg in the early stages and then increasingly dependent upon Erikson in the latter stages. Fowler presents his research as an imaginary conversation between these three.<sup>35</sup> The idea of stages of development has come under

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<sup>28</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 3-23, 98-116. Fowler, J. W. (1986). Faith and the Structuring of Meaning. In C. Dykstra and S. Parks (eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler*, Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 15-42.

<sup>29</sup> Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York, NY: HarperOne.

<sup>30</sup> Fowler, J. W. (1984). *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Fowler, J. W. (1987). *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press. Fowler, J. W. (1996). *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

<sup>31</sup> Streib, H. (2006). James Fowler. In E. M. Dowling and W. G. Scarlett (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Religious and Spiritual Development*. London: Sage, 167-169. See Fowler, Faith and the Structuring of Meaning, 20-22.

Fowler, J. W. (1992). The Enlightenment and Faith Development Theory. In J. Astley and L. J. Francis (eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 15-28. Fowler, J. W. (2004). Faith Development at 30: Naming the Changes of Faith in a New Millennium. *Religious Education*, 99/4, 405-421.

<sup>32</sup> Broughton, Political Psychology, 92. Nelson, C. E. and Aleshire, D. (1986). Research in Faith Development. In C. Dykstra and S. Parks (eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 182-186. Slee, N. (2004). *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 9 & 98. Phillips, A. (2011). *The Faith of Girls*. Farnham: Ashgate, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Dykstra, What is Faith?, 51-52.

<sup>34</sup> Hay, D. with Nye, R. (2006). *The Spirit of the Child*. (Revised ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley, 50 & 76. Streib, H. (2001). Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religions*, 11/3, 144. Haight, J. (2012). *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 3-26. Heywood, D. (2008). Faith Development: A Case for a Paradigm Change.

[http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=faith+development+heywood&btnG=&hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5](http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=faith+development+heywood&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5)

– accessed 30.05.13, 6-11.

<sup>35</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 40-116.

much scrutiny both in its empirical foundations<sup>36</sup> and its focus on structure over content and upon the inner self over against contextual articulation – grounded in his modernist and individualist convictions.<sup>37</sup>

At the core of Fowler’s theory lies the understanding of faith as ‘meaning-making’ by which life-worlds are constructed in relationship and through imagination.<sup>38</sup> Fowler recognises that this generation of meaning may arise through interaction with the narratives and symbols of religious traditions but he understands the experience of faith as a universal ‘way of *seeing* and *knowing*’ prior to any engagement with religion.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst he grants that ‘faith is *response* to action and being that precedes and transcends us,’ the focus of his research and theory is on ‘the *human* side of faith... faith as a *human phenomenon*’.<sup>40</sup> In practice, this means there is little room for the possibility of God as agent in the process of faith formation because Fowler avoids the distinctiveness of theological narrative in search of universality; for this reason faith development ‘might be more accurately described as ego formation’.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, despite reservations, there are a number of scholars that want to employ faith development, even if it is more ‘philosophy of life than descriptive psychology’<sup>42</sup> because it resonates with lived experience, at least in Western individualising

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<sup>36</sup> Clore, V. and Fitzgerald, J. (2002). Intentional Faith: An Alternative View of Faith Development. *Journal of Adult Development*, 9/2, 104. Heywood, Faith Development.

<sup>37</sup> Broughton, Political Psychology, 92-108. Hull, *What Prevents*, 210-213.

<sup>38</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 1-36.

<sup>39</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 1-15. Fowler, Faith and the Structuring of Meaning, 19. Dykstra, C. (1986). What is Faith?: An Experiment in the Hypothetical Mode. In C. Dykstra and S. Parks (eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 51-52.

<sup>40</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 32-33 – italics are Fowler’s.

<sup>41</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2013). ‘...*Each Part Working Properly*’ – How does Christian Community Foster or Inhibit Growth in Maturity? – DPT Year 1, 26 – See Appendix 28

<sup>42</sup> Ladd, *Each Part*, 27

culture.<sup>43</sup> However, there are alternative approaches which are less cognitive and staged and more open to communal and theological reading of human experience.<sup>44</sup>

Loder offers a more theological reading of developmental psychology which he describes as '*analogia spiritus*,' which seeks a way of speaking of human and divine subjectivity and the interrelationship of each to the other.<sup>45</sup> He notes that Pannenberg's theological anthropology seeks to 'counter subjectivism, existentialism and reductionism', arguing for an in-depth reading of the human sciences which is subsequently read through the theological lens of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This approach, Loder argues, is only methodologically fundamental and gives too much ground to the human sciences, particularly in the uncritical assumption that what Erikson means by trust can be extrapolated straightforwardly to faith in God, which does justice neither to Erikson nor the Christian faith.<sup>46</sup> Loder argues for an integration of methodology and theological substance along the lines of Barth's Chalcedonian differentiation which allows for a more nuanced relationship between the various disciplines concerned.<sup>47</sup> This approach is espoused also by Hunsinger and, following her, Swinton and Mowat.<sup>48</sup> Loder's approach allows for a much fuller articulation of the interrelationship of human and divine subjects appropriate to a description of the experience of St X.

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<sup>43</sup> Hull, J. (1985). *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 186-195. Regan, J. E. (2002). *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation*. Chicago: IL.: Loyola Press, 42-70. O'Murchu, *Adult Faith*, 109-118. Whipp, *Studyguide*, 40-48.

<sup>44</sup> Savage, S. (2011). *Joseph: Insights for the Spiritual Journey*. London: SPCK, 131-133. Heywood, Faith Development, 20-31. Westerhoff, J. H. (2000). *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3<sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition. New York, NY.: Morehouse Publishing, 79-103. Loder, J. E. (1998). *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>45</sup> Loder, *Logic*, 38.

<sup>46</sup> Loder, *Logic*, 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> Loder, *Logic*, 34-38.

<sup>48</sup> Hunsinger, D. Van D. (1995). *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 61-104. Swinton, J. and Mowat, H. (2016). *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: SCM, 79-86.

### 1.2.3.2 Psychodynamic theories – attachment

There is a smaller but significant body of work exploring the relationship between psychodynamic psychology and spiritual maturity, beginning with Rizzuto's exploration of 'the formation of the individual's private representation of God during childhood'.<sup>49</sup> Employing object relations theory, she proposes four common perspectives – uncomplicated faith, wondering and questioning, disinterest, whether angry or surprised, and the sense of a harsh and demanding God.<sup>50</sup> Her use of case studies inspired others to engage in empirical study of psychological and spiritual maturity from an object relations perspective.<sup>51</sup>

Hall et al used an object relations development scale to assess the subject's alienation, insecure attachment, egocentricity and social incompetence: these might be expressed in turn, for example, as hard to get close to others, the need to please others, lack of trust of others and uncertainty in relationship. This they examined alongside spiritual maturity measures that explored both awareness of God and relational participation, which demonstrated a significant level of correlation between psychological development and spiritual maturity.<sup>52</sup> This suggests a relationship between people's psychological

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<sup>49</sup> Rizzuto, A-M. (1979). *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytical Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Rizzuto, A-M. (1979). *Birth*, 91.

<sup>51</sup> Rizzuto, A-M. (1979). *Birth*, 93-173. Brokaw, B. F., and K J. Edwards. (1994). The Relationship of God Image to Level of Object Relations Development. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 22/4, 352-71. Hall, T. W. and Brokaw, B. F. (1995). The Relationship of Spiritual Maturity to Level of Object Relations Development and God Image. *Pastoral Psychology*. 43, 373-391. Hall, T. W., Brokaw, B. F., Edwards, K. J., and Pike, P. L. (1998). An Empirical Exploration of Psychoanalysis and Religion: Spiritual Maturity and Object Relations Development. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 37/2, 303-313. Simpson, D. B., Newman, J. L. and Fuqua, D. R. (2008). Understanding the Role of Relational Factors in Christian Spirituality. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. 36/2, 124-134.

<sup>52</sup> Hall et al. Spiritual Maturity and Object Relations, 303-313. See also, Hall, T. W. and Edwards, K. J. (2002). The Spiritual Assessment Inventory: A Theistic Model and Measure for Assessing Spiritual Development. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 41/2, 341-357.

development, particularly their levels of trust, and their openness to the other – both God and other people. There are some who have explored this psychodynamic perspective in more directly communal ways.<sup>53</sup>

#### **1.2.4 Defining Christian maturity through social psychology and integrative psychology: gaps in theorising Christian communal maturity**

The psychological material explored focuses on process in respect of maturity rather than the substance of maturity in itself, the assumption being that these disciplines rely on the goals of maturity that have been mapped out in humanistic psychology: for example, self-actualisation,<sup>54</sup> intimacy,<sup>55</sup> individuation,<sup>56</sup> congruence and organismic valuing<sup>57</sup> or universalising faith.<sup>58</sup> These are individualising visions without an obvious connection with communal maturity; moreover they are not theologically articulated.

Since the 1990s, work on spirituality in social science disciplines has focused on the relationship between spirituality and well-being.<sup>59</sup> As subsequent work has shown the correlation between well-being and maturity is not strong,<sup>60</sup> Shults and Sandage pursue the question of the difference between well-being and maturity, exploring questions of teleology, struggle, darkness and liminality.<sup>61</sup> Significantly, for this research project, they

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<sup>53</sup> Reed, B. (1978). *The Dynamics of Religion: Processes and Movements in Christian Churches*. London: DLT, 11-69. Bion, W. R. (2011). *Experiences in Groups*. London: Routledge, 11-26.

<sup>54</sup> Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and Personality*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Harper & Row, 149-180.

<sup>55</sup> Berne, E. (1964). *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 18, 55, 151-152.

<sup>56</sup> Franz, M. L. von. The Process of Individuation. In C. G. Jung (ed.), *Man and his Symbols*. London: Aldus Books, 158-229. Palmer, M. (1997). *Freud and Jung on Religion*. London: Routledge, 142-165.

<sup>57</sup> Rogers, C. (2004). *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. London: Constable & Co, 183-196.

<sup>58</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 199-213.

<sup>59</sup> Shults, F.L. and Sandage, S. J. (2006). *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 187-217.

<sup>60</sup> Bauer, J. J. and McAdams, D. P. (2004). Personal Growth in Adult Stories of Life Transitions. *Journal of Personality*, 72, 573-602. Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 246. Majerus, B. D. and Sandage, S. J. (2010). Differentiation of Self and Christian Maturity: Social Science and Theological Integration. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. 38/1, 41.

<sup>61</sup> Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 187-270.



position maturity in terms of relationship to the other in what they describe as the ‘relational maturity of *differentiated attachment*’.<sup>62</sup>

Christian social scientists have built on this insight, drawing on the clinical family therapy work of Bowen<sup>63</sup> and Kerr,<sup>64</sup> finding in their concept of ‘differentiation of self’ a way of thinking about relationship with the other in articulating maturity that can be understood as ‘both “separate-togetherness” and “together-separateness” that is a self-in-representation’.<sup>65</sup> This prepares the ground for a consideration of maturity in terms of mutuality.

Majerus and Sandage show how the concept of differentiation of self can correlate with biblical concepts of maturity, such as attentiveness to the other, unity in diversity, perseverance through struggle, identity and emotional health. They also demonstrate how the concept can have explanatory force from a psychological perspective in doctrinal matters, such as sin and responsibility and Trinitarian theology.<sup>66</sup> Shults and Sandage make the connection between relationality in psychology and the turn to the relational in theology.<sup>67</sup> For example, the psychological understanding of the significance of face-to-face with the other in differentiated relationship can inform and reframe the doctrine and practice of forgiveness, focusing more on theological understanding of face-to-face encounter with God and others in Scripture and Christian tradition, challenging Protestant propositional doctrine with a theology of relational participation in God.<sup>68</sup> Theologians have

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<sup>62</sup> Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 269 – italics are theirs.

<sup>63</sup> Bowen, M. (1978). *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York, NY.: Jason Aronson Inc.

<sup>64</sup> Kerr, M. E. and Bowen, M. (1988). *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*. New York, NY.: W. W. Norton and Co.

<sup>65</sup> Majerus and Sandage, *Differentiation of Self*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Majerus and Sandage, *Differentiation of Self*, 45-48. See also Balswick, J. O., King, P. E. and Reiner, K. S. (2005). *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL.: IVP.

<sup>67</sup> Shults, F.L. and Sandage, S. J. (2003). *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 15-17.

<sup>68</sup> Shults and Sandage, *Faces of Forgiveness*, 103-167.

long recognised the relationship between knowledge of God and knowledge of self.<sup>69</sup>

Psychologists show us how we use the same psychological and sociological processes in relating to God and to one another and therefore that psychology and theology, though distinct languages, can complement and integrate in describing both the substance and the formation of Christian maturity.<sup>70</sup>

My Evangelical tradition is suspicious of psychological interpretations of spirituality assuming them to be reductionist. But when we rely on a 'pure' reading of the New Testament for the shaping of our lives, we tend to create strong alternative communities, but at the expense of compartmentalisation which can lead to an uneasy dissonance between 'church life' and the 'rest of life'.<sup>71</sup> The advantage of this psychological thread is it offers a way of talking theologically about maturation in a psychologically informed way that can be integrative for the whole of life. As I will show in chapter 4, this social psychological thread has the potential to address communal maturity, but here it is still individualised.

Maturity is a journey that needs to embrace the whole of life and result in the kind of integrity that is espoused by the letter of James. In an individualised culture, we need to find a way to root our individualism in a more communal and theological narrative. In my year 1 piece, I suggested that a theological reading of virtue ethics might provide the bridge between individualism and a biblical vision of formation;<sup>72</sup> there are three reasons for this.

First, there is a point of connection with contemporary culture in the fact that the Aristotelian teleology and its concomitant virtues are individualistic and self-referencing.

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<sup>69</sup> Calvin, J. (1981). *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 37-39.

<sup>70</sup> Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 247.

<sup>71</sup> Bretherton, L. and Rook, R. (eds.). (2010). *Living Out Loud: Conversations about Virtue, Ethics and Evangelicalism*. Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 1-2. Greene, M. and Cotterell, T. (eds.). (2006). *Let my People Grow: Making Disciples who Make a Difference in Today's World*. Bletchley: Authentic Media, 13-24.

<sup>72</sup> Ladd, *Each Part*, 49-52.

Scholarly suspicion of this points to the care needed with this correlation in terms of a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval in dialogue with New Testament sources.<sup>73</sup>

Individual formation is not foreign to the New Testament;<sup>74</sup> *‘both Judaism and Paul take full account of the individual in the group.’*<sup>75</sup> However, the centrality of the communal dimension rooted in the history and identity of Israel represents a striking contrast to pagan sources.<sup>76</sup>

Second, to an atomised culture, virtue ethics are a way of thinking about human life in terms of shared history and narrative in which character can be formed over time towards a shared goal;<sup>77</sup> something that other scholars find attractive.<sup>78</sup> The New Testament mirrors the surrounding culture with its account of virtues and vices, with the exception of humility, which points to the centrality of the cross in its moral vision.<sup>79</sup> It places this account within a narrative that is historical and communal. With critical reflection, it is possible to maintain the narrative frame of Aristotelean ethics shaped by Christian virtues of love, humility, vulnerability, other-centredness and reliance on God.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Keck, L. E. (1996). Rethinking ‘New Testament Ethics’. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 115/1, 3-16.

<sup>74</sup> Downing, F. G. (2000). Persons in Relation. In *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*. JSNTSup, 197. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1977). *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. London: SCM, 547.

<sup>76</sup> Meeks, W. (1987). *The Moral World of the First Christians*. London: SPCK, 40-64 and 91-93. Meeks, W. (1993). *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 23-25. Dunson, B. C. (2010). The Individual and Community in Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Century Pauline Scholarship. *Currents in Biblical Research*, 9/1, 70-73. Thompson, J. W. (2011). *Moral Formation according to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 19-41.

<sup>77</sup> Sennett, R. (1999). *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*.

New York, NY.: W. W. Norton, 21-22. Covey, S. R. (2004). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. London: Simon and Schuster UK Ltd, 18-21. MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After Virtue*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London: Bristol Classical Press, 58-59.

<sup>78</sup> Kotva, Jr. J. J. (1996). *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Disbrey, C. (2007). *Living in Grace: Virtue Ethics and Christian Living*. Oxford: BRF.

<sup>79</sup> Meeks, *Origins*, 66-68, 85-88.

<sup>80</sup> Malherbe, A. J. (1986). *Moral Exhortation: A Graeco-Roman Sourcebook*. Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster Press. Hauerwas, S. and Pinches, C. (1997). *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press.

Third, The New Testament ethic is eschatological offering a different focus on the goal of human life and the way in which this may be attained.<sup>81</sup> By offering different teleological content, namely ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Kingdom Of God), maturity can be construed as communal, other-centred and directed towards a goal that is shaped by the Christian narrative.<sup>82</sup>

This is the beginning of both a theological and communal articulation of maturity which invites further dialogue with the disciplines of theological anthropology and theological ethics.<sup>83</sup>

### **1.2.5 Researching context within the CofE – communal formation in the midst of concern for numerical growth**

Following the decade of evangelism, the CofE began, slowly and fitfully, to face up to the reality of intractable numerical decline.<sup>84</sup> The CofE has responded to this with a range of pragmatic solutions from church planting, through ‘Fresh Expressions’ and most recently committing large amounts of money to ‘Resource Churches.’ Though most of the money has been directed to clerically-led traditional church models, there has also been a report on developing lay ministry. However, there is no evidence of financial resourcing for this and the report itself comments on the history of neglected reports on lay ministry within the CofE.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hays, R. B. (1996). *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. New York, NY.: HarperOne, 19-27. Meeks, *Origins*, 52-65, 111-129 and 174-188.

<sup>82</sup> Wright, T. (2010). *Virtue Reborn*. London: SPCK, 88-102.

<sup>83</sup> I will return to this in chapter 5 after the exploration of the issue of communal maturity through the empirical study. Because of issues of space and scope in this study, this will be a pointer to future research and theological articulation.

<sup>84</sup> In the 1990s.

<sup>85</sup> Archbishop’s Council. (2017). *Setting God’s People Free*. GS2056, 9

<https://churchofengland.org/media/3858585/gs-2056-setting-gods-people-free.pdf> – accessed 07.07.17.

Jackson was instrumental in encouraging the CofE to look more closely at its numbers. From his statistical research, Jackson makes proposals for actions that might help churches to reverse numerical decline. Since then, his research has focused around issues of and interventions for church growth; in this he has been followed by Goodhew.<sup>86</sup>

Interpretation based upon statistical research has been followed in research on Church Growth, Fresh Expressions, Church Planting, and the recent as yet unpublished research on new Resource Churches.<sup>87</sup> Though there have been attempts to do theology around this mode of research, it is hard to escape the pragmatic top-down approach on the ground.<sup>88</sup>

Following Hopewell's categorisations, the CofE at present is dominated by the 'mechanistic' model of Congregational Studies – one which privileges external analysis and interpretation without entering into the depths of a congregation's narrative.<sup>89</sup> This is of a piece with the technological and objectivising tendencies of our culture and academic context.<sup>90</sup>

This research is an attempt to challenge the narrowness of this approach in CofE research culture with a study that attends to a congregational journey of cultural change and communal formation and allows exploration of 'bottom-up' transformation, paying

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<sup>86</sup> Jackson, B. (2002). *Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Church Growth*. London: Church House Publishing. Jackson, B. (2005). *The Road to Growth: Towards a Thriving Church*. London: Church House Publishing. Jackson, B. (2006). *Going for Growth: What Works at Local Church Level*. London: Church House Publishing. Jackson, B. (2015). *What Makes Churches Grow?: Vision and Practice in Effective Mission*. London: Church House Publishing. Goodhew, D. (ed.). (2012). *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*. (Farnham: Ashgate).

<sup>87</sup> Jackson, B. and Piggot, A. (2012). *Another Capital Idea: A Report for the Diocese of London*. Diocese of London. Church Army Research Unit. (2013). *Report on Strand 3b: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church and Church Plants Begun in the Period 1992-2012*. [http://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/283368/Church\\_Army/Church\\_Army/Our\\_work/Research/Fresh\\_expressions\\_of/The\\_2013\\_report.aspx](http://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/283368/Church_Army/Church_Army/Our_work/Research/Fresh_expressions_of/The_2013_report.aspx) - accessed 03.07.17. Thorlby, T. (2016). *Love, Sweat and Tears: Church Planting in East London*. London: The Centre for Theology and Community.

<sup>88</sup> Goodhew, D. (ed.). (2015). *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*. Farnham: Ashgate. Lings G. (2017). *Reproducing Churches*. Abingdon: BRF.

<sup>89</sup> Hopewell, J. (1987). *Congregation: Stories and Structures*. London: SCM, 19-39. See section 1.3.4.

<sup>90</sup> Pattison, Practical Theology, 265-269.

close attention to congregational narrative and the spiritual journeys of lay people. I suggest that researching the nature of personal and congregational growth in terms of development, not numbers alone, is an important balance to the present CofE approach and might offer clues to more lasting change.

### **1.3 The theological shape of the research journey**

In the previous section, I have argued that spiritual maturity in community is important and have offered three reasons, while arguing that this needs investigation in practice. First my own ministerial journey has led me to recognise that community formation, marked by a mutuality of personal and communal maturity is central to the formation of people who embody a Christian vision of life with God – what Newbigin calls the ‘hermeneutic of the gospel’.<sup>91</sup> Second, because psychology, which has been the dominant language in contemporary culture and PT for talking about maturity, is broadly individualistic, a gap in knowledge for speaking about communal maturity has been revealed. Third, the CofE is in danger of losing touch with its own formative narrative of personal and communal maturity in a bid for a pragmatic approach to numerical growth.

In this section, I want to explain the methodological commitments which have framed and guided this research; this will both position me as a practical theologian and ground the approach taken in the research process. The commitments expressed here have been forged through a critical dialogue between PT and my Evangelical convictions.

First, I endorse the PT commitment to ground theology in concrete and contextual experience, but the contested nature of this claim needs to be acknowledged.<sup>92</sup> Second, as

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<sup>91</sup> Newbigin, L. (1989). *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. London: SPCK, 222-233.

<sup>92</sup> See 1.3.1 below.

this is a theological question and not restricted to the realm of psychology because God is an agent, I want to take seriously what this means both theoretically and on the ground.<sup>93</sup>

For this reason, I explore why it is important for the theological voice to have interpretative priority and how we read Scripture in a way that is not instrumental but attends to it as a strange voice rooted in its own life-worlds.<sup>94</sup>

Third, given the commitment to ground theology in experience, in this research I am determined to narrate the stories of the congregation and not simply use them as a platform for my theories. This is why I chose an ethnographic approach and more specifically why I was guided substantially by Hopewell's symbolic reading of the world view, ethos and story of a congregation.<sup>95</sup> Fourth, the next section integrates theological and narrative concerns, exploring how we can speak of God as agent in the narration of the congregation in a way that does justice to the way they articulate their experience.<sup>96</sup> Finally, I will explain how the PMC process suits the methodology of this project as the context for investigating maturity.<sup>97</sup>

### 1.3.1 Doing theology from practice

To say that PT begins with experience or practice is uncontroversial for practical theologians of every persuasion.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Starting the exploration with psychology is not a contradiction to this because this is not a linear relationship. Because PT does theology from experience, it takes seriously all disciplines; the priority of theology is expressed in the critical engagement – through integration and re-framing.

<sup>94</sup> See 1.3.2 and 1.3.3 below.

<sup>95</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation* – see 1.3.4 below

<sup>96</sup> See 1.3.5 below.

<sup>97</sup> See 1.3.6 below.

<sup>98</sup> Farley, E. (2000). Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology. In J. Woodward and S. Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 118-127. Pattison S. and Woodward J. (2000). An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology. In J. Woodward and S. Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 15. Lartey, E. (2000). Practical Theology as a Theological Form. In J. Woodward and S. Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 128-134. Graham, E. L., Walton, H. and Ward, F. (2005). *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM, 9-23. Thompson, J. (2008). *Theological Reflection*. London:

PT is grounded in reflection in the concrete realities of experience as well as reflection on that experience.<sup>99</sup>

However, the question of how we interpret that experience and in particular how people learn is less straightforward. Following Kolb, PT tends to be individualising and suspicious of the role of tradition or authority in the learning process.<sup>100</sup> Even where it draws on communal liberative traditions, individualisation asserts itself, often placed over against the controlling nature of community.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, there is a tendency in PT's working from experience to use Scripture and tradition as resources that we may or may not draw on in pursuing our personal journey to experiential knowledge.<sup>102</sup>

However, I propose that PT is a critical engagement as much with experience as with tradition, committed to seeing what is hidden, challenging assumptions in order to foster transformative outcomes. Paying attention to the communal involves attention to the sources of our shared identity and meaning-making, scripture and tradition, and the ability to hear multiple voices with respect and openness: human voices of the proximate and more distant other, but also the voice of Scripture and the voice of God as subject. PT that

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SCM, 17-33. Osmer, R. O. (2008). *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 31-78. Bevans, S. B. (2009). *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 3-15. Green, L. (2009). *Let's do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology*. London: Mowbray, 41-58. Cahalan, K. A. and Mikoski, G. S. (eds.). (2014). *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1-10. Bass, D. C., Cahalan, K. A., Miller-McLemore, B. J., Nieman, J. R. and Scharen, C. B. (2016). *Christian Practical Wisdom: What it is and Why it Matters*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1-15. Ward, P. (2017). *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 9-25.

<sup>99</sup> Schon D. A. (1991). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Farnham: Ashgate, 21-69.  
<sup>100</sup> Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 20-38. Thompson, *Theological Reflection*, 22-24. Green, *Let's do Theology*, 18. Haight, *The Righteous Mind*, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books, 52-87. Graham, E. L. (2002). *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 142-171. Graham et al, *Theological Reflection*, 182-191. Thompson, *Theological Reflection*, 22-24, 35-67. Green, *Let's do Theology*, 17-18, 27-35.

<sup>102</sup> Pattison and Woodward, Introduction, 14-15.



rules out God as agent and listening to the distinct voice of Scripture is not one that I can commit to nor one that will be effective for this project.<sup>103</sup>

These considerations influenced my decision to engage with an ethnographic approach which would allow me both to experience and participate in communal learning, and to listen to communal and personal perspectives of the congregation. To do this with authenticity is also a theological task taking seriously their practice of listening to Scripture and listening to God as vital relationships with the other in the process of maturation.

### **1.3.2 A question of methodology – correlation and practical theology**

Entering the DPT programme enabled me to be critically reflective about the way in which theology is related to practice. I was trained with an approach derived from the model that Schleiermacher created for the academy in which practical theology is the flowering of a tree whose root is philosophical theology, trunk, historical theology (dogmatics, history and biblical studies) and branches or crown, practical theology.<sup>104</sup> In this model, questions of theology are settled prior to practice and then applied to ministry – an approach that shaped ministerial education when I trained.<sup>105</sup> However, attention to my ministerial narrative demonstrates the role that critical dialogue with experience has played in practice.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Bass et al, *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 145-321.

<sup>104</sup> Crouter, R. (2005). Shaping an Academic Discipline: The Brief Outline on the Study of Theology. In J. Marina (ed.), *Friedrich Schleiermacher*. Cambridge: CUP, 111-128. Helmer, C., (2010). Schleiermacher. In D. Ferguson (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth Century Theology*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 31-57.

<sup>105</sup> Burkhart, J. E. (1983). Schleiermacher's Vision for Theology. In D. S. Browning (ed.), *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper and Row, 42-57. Farley, E. (1983). Theology and Practice outside the Clerical Paradigm. In D. S. Browning (ed.), *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper and Row, 25-28. Hiltner, Meaning and Importance, 31. Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 59-61. Ballard, P. and Pritchard, J. (2006) *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*. (2nd ed.). London: SPCK, 60-63.

<sup>106</sup> See section 1.2.2.

PT in the mid-twentieth century is marked by a move away from the 'deductive approach towards an experiential-inductive method'.<sup>107</sup> Because of the desire to listen to contemporary experience, PT now values interdisciplinary study and critical dialogue between disciplines as it attempts to interpret experience in a pluralist context.<sup>108</sup> Models of theological reflection have been developed to articulate this dialogue.<sup>109</sup> Pattison comes closest to describing how this approach works in practice as a 'critical conversation' but does not consider the relative authority of the voices.<sup>110</sup>

The question of which discipline has priority is straightforward in applied approaches as the flow is uni-directional. In the correlative approach of Hiltner or the critical correlation of Tracy and Browning, the priority is a shared public language that is secular and plural;<sup>111</sup> hence the choice of a Tillichian anthropological and phenomenological approach of correlation between disciplines.<sup>112</sup> Tillich's correlative approach starts with the assumption that knowledge of God is grounded in a common unity of being whereby 'what one knows about man (sic) by analogy he may know about God'.<sup>113</sup> This is the principle of '*analogia entis*.' Tillich begins, not from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ but rather his concept of

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<sup>107</sup> Pattison and Lynch, *Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 409.

<sup>108</sup> Pattison and Lynch, *Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 411-412. Osmer, R. O. (2012). *Practical Theology*. In K. M. Kapic and B. L. McCormack (eds.). *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 319-344.

<sup>109</sup> Killen, P. and De Beer J. (1994). *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York, NY.: Crossroad, 20-45. Kinast, R. L. (2000). *What are they saying about Theological Reflection?* New York/Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press. *Verbum et Ecclesia*. Vol 36/1. [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2074-77052015000100006&script=sci\\_arttext&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2074-77052015000100006&script=sci_arttext&tlng=es) – accessed 28.07.19. Lartey, *Theological Form*, 128-134.

Pattison and Woodward, Introduction, 13-16. Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 81-95. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 1-29. Thompson, *Theological Reflection*, 17-34. Green, *Let's do Theology*, 17-122.

<sup>110</sup> Pattison, S. (2000). Some Straw for Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection. In J. Woodward and S. Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 135-145.

<sup>111</sup> Hiltner, Meaning and Importance. Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 43-63. Browning, D. S. (2000). Pastoral Theology in a Pluralistic Age. In J. Woodward and S. Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 89-103.

<sup>112</sup> Frei, H. W. (1992). *Types of Christian Theology*. New Haven: Yale University, 3, 30-34 and 60-69.

<sup>113</sup> McKelway, A. J. (1964) *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich: A Review and Analysis*. London: Lutterworth Press, 63.

the 'New Being is applied to Jesus and he is called the "Christ" because he conforms to a prior principle of salvation represented by that title'.<sup>114</sup> This is the direction that PT has characteristically followed. Tillich argued that his approach did not change the content of faith, but only the form. However, in PT which uses this approach hermeneutically, it consistently privilege context over text, 'experience' over theology.<sup>115</sup>

One clear demonstration of the impact of this approach is the dominance of the psychological discipline and therapeutic individualism in PT and ministerial practice in the 1980s and 90s.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the more sophisticated approach with Tracy's critical correlation, Browning continues to promote the priority of voices other than the theological, because of his commitment to maintaining 'formal and universally applicable, context-invariant criteria'.<sup>117</sup> Browning wants to maintain priority for a universal articulation of religious experience rather than submit to the idea of experience being shaped within an embodied religious narrative.<sup>118</sup> For Browning, this had apologetic intent for communicating in a secular context over against Oden whom he says, 'insisted that only symbols formed by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (*Deus pro nobis*) provided this language, whereas I insisted on a correlational method... that correlated our secular intuitions of this ground with the language of revelation'.<sup>119</sup> As with Fowler, Browning can only conceive of the truth in universally arguable concepts.

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<sup>114</sup> McKelway, *Systematic Theology*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling*, 83-95.

<sup>116</sup> Browning, *Moral Context*, 11-37. Oden, *Care of Souls*, 26-42. Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology*, 208-220.

<sup>117</sup> Frei, *Types*, 33.

<sup>118</sup> Frei, *Types*, 34.

<sup>119</sup> Browning, *Pastoral Theology*, 95-96.

Hunsinger offers a different approach to interdisciplinary study and the question of correlation based on the Chalcedonian understanding of the two natures of Christ, maintaining the three distinctives of ‘the “indissoluble differentiation”, the “inseparable unity” and the “indestructible order” of two particular terms (often but not always divine and human)’. This asymmetrical ordering of disciplines, which allows a more nuanced approach to the prioritising of discourses, maintaining uniqueness whilst allowing appropriate interrelation – avoiding the danger of one being turned into the other.<sup>120</sup>

She illustrates her argument through a critique of three pastoral theologies including Tillich’s symmetrical correlation of healing and salvation. Whilst Tillich presents this as an asymmetric correlation he later argues for a ‘dialectical’ identity’ of the two.<sup>121</sup>

‘As the concept of healing is thus elevated, it is conceptually placed on the same level as salvation and can thus enter into a kind of reciprocal relationship with it. At the same time, the particularly Christian understanding of salvation, at least from a Barthian perspective, seems to be lost’.<sup>122</sup>

Similarly Oden argues, with Barth against Tillich for ‘*analogia fidei*’ knowing that is based on God’s self-disclosure and flows from God to human beings.<sup>123</sup>

This is a fundamental question for the practice of PT that has been left broadly unaddressed until recently when there have been signs that it is returning to the centre.<sup>124</sup>

Swinton and Mowat argue for the priority of the theological discourse in PT research drawing on the Trinitarian model of Hunsinger for their methodology.<sup>125</sup> It is questionable in

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<sup>120</sup> Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling*, 61-104.

<sup>121</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2012). Bible, Evangelicals and Practical Theology. Paper given at BIAPT Bible and Practical Theology Symposium at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, 3 – See Appendix 36.

<sup>122</sup> Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling*, 90.

<sup>123</sup> Oden, T. C. (1978). *Kerygma and Counselling*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 114-145.

<sup>124</sup> Root, A. (2014a). *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 53-83.

Graham, E. L. (2017). The State of the Art: Practical Theology, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: New Directions in Practical Theology. *Theology*, 120/3, 172-180.

<sup>125</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 68-94. See earlier discussion in 1.2.3.1. A Barthian approach is also followed by Root, *Christopraxis*, 156-184 and to an extent, Loder, *Logic*, 26-43.

practice whether they have succeeded in demonstrating a prior theological voice. In their worked examples, theological reflection appears late in the day, as it does in the pastoral cycle, and this is reflected in the fact that they tend to 'do' theology on outcomes that have already been generated.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, Swinton's concept of hermeneutic phenomenology is a creative suggestion; more recently he has argued persuasively for an approach that brings a genuine challenge to reductionist assumptions in the social sciences.<sup>127</sup>

For reasons already explained, my thesis is a theological interpretation of experience and therefore gives priority to theological disciplines in receiving voices from experience.

### **1.3.3 A question of authority – attending to Scripture in practical theology**

The previous discussion of the relationship of disciplines generated by correlative methods is also germane to a more specific question around authority that lies with the way Scripture is handled in PT and congregational practice. Focusing on the role of Scripture, thirty years ago, Pattison put this challenge: 'The Bible is essential to Christianity' but 'pastoral theologians seem to have almost completely avoided considering the Bible.'<sup>128</sup> He argued that failure to address the question of authority undermined the argument for using Scripture above any other helpful or inspiring source.<sup>129</sup>

The silence has been broken in recent years as practical theologians have begun to take up his challenge.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 89-94, 120-126.

<sup>127</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 97-111. Swinton, J. (2017). *What's Love got to do with it? Some Practical Theological Reflections on the use of different kinds of Knowledge for the Purposes of Divine Love*. Paper given at BIAPT Student Conference. Queen's College, Birmingham, 06.05.17

<sup>128</sup> Pattison, S. (1988). *A Critique of Pastoral Care*. London: SCM, 106.

<sup>129</sup> Pattison, *Critique*, 114-129.

<sup>130</sup> Ballard, P. and Holmes, S R. (eds.). (2006). *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans. Ballard, P. (2011). "The Bible in Theological Reflection: Indications from the History of Scripture." *Practical Theology* 4/1, 35-47. Ballard, P. (2012). "The Use of Scripture." In B. J. Miller-McLemore (ed.). *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 163-172.

To continue the debate, I have suggested three grounds for the uncertainty about Scriptural authority: epistemological, hermeneutic and authoritarian.<sup>131</sup>

### 1.3.3.1 Criticism and confidence – an epistemological question

There are epistemological roots to PT's diffidence about Scripture that lie in liberal theology and biblical criticism. For example the questioning of the concept of 'revelation' as undermined by Kant or the undermining of the authority of the Bible when it is seen as a human document with human flaws.<sup>132</sup>

The 'Bible in Pastoral Practice Project' revealed the impact of this in the huge gulf between Scripture reading and pastoral practice which was being avoided by ministers, '...the paucity of reflective comment starkly revealed a largely activist Christianity in the UK today in danger of losing the capacity to evaluate and improve its pastoral practice'.<sup>133</sup> This is confirmed by people working in ministerial education.<sup>134</sup>

Practical theologians range from not addressing the Bible at all<sup>135</sup> to an attempt to take Scripture seriously in disciplinary dialogue. But even here, the impact of the correlative

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Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. Ballard, P. (2013). *The Use of Scripture in Practical Theology – A Brief Response*. Paper given to the Bible and Practical Theology Special Interest Group at BIAPT Conference, July 2013.

Cartledge M. J. 2013. "The Use of Scripture in Practical Theology: A Study of Academic Practice." *Practical Theology* 6.3: 271-283.

<sup>131</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2014b). *Releasing the Voice of the Other: Towards an Evangelical Methodology for Attending to Scripture in Practical Theology and Congregational Practice* – DPT Year 2, 13 – See Appendix 29.

<sup>132</sup> Bennett, Z. (2013). *Using the Bible in Practical Theology*. Farnham: Ashgate, 11-12 and 35. Pattison, Critique, 108-129. Ladd, *Releasing the Voice*, 6.

<sup>133</sup> Dickson, J. N. I. (2003). *The Use of the Bible in Pastoral Practice*.

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/share/research/projectreports/previousprojects/biblepastoralpractice/the-use-of-the-bible-in-pastoral-practice.html> - accessed 21.11.13. Dickson, J. N. I. (2007). The Bible in Pastoral Ministry: The Quest for Best Practice. *Journal of Adult Theological Education*. 4/1, 109-113.

<sup>134</sup> Herbert, T. (2007). "Theological Reflection According to Paul." *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 4/2, 195-208. Ballard, P. (2011). "The Bible in Theological Reflection: Indications from the History of Scripture." *Practical Theology* 4/1, 35-47. Rooms, N. (2012). "Paul as Practical Theologian: *Phronesis* in Philippians." *Practical Theology* 5/1, 81-94.

<sup>135</sup> Whipp, *Studyguide*.

method tends towards the reading of Scripture through the alternative discipline that may look little different from proof texting.<sup>136</sup>

### **1.3.3.2 Reading behind, within and in front of the text – a hermeneutical question**

Study of lay people's engagement with Scripture challenges the assumption that people read Scripture hermeneutically using something that approaches Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons'. Some empirical research suggests that ordinary readers are not interested in scholarly reading 'behind' the text and are unlikely to have the critical distance to be able to separate horizons and engage with the 'otherness' of Scripture.<sup>137</sup> Todd's discourse analysis on Bible study groups suggested that 'talk' and 'text' run parallel in a relational hermeneutic that privileges fellowship rather than the hermeneutic interaction presupposed in fusion of horizons.<sup>138</sup> However, in his study of Evangelical and Charismatic churches, Rogers finds a greater commitment to the text of Scripture than Todd but also notes the collapsing of text and context into one another.<sup>139</sup> A social-psychological reading of this suggests that in the latter case people 'fuse' with the text because of their desire to embrace its vision as truth, whereas the latter distance themselves from it for fear of being subsumed by an alien subject.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Capps, D. (2002). *Life Cycle Theory Pastoral Care*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 17-31. Gerkin, C. V. (1987). *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*. Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 153-225.

<sup>137</sup> Village, A. (2007). *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics*. Farnham: Ashgate, 69-75, 90-91. Village, A. (2013). "The Bible and Ordinary Readers." In J. Astley and L. J. Francis (eds.). *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*. New Edition. Farnham: Ashgate, 131-133.

<sup>138</sup> Todd, A. J. (2013). "The Interaction of Talk and Text: Recontextualising Biblical Interpretation." *Practical Theology* 6.1: 69-85.

<sup>139</sup> Rogers, A. (2009). *Ordinary Hermeneutics: A Tale of Two Churches – Exploring Contemporary Expressions of Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in Britain*. Paper given at *The Royal Foundation of St Katharine* on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2009. Rogers, A. (2013). *Congregational Hermeneutics: Towards Virtuous Apprenticeship*. In J. Astley and L. J. Francis (eds.). *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*. New Edition. Farnham: Ashgate, 117-126.

<sup>140</sup> Ladd, *Releasing the Voice*, 9-10.

There is evidence, however, that lay people can read Scripture in more hermeneutically sophisticated ways. West, who has much experience of reading the Bible communally amongst the poor in South Africa, argues that ordinary readers have more capacity for reading behind the text than is generally assumed.<sup>141</sup>

The question remains about how Scripture is accessed by ordinary readers in a way that does justice to both the life-world of Scripture and the subjectivity of readers. It has been thought that this requires the expertise of the scholar or trained minister, but West's work on communal reading suggests that too much may be assumed here. Cartledge offers insights about reading from Pentecostal perspectives where the mediation of the Spirit is a hermeneutic key.<sup>142</sup> But there remains the questions as to what practices might embody such a way of reading and what kind of theological reading of this might be offered.

### **1.3.3.3 Use and abuse of Scripture – an ethical question**

Bennett discusses her own experience of reading Scripture with others in which her questions were silenced and her person marginalised.<sup>143</sup> PT comes typically from liberal, radical and liberative perspectives and theologians express concern not only about abusive use of Scripture by people but about perspectives within the Bible itself that are considered neither ethical nor egalitarian.<sup>144</sup>

Evangelicals who want to maintain a place for the Bible as primary revelation need to address these concerns both in theory and in practice. Evangelicals are concerned about the instrumentalising of Scripture. The academic method often leads to an objectifying of Scripture to be 'used' or not according to the preferences of the theologian. In arguing

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<sup>141</sup> West, G. (1991). *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*. Pietermaritzburg, SA.: Cluster Publications, 60.

<sup>142</sup> Cartledge, *Mediation*, 60-85.

<sup>143</sup> Bennett, *Using the Bible*, 9-12.

<sup>144</sup> Bennett, *Using the Bible*, 13-15. Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1995). *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. London: SCM, 3-40.



against a controlling subjectivity in the use of Scripture, Bennett creates a reversal of this subject/object dichotomy, which results in instrumentalising of Scripture which once again is at the mercy of reading from the immediate context.<sup>145</sup>

Nevertheless, Evangelicals also need to address their tendency to objectify the reader. Ostensibly, this is to place the reader under the authority of Scripture, but in practice this often means under the subjectivity of the interpreter, which without critical reflection, may lead to the kind of controlling experiences that Bennett describes.

In chapter 4, I will propose that an inter-subjective approach to reading Scripture can address these concerns, where the way we read Scripture together is not simply about virtue in hermeneutical reading<sup>146</sup> but also about a communal and relational maturity in which genuine differentiation between readers and between readers and text will help develop an approach to Scripture in practice that gives room for an authoritative voice without an authoritarian practice.

Approaching the research context with these questions in mind helped me to be attentive to people's voices in relation to Scripture. It forewarned me about how lay voices might be attenuated in contemporary church life, but also how inter-subjectivity and attention to the voice of the human other and the Scriptural text might be formative for personal and communal maturity.

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<sup>145</sup> Note the title of the book by Bennett, *Using the Bible in Practical Theology*. I debated this question with Zoe Bennett at BIAPT. Ladd, N. M. (2014c). Is 'using' the Bible the right language? *Debate with Zoe Bennett*. BIAPT Conference, Edinburgh – 16.07.14 – see Appendix 30.

<sup>146</sup> Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, 123-124.

### 1.3.4 A question of relationship – congregational studies (CS) and the narration of stories

Through reading Hopewell, I settled on an in-depth theological-ethnographical study of one congregation – to tell the story of their journey of transformation through PMC and reflect on the issues of maturity and development that this surfaced. I wanted to dig deep into one church's journey to see what themes and questions might emerge for further study in the future. I favoured a narrative approach which allowed me to engage with the culture and symbols of the group, placing this research in the tradition of CS.

Originating in America in the mid-twentieth century, interest in congregations as the locus of meaning for Christian practice has crossed the Atlantic and become a major area of research in PT. There are two discernible strands in this research: the descriptive/interpretative that seeks to liberate the voice of a congregation,<sup>147</sup> and those which focus more on change and transformation in the context of the practical wisdom of the congregation.<sup>148</sup> In the UK both strands are in evidence – interpretative work with varying commitment to promoting change,<sup>149</sup> and problem-focused research.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*. Fulkerson, M. M. (2007). *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. Oxford: OUP Press.

<sup>148</sup> Dudley, C. S. (1983). *Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church*. New York, NY.: Harper Collins. Browning, D. S. (1991). *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press. Ammerman, N. T. (1999). *Congregation and Community*. New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press. Graham, *Transforming Practice*.

<sup>149</sup> Cartledge, M. (2003). *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster. Village, *The Bible and Lay People*. Heard, J. (2010). *Inside Alpha: Explorations in Evangelism*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock. Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*.

<sup>150</sup> Cameron, H., Richter, P., Davies, D. and Ward, H. (eds.). (2005). *Studying Local Churches*. London: SCM. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*.

Within CS, James Hopewell's influence is widely acknowledged.<sup>151</sup> However, few people have ever tried to use his approach in full.<sup>152</sup> In the ensuing years, many people have taken narrative approaches to Congregational Studies, but it is hard to see whether this is the influence of Hopewell or simply through increasing engagement with the Social Sciences and prevailing narrative philosophies. Hopewell's approach to discerning the unique idiom of the congregation through narrative means is less easy to see in subsequent work.

Why has Hopewell's work not taken deeper root in CS? Partly, no doubt because of his untimely death. But there are a number of criticisms, some germane and some not, which may indicate further reasons: self-referencing story, controlling narratives, power and gender, and the messiness of participant observation. Each of these critiques has influenced in different ways my approach to Hopewell.<sup>153</sup>

Hopewell offers four categories for interpretation:<sup>154</sup> contextual studies placing their focus upon the investigation of the wider social world;<sup>155</sup> mechanistic with a pragmatic and organisational approach to church growth;<sup>156</sup> organic approaches which consider the

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<sup>151</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 43n60 and 54. Wind, J. P. and Lewis, J. W. (1994). *American Congregations – Volume 2: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Guest, M., Husting, K. and Woodhead, L. (eds.). (2004). *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1, 5, 9-10. Percy, M. (2013). Power in the Local Church: Locating the Implicit. In J. Astley and L. J. Francis (eds.). *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*. Farnham: Ashgate, 61-62.

<sup>152</sup> Guest et al, *Congregational Studies* 10n7 mention Wind, J. P. (1993). *Constructing Your Congregation's Story*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress. Hopewell's vision can also be seen in both Dudley's and Ammerman's approaches.

<sup>153</sup> Woodhead, L., Guest, M. and Tusting, K. (2004). *Congregational Studies: Taking Stock*. In Guest et al, *Congregational Studies*, 9-10. Collins, P. (2004). Congregations, Narratives and Identity: A Quaker Case Study. In Guest et al, *Congregational Studies*, 103. Aune, K. (2004). The Significance of Gender for Congregational Studies. In Guest et al, *Congregational Studies*, 186. Ward, F. (2004). The Messiness of Studying Congregations using Ethnographic Methods. In Guest et al, *Congregational Studies*, 127 and 129. The first is challenged below; the others are explored at different points in the thesis: from controlling story to story and counter-story in chapters 3 and 5, and Appendix 26; gender – see discussion in Appendix 7; messiness – see section 1.3.5.

<sup>154</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 19-32.

<sup>155</sup> Common in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>156</sup> Common in the 1970s and 1980s.

congregation as a complex living entity and seeks for its development and maturity through community, participation and shared responsibility. The fourth, which was Hopewell's approach, he describes as symbolic; a distinctive 'cultural/symbolic/narrative approach to the study of congregations', developed for attending to a congregation's story.<sup>157</sup>

Hopewell recognises that the complexity of congregations requires 'comprehension from [these] four quite different perspectives.' However the metaphors that he chooses to represent the first three, ghost, monster and Leviathan, represent a caution that, taking each one respectively, they can create interpretations that are 'intangible', 'manipulative' or unduly 'reconciling'.<sup>158</sup>

In a major work on CS, Woodhead et al propose category distinctions of extrinsic – 'for the broader good' and intrinsic – 'on its own terms or for its own sake'. This binary is a misunderstanding of the intention of many 'intrinsic' studies – including Hopewell.<sup>159</sup> Hopewell's categories offer a better tool for critical interpretation of the CofE's focus on numerical growth and the assumption that this is to be understood and analysed in mechanistic terms. The distinctions that he noticed in studies from the 1950s-80s between what he describes as 'mechanical' and other models is pertinent to my desire to offer a way of thinking about reading congregations from the 'bottom up' rather than imposing technical change from the 'top down.'<sup>160</sup>

In describing Hopewell's approach as intrinsic, Woodhead et al. argue that Hopewell's fascination with the congregation for its own sake tends to create a self-contained narrative with no focus on transformation of the wider world.<sup>161</sup> This is a

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<sup>157</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 3-18 and 28-32.

<sup>158</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 31, 106-107.

<sup>159</sup> Woodhead et al, *Taking Stock*, 2-18.

<sup>160</sup> See section 1.2.5 for the CofE context.

<sup>161</sup> Woodhead et al, *Taking Stock*, 9-10.

profound misunderstanding of Hopewell's albeit sometimes impressionistic theological agenda. Hopewell argues that it is only through the unfolding of the worldview, character and unique story of the congregation that it is possible to enable the '*paroikia*' – the local household – to engage authentically in Christ's mission to the '*oikoumene*' – the wider world for which Christ died.<sup>162</sup> Hopewell's theology allows for the complex working through of the gospel of Christ in the flawed humanity of a local congregation, which is both reflective of wider society and brings hope of transformation – not by the imposition of a perfect church upon an imperfect world but by enabling the congregation to exit 'from its own structures and safeties to find the Christ who appears in societies whose histories repudiate the local church's unfolding plot'.<sup>163</sup>

However, I suspect that Hopewell's aspiration for missional transformation may be beyond an approach which is only about narration of a story. I suggest that there is room for the organic approach – despite his somewhat pejorative image of a whale swallowing all in its path – because it pays greater attention to transformation.<sup>164</sup> An interesting variant on this is Moschella who proposes ethnographic practice as a tool to help pastoral leaders in the process of congregational transformation.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, Hopewell's metaphor is a good warning, not least to researching ministers, about the totalising dangers that lie in wait for those who seek more transformative approaches.<sup>166</sup>

Hopewell's concern is to narrate the story of a church in its genuine humanity so that the story of what happens when Jesus Christ is intertwined with ordinary human community

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<sup>162</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 175-176, 201.

<sup>163</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 176.

<sup>164</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 106-107.

<sup>165</sup> Moschella, M. C. (2008). *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. Cleveland, OH.: The Pilgrim Press, 237-255.

<sup>166</sup> Beaudoin, T. and Turpin, K. (2014). White Practical Theology. In K. A. Cahalan and G. S. Mikoski. (eds.). *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 255-256.

is revealed. I take this a step further in allowing the congregation a greater degree of agency in theologising its own narrative. Congregations begin to articulate this in dialogue with Scripture and as they develop their imaginative encounter with the agency of God through them and for the world.<sup>167</sup>

My research leans more towards an interpretative perspective that combines both symbolic and organic approaches in attending to the way in which a congregation forms its narrative and expresses its agency through shared practices – with the intention to collaborate with participants in shaping the interpretation.<sup>168</sup> PMC in the USA has developed a significant research base. Their approach is to use structured interviews with an appreciative inquiry approach, albeit with a feedback loop to ensure that participants retain ownership of the interpretation.<sup>169</sup> In-depth ethnographical approaches over time have not featured in the research and therefore this may offer a fresh description of the process. It will offer a similar contribution to the small but developing research base in PMC-UK.<sup>170</sup>

The choice of Hopewell as a primary guide to the ethnography was driven by convictions about narrativity. This follows Ricoeur in the conviction that personal identity, rather than being some unchanging essence, is formed through relationship with the other in a narrated form over time.<sup>171</sup> Choosing narrative as an interpretative category allows attention to personal maturity through individual agency and to communal maturity

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<sup>167</sup> Keifert, P. (2009a). The Return of the Congregation to Theological Conversation. In P. Keifert (ed.). *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 13-26.

Fredrickson, D. (2009). Congregations, Democracy and the Action of God in Philippians 1-2. In P. Keifert, (ed.). *Testing the Spirits: How Theology informs the Study of Congregations*. Grand Rapids. MI.: Eerdmans, 49-66.

<sup>168</sup> Graham, E. L. (2013). Is Practical Theology a form of “Action Research”? *International Journal of Practical Theology*. 17/1, 151.

<sup>169</sup> Church Innovations Research. [http://www.churchinnovations.org/01\\_services/research.html](http://www.churchinnovations.org/01_services/research.html) - accessed 03.06.15.

<sup>170</sup> PMC has had a base in the United Kingdom at Church Mission Society since 2015.

<sup>171</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago. IL.: University of Chicago Press, 3, 113-202. Walhout, C. (1999). Narrative Hermeneutics. In R. Lundin, C. Walhout and A. C. Thistleton. *The Promise of Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 94, 122-126.

mediated through the mutuality of shared practices and narrative formation. This has affinity with Sennett's idea of character formation through shared history, MacIntyre's view of moral identity through narrative and Lindbeck's idea of doctrine as narrative-based and faith as the grammar of language.<sup>172</sup> It is not simply that we communicate in stories, but that narrative is constitutive of personal and communal identity and therefore central to the articulation of journeys of development in which I am interested. My priority in designing an ethnographic accompaniment was to hear those stories and seek their theological character.

### **1.3.5 A question of spirituality – ethnography and practical theology**

Most ethnographic writing focuses its philosophical reflections briefly on the question of realism versus constructivism.<sup>173</sup> The correspondence theory of language and reality has long been challenged and ethnographers now see the task more as a construction of a narrative in which we articulate people's 'truths' through an interpretative process that takes seriously both ours and their conscious and subconscious preconceptions. Researchers vary as to how far they see the narratives they form in terms of ethnographic construction alone or entertain the possibility of a greater interplay between the construction of narrative and participants' meanings.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, 20-21. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204-225. Lindbeck, G. A. (2009). *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 32-41.

<sup>173</sup> Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Routledge, 5-13. Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Oxford: OUP, 591-593. Costley, C., Elliott, G. and Gibbs, P. (2010). *Doing Work Based Research: Approaches to Enquiry for Insider-Researchers*. London: Sage, 83-86. Social research has moved a long way from the positivism and naturalism of earlier times, and prefers a constructivist approach. See Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory through Qualitative Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage, 4-9.

<sup>174</sup> Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I. and Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1-20. Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 14-19, 120, 235-236.

I question the idea of constructed worlds which focus on human agency alone, because as a practical theologian I argue that a true account – however provisional and partial – requires a narrative that is theologically and spiritually formed. This is a complex question of how to read congregations theologically and how the different discourses inter-relate.<sup>175</sup>

One way to articulate this is to see the ethnographic task in terms of ‘embodied theology’.<sup>176</sup> This allows theology to arise from practice and therefore to describe the real rather than the ideal – an ecclesiology from the ground up, an inductive theological approach.<sup>177</sup> Critiques of the use of social sciences generally proceed from an idealist perspective; what the ethnographic approach offers is an embodied approach of thick description which is honest about the struggles and contradictions of life both reflectively and reflexivity.<sup>178</sup> This is congruent with Hopewell’s approach discussed earlier in which rather than arguing for the articulation of a theological-biblical perspective as an idealised intellectual construct, epistemology is grounded in embodied seeing and experience, something that has gained ground in PT recently through attention to the concept of practical wisdom.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, theological reflection on practice can situate the

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<sup>175</sup> Watkins, C. (2012). Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?: In P. Ward (ed.). *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 168-169.

<sup>176</sup> Scharen, C. B. and Vigen, A. M. (eds.). (2011). *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*. London:

Continuum, xxiii. Fulkerson M. M. (2012). Interpreting a Situation: When is “Empirical” also “Theological”? In *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 132-135.

<sup>177</sup> Scharen and Vigen. *Ethnography*, 28-46. Fiddes, P. S. (2012). Ecclesiology and Ethnology: Two Disciplines, Two Worlds? In P. Ward (ed.). *Perspectives in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 13-35.

<sup>178</sup> Scharen and Vigen. *Ethnography*, 47-74. Fulkerson. *Places of Redemption*, 124-144.

<sup>179</sup> Bass et al, *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 1-19. Scharen, C. B. (2016). Eclipsing: The Loss and Recovery of Practical Wisdom in the Modern West. In D. C. Bass, K. A. Cahalan, B. J. Miller-McLemore, J. R. Nieman and C. B. Scharen. *Christian Practical Wisdom: What it is and Why it Matters*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 145-174. There is an interesting direction here in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of embodied perception, see Langer, M. M. (1989). *Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 23-66; see also Scharen, C. B. (2015). *Field Work in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God’s Work in the World*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 49-64.



relationship between the personal and the communal in relationship to God. Bourdieu's view of 'habitus' offers a way of understanding the interplay of social structure and human agency, history and experience – a cultural artefact rather than formation through a tradition.<sup>180</sup> A step on from this is a theological approach shaped from the particularity of practice that can draw on these insights without collapsing its reading to human agency alone.<sup>181</sup>

Within this bottom up, embodied approach, it is possible to articulate people's encounter with the subjectivity of God in the research context.<sup>182</sup> Keifert argues for the 'return of the congregation to theological conversation', by which he means that through the operation of practical reason, congregations are enabled to discern the presence and activity of God in their own narrative. God as subject of our conversation is part of the research and the narrative – not something that is added in later.<sup>183</sup> This is much easier to understand in the context of the practice of an iterative hermeneutical dialogue between Scripture and experience taking place in the journey of communal discernment and narrative construction.<sup>184</sup>

This debate is germane to my research because I narrate a journey in which people have been invited to take seriously both the centrality of Scriptural interpretation and the subjectivity of God in the formation of their narrative and identity. The multiple narratives of participants and researcher give access to a complex reality which is both theologically

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<sup>180</sup> Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 95, 100-104. Maton, K. (2014). Habitus. In M. Grenfell (ed.). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Abingdon: Routledge, 48-54.

<sup>181</sup> Fulkerson, *Interpreting a Situation*, 136-144. Root, *Christopraxis*, 60-66. Bass et al, *Christian Practical Wisdom*, 1-19.

<sup>182</sup> Swinton, *What's Love got to do with it?*

<sup>183</sup> Keifert, *The Return of the Congregation*, 13-20.

<sup>184</sup> Keifert, P. (2009b). *The Bible and Theological Education: A Report and Reflections on a Journey*. In P. Keifert (ed.). *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 27-47.

grounded and theologically interpreted. As we explore this together in context and shared life we are trying to articulate something that is true – not total truth but aspiring towards it in critical realist form.<sup>185</sup>

Other practical theologians are not persuaded by the priority of the theological discourse because they believe that anything less than a presumed equality between discourses will lead to misrepresentation, abuse or oppression.<sup>186</sup> This is a fair concern but it is not addressed by suspending judgement between discourses – which no-one can actually achieve – but rather by being critically reflective and reflexive about the theological reading of the narrative. Root offers a sympathetic but challenging critique to those who appropriately recognise the importance of a description that is grounded in contextually embodied practice yet make no room for an understanding of mediated divine agency as well as human agency in their descriptions.<sup>187</sup>

It is hard to do justice to an ethnographical reading of spiritual experience and the presence of God using the objectifying and reductionist approaches that most social researchers favour.<sup>188</sup> In her study of American Evangelicalism, Luhrmann presents this as a problem of people believing against ‘the evidence of their senses’.<sup>189</sup> She offers a sensitive and engaging reading of belief for a secular modern context based on the exercise of the imaginative mind.<sup>190</sup> The problem is that people simply do not experience or articulate their experiences in this way. Rather, the approach that is needed is one which can engage with

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<sup>185</sup> This mattered as much to those who participated in my research journey with St X as it does to me.

<sup>186</sup> Watts, F. (2002). *Theology and Psychology*. Aldershot: Ashgate 7-8. Graham et al, *Theological Reflection*, 76, 105-107. Bennett, *Using the Bible*, 9-13.

<sup>187</sup> Root, *Christopraxis*, 60-66.

<sup>188</sup> See for example, Percy, M. (1996). *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism*. London: SPCK, 60-81.

<sup>189</sup> Luhrmann, T. M. (2012). *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York, NY.: Vintage Books, xii.

<sup>190</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 300-325.

the linguistic and narrative world of the congregants on their own terms rather than seeking a spurious objectivity.

Keifert's critique of this kind of approach argues, with Swinton, that it is mark of reductionist philosophy to say that God cannot be experienced and described as subject, but he also offers methodology and practice for how this may be articulated in a research context. Such spiritual discernment is central to the PMC journey and so it needs a methodology that recognises that the language people use is not only a form of social construction but connects in some way to transcendent experience.<sup>191</sup>

This position can be justified epistemologically by taking a critical realist approach that recognises the possibility of accessing true, if partial and provisional descriptions of the social world whilst at the same time recognising that all representations contain perspective and bias and need to be approached with this in mind. This means that the accounts may be treated as potentially telling something real about people and the social worlds they inhabit without naively assuming a simple representation as in a naturalist perspective.

Correspondingly, the accounts will be analysed with interest in their construction and their narrative but without assuming that they can tell us only about a person's perceptions and biases.

Epistemological perspective shapes the way in which we record participation. Symbolic Interactionism proposes the understanding of social worlds as constructed through human relationships and transactions and therefore that meaning is negotiated and interpreted through relationship; this is resonant of Hopewell's symbolic model of congregational study.<sup>192</sup> To narrate the perspective of others requires immersion in their

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<sup>191</sup> Keifert, *The Return of the Congregation*, 13-20. Swinton, *What's Love got to do with it?*

<sup>192</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 28-32.

life-worlds.<sup>193</sup> This implies a level of resocialisation as a means of entering into the social worlds of others, not as a detached observer but as one whose participative presence is central to the process of 'seeing' an emergent narrative.<sup>194</sup> It is worth adding that this attentiveness should also be understood in terms of spiritual discernment as the narrating involves people's encounters with a God who is present and active amongst them.<sup>195</sup>

Reflexivity of the researcher is crucial, not simply from the point-of-view of self-awareness and honesty, but as a requirement for a critical realist approach designed to offer a persuasive account of perspectival reality. Writers consistently stress the generative impact and interpretative value of the researcher's presence, but one which requires a high degree of reflexivity to ensure the validity of this presence.<sup>196</sup>

The settled intention behind this piece is to generate a piece of research, taking full account of the messiness of this process;<sup>197</sup> one in which the voice(s) of the congregation will be as important as the voice of the researcher. This is grounded in theory about 'otherness' and 'inter-subjectivity' in the generation of knowledge and in the formation of maturity.<sup>198</sup> Once again this is far from simply a theoretical consideration because St X's journey embraced a challenging engagement with the practice of discernment, which sought to help the church to take seriously engagement with the subjective voice of God in its decision making. It is the contention of this piece that their journey of maturation is

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<sup>193</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 55-58.

<sup>194</sup> Emerson et al, *Writing*, 2-5.

<sup>195</sup> Keifert, *The Return of the Congregation*, 13-20.

<sup>196</sup> Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 108-109. Emerson et al, *Writing*, 4-5. Fulkerson, *Interpreting a Situation*, 124-125.

<sup>197</sup> Ward, *Messiness*, 125-137.

<sup>198</sup> The idea of 'inter-subjectivity' comes from Irigaray and will be explored in chapter 4. Irigaray, L. (2000). *To Be Two*. London: The Athlone Press. Irigaray, L. (2002). *The Way of Love*. London: Continuum.

deeply formed by the agency of God and not simply by the following of a programme or process.<sup>199</sup>

### 1.3.6 Does PMC focus on maturity?

I had already settled on the subject matter of this thesis on community formation and spiritual maturity before I came across PMC.<sup>200</sup> Whilst working as a theological college tutor, I was invited to bring students into the PMC process as a part of their placement programme.<sup>201</sup> It occurred to me that researching a context where people had entered – willingly or otherwise – into a process of development and change might highlight the precise question that I was interested in.

PMC does not explicitly set itself up as a process of maturation because it is offered to the church as a process for missional engagement. However, it is a process of congregational engagement which has clear formational expectations – particularly communal ones – beyond simply increasing the number of those who come to church.<sup>202</sup>

Because the context for PMC is culture change, its implicit formational agenda works through challenging the assumptions of modernity that are deeply embedded in Western church life. For example, the practice of ‘Dwelling in the Word’ (DitW) challenges the idea of knowledge as the imparting of correct information by experts based as this is in the enlightenment separation of fact and value (the public world of rationality over against the private world of feeling) – a critique that had already been offered by missional thinkers in the twentieth century.<sup>203</sup> Instead, by ‘democratising’ the approach to the reading of

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<sup>199</sup> The practical challenges of researching this will be explored in chapter 2.

<sup>200</sup> Appendix 3.

<sup>201</sup> This was in 2011.

<sup>202</sup> See Appendix 4: note sections highlighted in yellow. Keifert, P. (2006). *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era*. St Paul’s, MN.: Church Innovations Institute, 117-150.

<sup>203</sup> Newbigin, *Gospel*, 14-38. Bosch, D. (1997). *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 262-273.

Scripture it subverts the 'expert culture' privileging reading 'in front of the text', allowing the voices of readers in community to be heard whilst rejecting a spurious choice between objectivity and relativity.<sup>204</sup>

This is of a piece with PMC's commitment to take seriously the role of the congregation in the practice of theological reflection. Through encouraging the practice of reflection as a congregational discipline, Keifert returns agency and responsibility to lay Christians, which goes some way to explaining why the PMC process is a good context for observing personal and communal formation.<sup>205</sup> Keifert unpacks the theological grounding of this approach in an earlier book in which he explores the gospel imperative of attentiveness to the voice and presence of the stranger, grounded in the surprising presence of God, as an antidote to the privatisation of Christian community and passivity in Christian discipleship.<sup>206</sup>

I was struck by the attention to communal and personal spiritual formation in PMC and by the fact that it promotes attentiveness to the other in its spiritual practices – whether the 'other' is Scripture, God, congregation members or the wider community. This is why I was drawn to it as the context for my research into maturity through community formation.

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<sup>204</sup> Keifert, P. (2012). Training given to Southwell and Nottingham and Leicester Dioceses PMC Delivery Team at St John's College, Nottingham – July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012.

<sup>205</sup> Keifert, P. (ed.). (2009). *Testing the Spirits: How Theology informs the Study of Congregations*. Grand Rapids. MI.: Eerdmans, 11-66.

<sup>206</sup> Keifert, P. (1992). *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1-36. See also Simpson, G. (2009). God, Civil Society and Congregations as Public Moral Companions. In P. Keifert, (ed.). *Testing the Spirits: How Theology informs the Study of Congregations*. Grand Rapids. MI.: Eerdmans, 67-88.

## 1.4 Research question

Having explained the reasons behind the research project and the theological commitments, it is time to present the research question and the aims.

After an iterative process of development over a year in study, supervision and with the DPT research community, I reached a 'single, overarching central question' in which the developmental journey of a congregation would be the focus, PMC the catalyst and maturity the reflective question.<sup>207</sup> The question that was formed was revised slightly in the course of the research as experience continued to shape its articulation.<sup>208</sup> The question settled upon was:

**What are people's understanding and experience of change and development when their church journeys with the PMC process?**

**What light might this shed on issues of maturity through community?**

The process for exploration of this question is grounded in the aims of the project which were first articulated in the Research Proposal and then refined during the period of FW.<sup>209</sup>

- To observe and participate with the congregation in their pattern of life together and with the wider community
- To identify participants' (church members and clergy) perceptions of their personal and communal journey of change during PMC and their understanding of growth and development

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<sup>207</sup> Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage, 21. Sensing, T. (2011). *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 63-64. Costley et al, *Doing Work Based Research*, 168. Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Sage, 138.

<sup>208</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 28-29.

<sup>209</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2015a). *Research Proposal*. Submitted in the course of Part 1 of the DPT. University of Birmingham, 4-5. See Appendix 31.

- To offer my own interpretation of community formation based on:
  - (i) Analytical reading of ethnographical observations to generate key themes
  - (ii) Analytical reading of interviews to generate key themes
  - (iii) Exploration of these themes in the light of social psychological, psychodynamic and faith development perspectives on maturity and development.
  - (iv) Critically integrating the above with a theological reading of personal and communal maturity through their journey
- To explore my interpretations of change and development through focus groups [FGs] with church members and clergy in order to allow them to critique and contribute to the interpretation.

## 1.5 Conclusion – messiness and complexity

This brings me chronologically to the cusp of the FW, which I will describe in the next chapter. This chapter is a reflective account which is related to the whole of the research journey so there is a sense in which this is deliberately crafted – an ongoing reflection upon a reflection, the essence of what makes this a theological journey: ‘not merely a straightforward record of things that have happened’.<sup>210</sup> The danger is that this disguises the messiness and provisionality of the journey – something that I will seek to avoid when I record the research journey in the next chapter.<sup>211</sup> My theological methodological convictions became clearer and more explicit in the process of hearing the stories and voices of St X and as I sought to discern with them as co-researchers.

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<sup>210</sup> Walton, H. (2014). *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection*. London: SCM, 46.

<sup>211</sup> Ward, Messiness, 125-137.



However, there was also personal messiness in this theological journey. I took a break of a year in the midst of the first year, ostensibly because of busyness, but more because of my own struggles with academic identity.

Over time, I had become at ease with complexity in personal life and ministerial practice – which I would take to be a sign of maturation. During the DPT, I realised that I had not made the same journey in my academic identity. My evangelical background had made me defensive and suspicious in relation to other perspectives, feeling that my calling was to defend the gospel against the encroachments of secular culture. This was rooted in an approach to the Bible which Bennett describes as controlling.<sup>212</sup> My formation was with the goal of being an authoritative teacher and this had the effect of making me closed to otherness and difference in my theological perspective. This theological identity was embodied in the ghettoised life within the church that had both nurtured me at vulnerable points but also restricted my imagination, risk and adventure. I pictured this to myself as being behind castle walls – a metaphor I discovered that St X had adopted to describe their situation at the beginning of PMC. The DPT journey unpicked my defensiveness and this was extremely unsettling. Gradually, I formed an identity in which I was able to open up to the academic insights of others, become at ease with provisionality in my own work and be able to think theologically in the public space, both appreciatively and critically.<sup>213</sup> This reduced my anxiety and enabled me to enjoy academic study with curiosity as well as conviction. I see this as part of my own journey of maturity in terms of openness to the other which I will trace also in the life of St X.

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<sup>212</sup> Bennett, *Using the Bible*, 9-12.

<sup>213</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2018a). A Search for Truth which is True to Scripture. In Z. Bennett, E. Graham, S Pattison, and H. Walton. *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*. London: Routledge, 112-113.

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.1 Introduction

The architecture of a good research project encompasses proposal, question, theoretical underpinning, structure and design and the research techniques employed.<sup>1</sup> The first three were covered in the research proposal and chapter 1.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter focuses first on theory which pertains to research structure and design decisions. It takes the two methodological conceptions – theology and narrative – and builds them into the research practice, articulating a theological relationship between ethnography and practical theology and explaining how the priority of narrative reading will be sustained.<sup>3</sup>

Research techniques were chosen that would allow the methodology to take root in practice in terms of narrative openness to the other, reflexive awareness and ethical practice. Analysis sustained the commitment to the other in the narration of stories, preparing the ground for an account which is methodological coherent and credible and was both communicable and resonant to participants and readers.<sup>4</sup>

Structure, design and techniques together constitute the research methods of the project.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, M., Martin, P. and Green, G. (2007). *Doing Practitioner Research*. London: Sage, 112-118.

<sup>2</sup> Ladd, *Research Proposal*. See sections 1.2-1.4.

<sup>3</sup> See section 2.2

<sup>4</sup> See section 2.3

<sup>5</sup> Fox et al, *Doing Practitioner Research*, 116.

## 2.2 Research structure and design

It has been the driving force of my ministry to explore how communities can contribute to people's journeys of growth. This interest long pre-dates my encounter with PMC, but was given a new twist by experiencing the PMC journey. Was the research about PMC or maturity? Is maturity something that people think about or can talk about in the abstract or would I need a particular way in? Thus this project might be described as a 'developmental puzzle'.<sup>6</sup> People tell stories that express their understanding and experience rather than theorising about it. I needed an approach which would allow me to engage with a community's experience and interpretation of experience, whilst giving me room to make my own interpretation – emic and etic.<sup>7</sup> This involved finding a 'setting' in which such a journey could be encountered and observed.<sup>8</sup> In structural terms it required a 'flexible design' in which, though I would make design decisions before FW began, I would continue to be open to revision in the process of FW and analysis.<sup>9</sup> This flexible approach to structuring the research methods was necessary if I wanted to allow people's experience and narratives to have interpretative force, for them to co-create the research at some level. I concluded that the best approach to gaining such insight would be to conduct an ethnography in which I had time to participate, listen and observe as well as to question.

### 2.2.1 Ethnography and practical theology<sup>10</sup>

Ethnography focuses on the interpretation of narrative or the development of theory (Grounded Theory Method [GTM]). GTM has had something of a ubiquitous influence in

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<sup>6</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Fetterman, D.M. (2010). *Ethnography: Step by Step*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Sage, 20-22.

<sup>8</sup> Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Fox et al, *Doing Practitioner Research*, 118.

<sup>10</sup> See sections 1.3.4 and 1.3.5.

qualitative research and is assumed as the method of choice by a range of theorists and initially, I was drawn to what seemed to be its quasi-objectivity.<sup>11</sup> However, it became clear that the project was not of the scope to justify the goal of theory generalisation.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as explained in chapter 1, my aim has been the creating of a narrative of St X's journey, giving due space to their interpretations whilst offering my own. This has led me to an ethnographic approach whose focus is the interpretation of narrative rather than the development of theory.

Because this is the narration of the spiritual journey of a Christian congregation, it requires the integration of practical theology with ethnography to produce something that has spiritual and ecclesial engagement as well as personal and sociological. I have been guided in this by Hopewell's symbolic approach which sensitively engages with the unique narrative and 'personality' of a congregation whilst giving scope for theological critique and construction: an approach which both encourages and structures close listening and accompaniment of congregations on their journeys.<sup>13</sup>

Creswell notes the development of reflexivity in qualitative research, a further connection with PT.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing to be gained from denying the place of personal experience in search of a false objectivity; reflexivity can illuminate interpretation.<sup>15</sup> To an

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<sup>11</sup> Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory through Qualitative Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage, 4-6. Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation*. Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 12-15, 80-94. Auerbach, C. F. and Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*. New York, NY.: New York University Press, 14-20. Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 158-190. Emerson et al, *Writing*, 171-199. Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K. (2010). Grounded Theory Research: Methods and Practices. In A. Bryant and K. Charmaz (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. London: Sage, 1-13

<sup>12</sup> Dey, I. (2007). Grounded Theory. In C. Searle, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium and D. Silverman (eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage, 88-92.

<sup>13</sup> See section 1.3.4.

<sup>14</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 47. Graham, *Practical Theology*, 148-178.

<sup>15</sup> Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 15-24. Muncey, T. (2010). *Creating Autoethnographies*. London: Sage. (I could not source this text during Covid-19 for exact page numbers).

extent, I was researching my own practice. Literature on ‘work-based’ or ‘insider’ research suggests that there is value to be gained in terms of negotiating entry, understanding of the context and contributing to the re-shaping of the organisation.<sup>16</sup> The researcher’s presence is a part of the data and ethnographers recognise both its inevitability and potential creativity.<sup>17</sup>

### **2.2.2 Narrative interpretation**

Narrative reading was an over-arching commitment for the FW and analysis. I start with the assumption that communities express their identity and convictions through the stories they tell. Stories may take ideological shape which, after Marx, can be understood as a self-serving legitimization of a view of reality or, after Ricoeur, in a less controlling way as framing the story of a community.<sup>18</sup> Charting movement in their stories can therefore be a way of understanding and interpreting personal and communal growth and change. In addition because our stories, shaped by others’ stories, are constitutive of our personal and communal identities, disruption and challenge is likely to be conflictual. Listening to stories was central to the research and the nuances of conflict and negotiation of stories was crucial for understanding the journey.

### **2.2.3 Inductive and deductive approaches in narrating maturity**

I wanted to look at maturity and growth from the perspective of lived experience. I chose an ethnographic approach for addressing the question, because this allowed me to observe and document culture and communal narrative as well as personal engagement

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<sup>16</sup> Costley et al, *Doing Work Based Research*, 1-7. The implications of reflexivity for research methods is addressed in section 2.3.6

<sup>17</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 14-18.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, W. (2014). *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 7-8.

and journey, through community participation.<sup>19</sup> Ethnography is an inductive approach that takes empirical data seriously. This seems such a given that it is easily forgotten that theory and empirical study were once in 'parallel universes'.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, there is no such thing as an entirely inductive process and complex approaches recognise a subtle interplay of deductive and inductive, not least in the clarification of 'foreshadowed problems'.<sup>21</sup> My research was shaped by two such 'problems'. First I had a broad hypothesis about articulating the nature of maturity as communal in relation to personal formation. PMC as a process of intentional change would bring questions of maturity and development within community front and centre. PMC is a three-year process in which a number of congregations work with experienced facilitators to learn how to form partnership in God's mission with people from their wider community. They are introduced to six communal spiritual practices<sup>22</sup>, which enable them both personally and as a community to engage in relationship with others – human and divine – forming transformative missional partnerships.<sup>23</sup>

In practice, though maturity – and particularly the impact of community on this – was my interpretative lens, I tended to use words like growth, development or change in interviews and discussions because to use the word maturity might lead people towards introspection and caution where I wanted people to talk freely about their faith journeys. To talk about one's maturity felt a little bit like asking people about their humility. Moreover, maturity is a contested concept and therefore better to explore in the light of their open-

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<sup>19</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 403. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 94-95.

<sup>20</sup> Dey, *Grounded Theory*, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis*, 12-15. Delamont, S. (2007). Ethnography and Participant Observation. In C. Searle, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium and D. Silverman (eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage, 212-213. Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 21-24.

<sup>22</sup> PMC calls these 'disruptive missional practices'.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix 3.

ended personal narratives first in preliminary theological articulation and then in reflection in the light of the research data.<sup>24</sup>

Second, having grasped the impact of the cultural imprisonment to privatised religion, I began to articulate something that had been implicit in my previous ministry: that genuine growth and development comes when we open our lives to welcome and engage with the other who is different to ourselves.<sup>25</sup> There are a number of observations that relate to this broad insight that are relevant to the focus of my research:

- Dissatisfaction with ‘technical’ accounts of church growth and development and appreciation of deeper models of cultural change
- Surprising changes to clergy who have undertaken the cultural change journey that is embodied in the PMC process
- Personal experience of spiritual formation and the transformative impact of being challenged and unsettled by difference – both the experience of living and working in cultures different to my own – inner city and outer estate and the intellectual journey with difference in the DPT.
- Experience of the maturing effect of engagement with ‘otherness’ in communal formation<sup>26</sup>

I chose my setting with these ‘foreshadowed problems’ in mind and the task was to look out for appropriate ‘cases’ within that setting that would open up these problems. A ‘case’ is a particular angle or perspective from which phenomena within the setting are

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<sup>24</sup> See section 1.2 and chapter 4.

<sup>25</sup> Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 27-36.

<sup>26</sup> This runs counter to the Homogeneous Unit Principle which has influenced missional thinking in the CofE in Fresh Expressions and Resource Church strategy (Church of England. Mission and Public Affairs Council. (2004). *Mission- shaped Church*, 1-15. Hull, (2006). *Mission-Shaped Church – A Theological Response*, 1-36.

being observed. Attention to cases allows the researcher to focus on particular aspects of the setting that illuminate the foreshadowed problems.<sup>27</sup>

Because of my sense that maturity<sup>28</sup> would have something to do with relationship to the other, it was important that the approach made room for charting otherness in terms of participants' relationships with me and with each other – both in terms of difference and also in terms of shared narrative. Therefore an approach which paid attention to their interlocking and conflicting stories, whilst being aware of my own, was the appropriate way to structure the methods. Attending to participants' stories would also reveal the importance of their relationships with others in their wider communities and also the role that the otherness of God and of Scripture would play in their journey together.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst there is an appropriate privileging of the narratives of the congregation through time spent and attentive engagement with their life and practice, the articulation of broad hypotheses of enquiry allows focus in what is still a time-limited engagement and gives direction to research decisions made in the context of the FW.

#### **2.2.4 From design to field work**

My plan was to gain access, through establishing a relationship with the parish leadership, participating in as wide a range of church events and activities as possible and recording observations and impressions in field notes [FN]. Conducting group and individual interviews, which I planned to record, would help sharpen the focus around maturity and guide selectivity of 'cases' as the time went on.

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<sup>27</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 28-35.

<sup>28</sup> I decided before I started that the focus would be adult maturity; therefore I could not participate in activities for under 18s, only hear about them from adults.

<sup>29</sup> See section 1.2.



I decided to address this through a sustained period of participant observation with a range of personal and group interviews which would provide insight into people's performance and perceptions of their journey and which would be triangulated with my own participation and observation of the setting. The narrative would develop out of themes generated through triangulation between interviews and FN and offer a theological articulation of the themes that emerged. This involved attending to spiritual and communal practices that appeared to generate personal and communal development in their story and that might be fruitfully recontextualised in different cultural contexts.

Through my work with PMC in broader professional life, I was aware of a church in my local area, St X, which was journeying with this process.<sup>30</sup>

## **2.3 Research techniques**

### **2.3.1 Gaining access**

The vicar was open to the idea of my using St X as the researching community for my enquiry. Further permission needed to come from the Church Council (PCC) and not simply through him.<sup>31</sup> I wrote first to him and then to the Secretary of the PCC.<sup>32</sup> It was helpful to have the vicar to introduce me, but risky in terms of aligning me with authority.<sup>33</sup> I also talked with leaders in the diocese so that they would be aware of what I was doing and to PMC and PMC-UK to put them in the picture and gauge their interest.

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<sup>30</sup> I knew St X through student placements from the college I worked for; I was also acquainted with the vicar.

<sup>31</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 49-62

<sup>32</sup> See Appendices 5a and b.

<sup>33</sup> Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 36-37.

The PCC agreed and I introduced myself to the church at both Sunday services as well as writing something for the church notices.<sup>34</sup> Access proved easy with the PCC because they felt they had a story to tell – and one that put them, for once, in the ‘vanguard’.<sup>35</sup> This was not simply the threshold to cross to start, but part of the observation. Gaining access was an ongoing challenge and people’s responses were variable – interrogative, enthusiastic, suspicious, indifferent. Some groups were hard to tie down and I learnt that this could be as much about their journey as my skill. Difficulty and failure of access is an important part of the data and contributed to the reading of the culture.<sup>36</sup> There were other contexts, particularly with the ‘Community Group’ where access was formally sought later in the process. I was keen not to rest too heavily on the vicar’s support nor to make assumptions about the level of access I had gained at any point. People’s lives are more important to them than my research; keeping on top of the question of access was a constant relational challenge, which was at times interesting, exciting, stretching, frustrating and exhausting.<sup>37</sup>

### **2.3.2 Field work and field notes**

My role can be described as participant-as-observer and not simply participant, because it was an overt rather than covert role; but it also involved regular participation in the life of the community, not interviewing alone as in the observer-led roles.<sup>38</sup> Openness and participation seemed essential if I were to engage with their story and involve them in the interpretation.

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<sup>34</sup> FN:14-17 – 15.11.15.

<sup>35</sup> FN:9 – 14.09.15.

<sup>36</sup> Delamont, *Ethnography and Participant Observation*, 213.

<sup>37</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 410-411.

In the initial stages, I took the role of a newcomer to a church community intent on developing their involvement, but I made no attempt to disguise what I was doing. But people in church communities pick up things at different rates and I often found myself explaining what I was doing quite far into the project.<sup>39</sup> With those who were enthusiastic, I took care to explain that I would end up with my interpretation, which they were at liberty to disagree with. Because it was an environment I was at home in and I found that rapport developed over time, I needed to be aware of the temptation to go 'native'.<sup>40</sup>

Having met the PCC in September 2015, the FW began formally in November and continued until July 2017. Phillips puts the challenge that PT claims 'ethnography' for all manner of short-term projects. The timescale here, however, fulfils her requirements.<sup>41</sup> During this time, I participated in a wide range of church and community events.<sup>42</sup>

At the 8.00am service on my first Sunday, having spoken from the front about my research, no-one asked me anything afterwards; this would be a pattern at this service. At the 10.30, I was welcomed by a couple sitting near me who really 'wanted to quiz me' about the research.<sup>43</sup> Beyond that, I found that I had to do all the running in making conversation after the service and over coffee: 'there is nothing very obvious about how to get in'.<sup>44</sup> People did not seem suspicious of me, but neither did they appear overly interested. I was conscious that as an experienced minister and one who has been involved with PMC, they might see me as an 'expert-critic' or even a consultant who was there to help them do better or criticise their performance; my age was against me in this respect.<sup>45</sup> This made me

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<sup>39</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 53-58.

<sup>40</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 86-89.

<sup>41</sup> Phillips, E. (2012). Charting the "Ethnographic Turn": Theologians and the Study of Christian Congregations. In P. Ward (ed.). *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 102.

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>43</sup> FN:15 – 15.11.15.

<sup>44</sup> FN:17 – 15.11.15.

<sup>45</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 60-61.

very careful about trying to emphasise my desire to learn and to avoid too much comment and reflection to them about what I was seeing. I did reflect with people in meetings, when asked, but also made opportunities to invite people to reflect with me on what I was experiencing.

Ethnography is not an exact science – it's a messy human engagement and there are as many constraints as opportunities.<sup>46</sup> Early explorations led me to a meeting with a disaffected home group. Serendipitously, this generated the idea for meeting with home groups, covering a large number of the committed adult congregation and being able to listen and observe in community, in addition to carefully chosen one-to-one interviews.

But there were barriers too; I almost missed meeting with the 18s-30s as they proved a difficult group to get together. I tried to meet newcomers individually and as a group but they proved elusive – partly, I think, because they were more cautious about meeting me than more established church members and also more uncertain about their place within the church: 'AAAA said he didn't feel quite safe to respond to my request for an interview'.<sup>47</sup>

I decided before I began that I was only going to work with adults – so this meant that I could only hear about some interesting work with children. It might have been interesting to visit the Luncheon Club for older folk, but in the end time was a factor in how much I could see.

There is a rhythm to FW, which is hard to discern in the midst. Moments of excitement and illumination appear in times of ordinariness and boredom. But the extended time allows for the development of a relationship with the community in which deep

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<sup>46</sup> Ward, Messiness, 125-137.

<sup>47</sup> FN:180 – 09.07.17. See Appendix 7 for my rationale for denotation of individuals in the research

listening can occur.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, because this is the narrative of a community journey, meaning is embedded in time.<sup>49</sup> As the research journey unfolded, I found that I adjusted from going to everything to which I could gain entry to being more selective about what I did in relation to my research question and to the things that were emerging from the interviewing process.<sup>50</sup> Negatively, this was guided by finding nothing new when continuing to attend certain events, like Sunday services; positively, the decision was related to experiences that opened up the exploration of maturation. At one point in the research journey, I greatly reduced my attendance at Sunday services because I felt I had learnt most of what I was likely to and concentrated on attendance at events midweek. 'At least three people commented on the fact that they hadn't seen me around, two joking that they hadn't seen me since I interviewed their house group – "thought we'd put you off, frightened you away"'.<sup>51</sup> This caused some to think that I had finished my research and I had to review my practice to avoid misunderstanding.

Nevertheless, as time passed I chose to focus on key areas and themes allowing me to ask a wide range of people the same questions. This made it possible to triangulate data more thoroughly than would have been the case if I had stayed with the same broad approach to the context which was appropriate at the beginning of the FW. Technically, this is sampling within the cases over time, but not theoretical sampling.<sup>52</sup>

The ending had a characteristic messiness about it. The vicar forgot to put my farewell words into the notice sheet and that I was going to say a few words. I did manage to speak at both services on my final Sunday, but I was flustered because I had been

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<sup>48</sup> Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 141-166.

<sup>49</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 179-180.

<sup>50</sup> Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 35-36.

<sup>51</sup> FN:108-109 – 14.11.16.

<sup>52</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 35-38.

expecting to speak from what was in the notices. I found myself hanging around at the end of the 10.30 service to say goodbye to people – but it faded away. This is but one example of the strains and stresses of FW. There were times when I had to force myself to attend yet another 8.00am service or steel myself for the extroversion required at coffee time.<sup>53</sup>

Another challenge of data collection was the time it took to write up the material in the midst of both full-time work and continuing to research the context. There is a constant trade-off between keeping the FW moving and writing up the accounts.<sup>54</sup>

I tried to write up on the same or the next day, but did not always succeed. However, I found it possible to take notes at most of the meetings and services that I went to without causing unease; A5 notebook at more formal meetings and a very small notebook when I wanted to be more discreet in services. When I felt the need, I would ask people if it would be alright if I took notes. I also supplemented my notes with voicemails made immediately after meetings; these recordings were often of a more reflective nature. I worked hard at recalling incidents and my feelings about them.

I anonymised people by using letters; using the whole alphabet and then double and triple letters and so on. It might have personalised the account more to use changed names, but paradoxically, I found it easier to remember people from letters than I would have done from altered names; this was helpful for analysis. X was reserved for the church and X1, Y1 and Z1 were different geographical areas of the parish.<sup>55</sup>

From the beginning, I planned to make distinctions between the kinds of writing in the FN; information, ethnographic narratives, analysis, reflection and reflexive writing. While all accounts are interpretative, in my view something different was going on when I

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<sup>53</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 89-96.

<sup>54</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 143-144.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 7.

was trying record accounts of FW and when I was reflecting upon it.<sup>56</sup> I achieved this by colour-coding and the distinctions were of considerable help when it came to analysis.<sup>57</sup>

### **2.3.3 Interviewing**

At the planning stage, my selection criteria for interviews were based upon typical demographic categories – age, gender, social class. However, it became clear early on that response to PMC was a place of clear divergence, so I took this as the first criterion and returned to other criteria when this had been fulfilled. This divergence was also observable within and between FGs. In addition, I took account of the hierarchies within the church and took care not to be drawn in an unbalanced way to my social peers.

Through interviews, I gave people the opportunity to explore their own journeys of personal and communal growth and development and the impact of the PMC process upon this.<sup>58</sup> I chose a semi-structured or ‘in depth’ approach as this allows flexibility in the interview whilst offering focus around themes germane to the research question.<sup>59</sup> I used some closed questions at the beginning, designed to ease people in and to elicit some factual information about the individual or the group, but the substance of the interviews employed open questions to give people the opportunity to explore and interact at depth.<sup>60</sup>

#### **2.3.3.1 FGs – 8 conducted between May 2016 and June 2017: 1 in November 2018**

I wanted to explore the way in which group life supported personal and communal journeys and what they felt had been the impact of PMC upon them. Interviewing home

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<sup>56</sup> Emerson et al, *Writing*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 8.

<sup>58</sup> See section 2.2.3 for the decision to use these words rather than maturity when conducting interviews and FGs.

<sup>59</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 438-439.

<sup>60</sup> Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. London: Sage, 10-16.

groups gave me a very full entrée to the adult congregation and to very varied perceptions about personal and church journeys.

For the first two groups, I wrote an interview guide which invited them to tell me a bit about their group story and then to reflect on their experience of PMC and its impact on the church. After the first two groups, I reflected that focusing solely on the PMC process would not serve my research question fully as I wanted them to explore the formative impact of PMC in the light of their own developmental journeys as Christians. I introduced a group exercise to explore 25 words or phrases to evoke stories of change and development; I chose some words that are traditionally associated with Christian growth and maturity in Evangelical churches – worship, prayer, Bible study, evangelism, fellowship.<sup>61</sup> Others chosen had resonance with PMC – community involvement, partnership, hospitality, discernment, listening, mission.<sup>62</sup> I invited them to discuss together and decide their ‘top ten’, including ones not selected by me if they chose. I asked them to think about stories and experiences that were informing their choices and invited them to share and discuss these when they had concluded their choice. I modified the guide a number of times to allow for new questions.<sup>63</sup> I created an information sheet and a consent form, which initially, I sent out before the meeting. The forms explained the purpose and covered the important issues of confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal. The focus group (FG) material included a clause about group confidentiality which was discussed at each session. I also arranged confidential

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<sup>61</sup> Watson, D. (1981). *Discipleship*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Wimber, J. with Springer, K. (1990). *The Dynamics of Spiritual Growth*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Croucher, R. (1992). *Grow: Meditations and Prayers for New Christians*. Melbourne: JBCE. Virgo, T. (1994). *Start*. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications. Ogden, G. (2003). *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP. Hull, B. (2006). *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO.: NavPress.

<sup>62</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*. Keifert, P. and Rooms, N. (2014). *Forming a Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations*. Grove Pastoral Series 139. Cambridge: Grove Books, 20-24.

<sup>63</sup> See Appendices 9a-d.



support in terms of a spiritual director and a counsellor, making the commitment to pay for the first session; no-one took me up on this. I discovered that sending consent forms in advance rather than reassuring people about my professionalism, proved intimidating. For later gatherings, I presented them at the group and gave time for discussion and completion.<sup>64</sup>

### **2.3.3.2 One-to-one interviews – 10 with members of the congregation; 1 with the vicar conducted between May and July 2017**

Interviews took place towards the end of the FW, when I had got to know some people and developed an idea of who I might want to interview. They were selected with attention to age, gender and variability in relation to their support of PMC.

The interview guide reflects the fact that they took place late on in the process, by which time there were some themes that I wanted to explore with them. In other respects, I followed the same process as with the FGs.<sup>65</sup>

### **2.3.3.3 Community interviews: 24 random surveys in September 2016; 3 community interviews from January to March 2017; survey of Community Group supporters through their Facebook page in May 2017.**

I also did some testing of whether the church's perception of a growing relationship with the community was confirmed. I did this by comparing some random surveys conducted at various areas of public gathering around the parish, mainly shopping areas, with some interviewing and surveying of people who were supposedly connecting with the church in its new outward journey. In the case of the surveys, it was not appropriate to complete a consent form and the information sheet was offered on the day of the surveys and posted on the Community Group's Facebook page.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Appendices 10 and 11.

<sup>65</sup> See Appendices 12-14.

<sup>66</sup> See Appendices 15-17.

Due to the large amount of data, I decided to have the interviews transcribed.<sup>67</sup> In the main text, I have removed repeated words and hesitations for the sake of clarity, except where these contribute to the interpretation.

#### **2.3.3.4 Written documents**

Ethnography has tended to privilege oral accounts because of its history in researching non-literate cultures.<sup>68</sup> In the West, we work much more with written documents and St X had generated a lot of writing. I decided to draw on those documents that had been generated by the PMC process, especially those that were relevant to change and development processes.

Because written documents are composed after the event and may even be edited over time, they may reflect more 'espoused' than 'operant' perspectives.<sup>69</sup> There is a parallel here with FN, which are also constructed after the event. The difference is that FN are reflective and reflexively aware; it is not possible to be sure about this in the case of written documents.

#### **2.3.3.5 Interview practice**

Interview data may be viewed from many theoretical positions: some of which are positivist, naturalist, liberative, deconstructive and discourse perspectives – each creating its own understanding of how the data is to be read.<sup>70</sup> The view taken here is that there is access to genuine social reality and personal perspective in the opinions expressed by interviewees, but this is not simply read off the surface of the transcript. People's articulation of their views may be effected by a range of factors; confidence about voicing

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<sup>67</sup> See Appendices 18 and 19.

<sup>68</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 121-123.

<sup>69</sup> Cameron et al., *Talking about God*, 53-56.

<sup>70</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 97.

opinions, ability to articulate or even be aware of their thoughts and feelings, concern about the opinions of others in a group or how their views might be seen by others, not least people in authority.

Theoretical concepts that influenced my practice of interviewing were 'romanticism' – an attempt to get close to the rich depth of people's narratives and 'localism' – that people's accounts are situated and contextual.<sup>71</sup> This prompts attention to the detail of people's narratives and the cultural contexts in which they are embedded.

Added to this is the recognition that interviews in particular, but FW too, have the element of performance about them shaped by the presence of others, actual or imagined, and by the presence of the interviewer. Care must be taken in attending to non-verbal cues and to the relationship of interviewee and interviewer; the researcher's reflexivity is a crucial aspect of interpreting the data.

Taking all this into account, it is not unreasonable to consider that interviews may offer genuine mediated access to people's 'attitudes, feelings, behaviour,' whilst recognising the need for critical engagement with data, the interpretation and the interpreter's perspective.<sup>72</sup>

### **2.3.4 Analysis – coding and narrative**

In Ethnography, analysis is seen as an iterative process that runs throughout the project.<sup>73</sup> Intentionality is expressed through focused moments of analysis. I applied thematic analysis to my FN throughout the time, pausing at points to examine these for patterns and relationships, sometimes finding groupings of themes or relationships between

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<sup>71</sup> Alvesson, M. (2011). *Interpreting Interviews*. London: Sage,9-22.

<sup>72</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 109. Roulston, *Reflective Interviewing*, 116-119.

<sup>73</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 158. Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 93.

them.<sup>74</sup> Appendix 20 records the early stages of this: initially collecting themes, then beginning first to group them, then to sharpen ideas about controlling themes. Recurring themes suggested something for further reflection, though single themes can still be significant based on things that are not said; these became the basis for further analysis in broad themes and in detail. I followed the practice of writing analytic notes, reflections in the moment in the form of voicemails or jotted down in my research log (RL),<sup>75</sup> and analytic memos which were more substantial reflections on themes emerging from time spent with interview transcripts and FN and recorded in supplements to the FN.<sup>76</sup> This practice punctuated the FW with moments of reflection, keeping the analytic process fresh and engaged, contributing greatly to the unfolding interpretation of the context.

In July 2017, interviewing and participant observation came to end and I was confronted with a vast amount of data.<sup>77</sup> My response to my sense of being overwhelmed was immersion in the data.<sup>78</sup> During this process, I realised that I would only be able to use a portion of the data and the selection of what to use was part of the interpretative process, which would lead to the creation of a reflective narrative.

A more focused period of analysis began in June 2017 with a three month study leave; this was when I coded all the material from the FGs and interviews and used NVivo to structure this process.<sup>79</sup> The intent of this was to offer a way of triangulating the data and comparing with analytic work on the FN using a more detailed analysis of the interviews.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 97-98.

<sup>75</sup> The RL was mainly used early on; its role was taken over to a large extent by NVivo as the analytical task grew.

<sup>76</sup> See Appendix 21. Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis*, 71-72. Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 150-151. Emerson et al, *Writing*, 171-199.

<sup>77</sup> Emerson et al, *Writing*, 171.

<sup>78</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 159. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 168.

<sup>79</sup> Edlund, B. M. and McDougall, A. G. (2016). *NVivo 11 Essentials: Your Guide to the Leading Qualitative Data Analysis Software*. Stockholm: Form & Kunskap AB.

<sup>80</sup> Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 183-185. Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 97-98.

Though many writers assume that coding is for the purpose of creating Grounded Theory, I was able to use a range of writers to guide my approach to this, where coding has been used for thematic analysis not grounded theory.<sup>81</sup>

Coding was a good discipline for attending to the detail of what people said and a foil for the broader thematic analysis of the FN; where possible I used the language that participants used, allowing interviewees to speak on their own terms, which generated a large number of codes and a picture of richness and complexity out of which key themes began to emerge that were triangulated with the analysis of the FN.<sup>82</sup>

I was able to place the data within and across a number of main categories – personal and communal maturity, personal and communal experience of PMC and experience of spiritual practices. Two further categories emerged: power, which contributed greatly to the interpretation, and leadership, which did not prove to be central to this research but gives pointers to the future.<sup>83</sup>

Coding has a tendency to atomise and decontextualize people's stories. I found it necessary to code quite large pieces of narrative because it was not always easy or even appropriate to lift single words or phrases from their narrated context. This suggested a narrative analysis approach as a foil to coding.<sup>84</sup>

At the macro-level, narrative analysis is understood as a move within the sociology of religion to engage with the narrative turn in contemporary philosophy. Spickard proposes a number of descriptive narratives, two of which, 'religious individualism' and 'religious

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<sup>81</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, *Qualitative Data*, 42-46. Hammersley, and Atkinson. *Ethnography*, 158-168. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 538-563. Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis*, 86-88. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 177-180.

<sup>82</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, *Qualitative Data*, 42-66.

<sup>83</sup> See Appendix 22. See also 5.3.2 and 5.3.3.

<sup>84</sup> Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis*, 95-101. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 553-554.

markets' had explanatory force for observations at St X and helped me to notice patterns in the stories that people told.<sup>85</sup>

More specifically, narrative analysis focuses upon 'small stories' which whilst often attending to personal past non-shared events can be expanded to include 'under-represented narratives' including present, immediate future and shared narratives – aspects that are pertinent to this analysis and which can be extended to communal story-telling.<sup>86</sup>

Narrative analysis explores varied methods to look at the content of what is said, the way it is told and the interaction between participants and performance of stories in community. Riessmann proposes four methods, three of which I employed: thematic, performative and interactional.<sup>87</sup>

Thematic analysis enabled me to find coherence and connection across the stories that I heard. Hopewell's approach guided me in this. Drawing on the work of Geertz and Turner, Hopewell created a 'thick description' of a church's 'idiom' comprising the symbols and metaphors through which a congregation expresses its world view, character and story.<sup>88</sup> This is more than simply listening and attending to narratives but rather seeing a congregation's identity and culture as a narrative construction. Moreover, under the influence of Frye's literary theory, these narratives are understood as the expression of combinations of four archetypal story forms – Ironic, Comic, Romantic and Tragic. In Hopewell's reading of Frye for Congregational studies, these become: empiric – life is what

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<sup>85</sup> Spickard, J.V. (2006). Narrative Versus Theory In *The Sociology Of Religion*:

Five Stories of Religion's Place in the Late Modern World. In J. A. Beckford and J. Walliss (eds.). *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 173-179.

<sup>86</sup> Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). *Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis*. London: Kings College, 4-5.

<sup>87</sup> Riessman, C. K. (2005). Narrative Analysis. In *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life*. University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, 2-4.

<sup>88</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 5-9. Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, NY.: Basic Books, 93-154. Turner, V. W. (1974). *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 23-59.

it is and you have to make the best of it but don't expect big answers; gnostic – the search within for insight will make sense of life; charismatic – God will break into your world and make sense of it; and canonic – there is meaning to life, but we will not see it this side of death<sup>89</sup>. The two stories of transcendence, charismatic and canonic, helped to identify the story and counter-story at St X.<sup>90</sup>

Performative analysis attends to the interplay between participants, like characters in a drama. Going beyond the words, it pays attention to the ways in which people communicate and the roles they take in telling the story. This method prompted me to explore group dynamics and pick up the nuances of emotion in the voices and in the language used. It also invited me to pay attention to the power dynamics within groups and within the wider church and recognise the way in which discourses express group and individual assumptions about personal and communal spiritual life. Moreover, it allowed me to recognise my role in the interviews – my interventions, emotions, attitudes and assumptions.<sup>91</sup>

Interactional analysis is an approach in which 'teller and listener make meaning collaboratively'.<sup>92</sup> This is useable in any interview, but it was particularly pertinent in those groups where I sought to explore my findings with the participants and invited them to respond to and re-frame what I was saying.<sup>93</sup> Whilst narrative interests were explored to an extent with all my data, it was most appropriate for the FGs in which participants' interactions could be studied.

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<sup>89</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 55-85. Frye, N. (1957). *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University, 158-239.

<sup>90</sup> See section 5.3.2.

<sup>91</sup> See Appendix 23

<sup>92</sup> Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> FG7 is an example of this.

Triangulating analysis of interviews, documents and FN allowed critical engagement between my observation and participation and participants' narration of their experience. Triangulation of the outcomes of different analytical methods allowed dialogue between different ways of reading the material, providing a rich and nuanced account of personal and communal development and growth, the relationship between the two and the impact of PMC on journeys of maturation. I was able to ask the same questions to different groups of people or individuals, use different analytical lenses on the same material, viewing the data from different angles like the facets of a diamond, moving iteratively between data and theory, from person to person, from method to method. This was further strengthened by exploring my analysis at various points in the FW with groups of church members. Though there is a danger in this of losing reflective distance, it is generally thought that as one thread among several, the introduction of 'respondent validation' strengthens the interpretation.<sup>94</sup>

Analysis continued through the writing stage as well. As I constructed chapter 3, themes from the coding of interviews and FGs and the thematic analysis of FN interacted with the narrative analysis which brought into relationship thematic ideas with the emotional, social and conflictual experience of the congregation. This means that chapter 3 is an analytic interpretation committed to narrating the formative stories of the congregation.

### **2.3.5 Trusting outcomes in qualitative research**

The transfer of language of reliability, validity and generalisability from quantitative research is questionable because it assumes the possibility of a single narrative of a social

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<sup>94</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 181-183. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 377-378.



context.<sup>95</sup> Suggestions for ways appropriate to qualitative research are trustworthiness – dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability – and authenticity or justifiability – in terms of transparency, communicability and coherence.<sup>96</sup> I am working here with a selection of these priorities.

Transparency can be seen in the open and accountable way in which the research methods have been employed and in the care taken with the fullness of the FN, the careful transcription, the thoroughness in coding and the ongoing attention to analysis throughout the process.

‘Prolonged time in the field’ offers credibility to ethnographies and my time with St X covered 21 months with returns for follow-up in December 2017 and November 2018.<sup>97</sup>

‘Respondent validation’ is also a factor in creating a credible account, though this needs to be approached with critical reflection.<sup>98</sup> I met with small groups within the church twice during the FW to explore questions and interpretations with them.<sup>99</sup>

On 12.12.17, I returned to the church to offer a presentation based around the interpretative themes in this thesis.<sup>100</sup> There was a high degree of resonance with them as well as tough questions and interesting discussion. Attending to the participants’ contribution and learning is a key aspect of generating authenticity.<sup>101</sup> It also demonstrated

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<sup>95</sup> Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage, 105-117.

<sup>96</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, *Qualitative Data*, 77-87. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 376-379. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 243-263.

<sup>97</sup> Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Sage, 192.

<sup>98</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 181-182.

<sup>99</sup> FN:74-80 – 14.03.16; FG7 – 15.04.17.

<sup>100</sup> I offered an open invitation; there were about 25 people out of a congregation of between 50 and 70, including those who were strong supporters of PMC and strong sceptics as well as a few that were new to the church who wanted to hear the story. I used the themes that became the basis for the findings chapter and offered them material from interviews and FN to illustrate what I was saying. I wanted to test my findings with them.

<sup>101</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 379.

that the research had ‘communicability’ for the participants. I have also tested the communicability of the research by offering papers based on my findings at the International Research Consortium on mission studies and practice.<sup>102</sup>

Coherence is demonstrated in the integration of philosophy, theology, method and FW practice. Key themes, like attention to the other, have shaped the theology, methodology and practice of the research. Triangulation of methods of data collection and analysis is recognised as important for credibility and strengthens the coherence of the research. This includes my own reflexivity, which whilst needing to be handled with critical awareness is also based on years of experience of community formation and development.<sup>103</sup>

### **2.3.6 Reflexivity and ethical practice**

I have combined these two subjects because ethical practice in ethnographic research is deeply related to both the conduct and the self-awareness of the researcher. There are four areas that are pertinent: good practice, negotiation of power, awareness of roles, and authenticity in writing.

#### **2.3.6.1 Good practice**

The basic ground rules about ethical practice – authorisation, consent, confidentiality and data management – were set in the research proposal, beginning with gaining ethical approval from the University of Birmingham, granted in August 2015 and

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<sup>102</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2017). The Cinderella Practice: Observations and Questions about the Diffusion of the Practice of ‘Announcing the Kingdom’ – an Ethnographical Study of an Anglican Congregation and Parish in the Fourth and Fifth Years of their Partnership for Missional Church Journey. Paper given at the IRC. June 20-24, Pittsburgh, PA.: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Ladd, N. M. (2018c). The interplay of personal and communal in the story of growth – the way in which a “communal ‘vehicle’” inhibits or supports personal and communal growth. Paper given at the IRC. June 18-22, Kappel, Zurich. Ladd, N. M. (2019). Ethnographic Research on PMC-UK. Paper given at the IRC. June 24-28, Wellington, South Africa – See Appendices 32-34.

<sup>103</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 14-18. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 184-187. Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 94-97.

thereafter adhered to in the FW.<sup>104</sup> Informed consent was relatively straightforward to ensure in FGs and interviews. In participant observation, consent was more diffuse. Although I explained myself thoroughly at the beginning, not everyone was present, nor would they necessarily remember; I often took time to explain my presence and the research to individuals during the FW.

### **2.3.6.2 Negotiation of power**

The more complex ethical issues noted in the proposal were those around power and reflexive awareness. I am a minister with thirty years' experience, and a theological educator with some prior knowledge of the ministers of St X and I was concerned that the congregation and the ministers might cast me as an 'expert' and expect me to be making suggestions and interventions. I did not wear a clerical collar, nor did I reference my role at theological college – though most people were aware of both. I was careful not to be drawn into a quasi-ministerial role. I sought to ameliorate the understandable projections by being clear on all occasions about my interest in hearing the full range of people's experience and opinions. I found that a disposition of genuine enquiry and curiosity reassured people that I was not there to judge or direct them.

I had been involved in the PMC process to a limited extent with St X at an earlier date and elsewhere in the country – though I had not at that point taken the journey from the 'inside' with my own church. I was not researching my practice directly as I was not the minister of St X. However, the concerns about community spiritual formation had been with me for thirty years. This is because the DPT, as a professional doctorate, focuses on researching one's own practice.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See section 2.3.3.

<sup>105</sup> Scott, D., Brown, A., Lunt, I. and Thorne, L. (2010). *Professional Doctorates: Integrating Professional and Academic Knowledge*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 1-4, 56-59.

At one level this helped because it meant that I had some initial understanding of their journey, though it could also have meant that people would assume that I was a supporter of PMC. I made a point of communicating my openness to all perspectives on PMC – critical and affirming. I was on my own critical journey with PMC and my mind was in no way made up. Though I wanted to be appreciative about the formative journey that the church was on, I took care to listen carefully and articulate what I came to understand as the ‘counter-story.’ My desire to present this side of the story is reflected in my choice of interview examples.<sup>106</sup> The fact that after only two previous conversations, D felt able to share his anger and frustration about PMC with me suggests that I was able to convey acceptance.<sup>107</sup> I maintained openness to the range of data by making attitude to PMC the first criteria for interview selection.<sup>108</sup>

I was moved and at times drawn into the participant’s and community’s journey in ways that I believe have been important for holistic engagement for the research, but I have been aware of the dangers of ‘going native.’ Wanting to write something which both honours their journey and is a critically reflective interpretation can be a hard balance to keep. The reflexive concept of the ‘marginal native’ has been very helpful for me in navigating my role with the church.<sup>109</sup>

Because I had some prior relationship with the vicar and because of his key role as primary gatekeeper, I was aware of the danger of being too close to him and giving the congregation the sense that we were doing this work together. He was extremely generous and undefended about the process but he did have the habit of giving me blanket

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<sup>106</sup> See Appendices 18 and 19.

<sup>107</sup> FN:32-33 – 29.11.15.

<sup>108</sup> See section 2.3.3.

<sup>109</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 86-89.

permission to attend anything I chose. By contrast, I tried to make sure that I always asked the people concerned and did not presume on his overarching permission.

My concern about the relationship with him may have made me more guarded in the time that I spent with him. I had a number of interesting conversations with him early on in the process – especially between the Sunday services. But I felt the need to keep a bit more distance and not let him interpret too much of what I was seeing. I made it a rule not to report anything to him, but rather to listen to anything he might want to say. In the end, I developed the habit of going to Costa between the services.

Apart from being with him at meetings he was at and interviewing him one-to-one, I did not spend much time with him after the first couple of months. He was incredibly generous to me and I feel I have given him very little in return. I hope I may make up for that with some time to reflect after the research process is finished.

### **2.3.6.3 Reflexive awareness of roles**

I was fascinated to watch and review myself as an interviewer and note that different people elicited different kinds of responses from me. Some people were very happy to take part because the vicar was encouraging it and being a minister myself may have facilitated that process. It does carry the danger that people might be compliant and say what they think I or the vicar might want to hear. On the other hand, there were contexts where it was a very slow process to gain access and where the fact that the vicar supported the research was of no help to me. I was sometimes too quick to assume that reluctance to meet was a personal failure on my part when it could equally well be to do with people's availability or interest, their confidence or their reaction to the present ethos of the church.

In most circumstances, I relate easily to adults, both men and women, so it was very noticeable when groups were suspicious and cautious with me.<sup>110</sup> Working with younger adults was more complex, where my age was something of a barrier to their natural conversation. Similarly, working with the over 70s was difficult as they seemed less used to offering their opinions. With both these age groups, time with them was more limited as they did not attend much of the church's communal activities and relationships were slower to grow. I grew to recognise that reactions to meeting with me could be just as much a part of the data as what people eventually spoke about.

Socially, I am part of the 'established middle class' and I noticed that I related easily with participants of a similar social background, even when they were hostile to the process.<sup>111</sup> Because of my social and ministerial background, it was easy to slip into the place of what I felt was the dominant social group within the church and therefore I needed to take care to attend to the voices of those with different social background and create an environment where they felt at ease. I found that openness, presence and careful listening built people's confidence in the genuineness of my interest. I was also careful to arrange meetings on their terms rather than mine. This is an expression within the research practice of attentiveness to the other who is different.

On the whole I think I have been a disciplined interviewer and observer. But I note that in interviewing I am very patient with people who are struggling emotionally with the church and their journey but more frustrated with people who have intellectual problems with the PMC journey whilst betraying their ignorance of the process. The discipline of research and analysis enabled me to take full account of their contribution all the same.

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<sup>110</sup> FG6 was an example of this.

<sup>111</sup> See Appendix 7.

At times, I wondered whether they even knew I was there – something which caused great amusement to my supervisor. This delusion was erased when I moved from mainly participation and observation to interviewing and began to discover what resistance and power dynamics were all about. My changing role as a researcher was an interesting challenge to negotiate – observer to interviewer to researcher to facilitator. Self-awareness about what are sometimes subtle changes in role and relationship proved very important.

#### **2.3.6.4 Authenticity in writing**

Writing is a key part of the research process in which the researcher seeks to present an interpretation which is both true to the data and yet is genuinely their reading of the context.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the interplay between emic and etic, between ‘types and instances’, ‘metaphor and synecdoche’ is important for crafting an authentic narrative.<sup>113</sup>

There are endless styles of writing, but attention to examples showed that what effective ethnographic pieces have in common is the ability to bring together the authenticity of contextual experience with an interpretative structure that offers meaning and shape to that experience.<sup>114</sup> Fulkerson remains a model for me of writing which is interpretative yet emotionally sensitive, but her theological interpretation, though profound, lacks connection to the spiritual experiences of her participants.<sup>115</sup> Like her, I have been drawn to a thematic interpretation.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 191.

<sup>113</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 191-198.

<sup>114</sup> De Certeau, M., Giard, L. and Mayol, P. (1998). *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*. Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press. Fulkerson, M. M. (2007). *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. Oxford: OUP Press. Alexievich, S. (2013). *Second-Hand Time*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions. Flores, E. O. (2016). “Grow Your Hair Out”: Chicano Gang Masculinity and Embodiment in Recovery. *Social Problems*, 0, 1-15. Nieman, J. R. (2016). Dancing: Moves and Rhythms that Engage Local Wisdom. In D. C. Bass, K. A. Cahalan, B. J. Miller-McLemore, J. R. Nieman and C. B. Scharen. *Christian Practical Wisdom: What it is and Why it Matters*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 88-118.

<sup>115</sup> Fulkerson, *Places*, 231-254. Root, *Christopraxis*, 65.

<sup>116</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 194.

To write with faithfulness to the context and yet with interpretative substance is a matter of skill and character and requires constant attention to oneself in the process in order to remain faithful to the journey of the other.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter describes the research design and the methods employed. The priority throughout was to enable the stories of St X to be heard in all their richness and complexity – and heard in such a way as to make room for critical analysis and interpretation.

Long-term participative engagement allowed me time to become embedded in the context, to hear stories and to experience the culture. Asking broadly the same questions of a wide range of groups and individuals, whilst listening and observing their life allowed me to triangulate the data generated by interviews, FGs and FW, so as to arrive at a narrative that both reflected their stories and allowed critical interpretation, all the while taking into account the impact of my presence in the research.

What follows in chapter 3 is a narration of the participants' journey in which I seek to give voice to the complex reality of life at St X, a narrative that is shaped by key themes that emerged, that they themselves recognised as important, and which enabled me to give structure to my interpretation of their journey and how it spoke about personal and communal maturity.



## CHAPTER 3: TELLING THE STORY – THE JOURNEY WITH ST X

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of data which is presented in narrative form. It has an interpretative structure responsive to my focus on ‘otherness’ and communal formation, prompted by the hypothesis of this research into maturity. I reserve further interpretation of this story for the next chapters to allow the congregation and its community to speak as much as possible on their own terms, even while their story is shaped by my research commitments. This process involves awareness of my own otherness, my subjective presence in the story, not so as to remove myself to create an ‘objective’ account, but rather to discipline myself to privilege the voice of the other in the narrative.

Notwithstanding the commitment to narrating the congregation’s story, this chapter, as it unfolds, will deepen the themes of growth, maturation, individuality/communality as it builds up a more complex picture of St X’s community.

The story begins with the congregation’s journey outward from a private and bounded space into the public sphere and continues by exploring the changes this wrought in relationships with the human ‘other’ – the proximate other within the congregation and the more distant other, the stranger who is neighbour and who might become partner.<sup>1</sup> This created a new vocation and identity which a good number felt that they needed to express and support with new models of communal life.<sup>2</sup> The story continues by articulating the spiritual driving forces of this journey through engagement with the voice of Scripture as ‘other’ and the ‘otherness’ of God as the primary agent of

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<sup>1</sup> See sections 3.2 and 3.3.

<sup>2</sup> See section 3.4.

transformation.<sup>3</sup> Within this communal journey, we find persons who themselves have deep psycho-spiritual perspectives that consciously or unconsciously shape their response to new ideas and change.

This is not a chronological account. However, there are chronological moments in the descriptive elements of the narrative, because these were real moments in time for St X. The early sections on the ‘journey outwards’ are based on hearing their stories from PMC process, which they undertook from 2012-2015.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the movement to ‘Connect Groups’ was a major turning point that arose from the Lent groups in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the logic of the narrative I am telling about the congregation and what they shared with me lies in the movement from description of their actions to the practices that enabled this and then to the motivating relationships – especially with God and Scripture – that fuelled their imaginations and shaped their story. The significance of their relationship with the ‘other’ becomes clear throughout. While interrelated, these three aspects are separated here for the sake of narrative clarity and to highlight the different modes of otherness that were at play. In subsequent chapters, I will make connections between this story of communality and encounter with the other, with ideas about maturation.

The narrative begins by describing and assessing their journey into public space as a community and the conflict this generated, focused upon the totemic “Holiday Club”.<sup>6</sup> This leads to an exploration of their journey with the other and the different modes of resistance and embrace, showing how this was related to their adoption of other-centred spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> See sections 3.5 and 3.6.

<sup>4</sup> See sections 3.2 and 3.3

<sup>5</sup> See sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4.

<sup>6</sup> See section 3.2

practices.<sup>7</sup> There follows an exploration of how their “communal vehicles” resisted their engagement with the other and how, in the light of this, some members of St X recognised the need for fresh “communal vehicles” to embody and support this new movement towards the other in the wider community.

From here, the narrative focuses on the way that the communal spiritual practices that they learnt from the PMC process, where adopted, led to some members of St X taking greater responsibility for their learning, discernment and leadership, matched by a growing openness to the other – all of which I take as marks of maturation.

The conflictual nature of the journey is clear throughout leading, in chapter 5, to the proposal of the idea of story and counter-story as a way of understanding communal development and the importance of negotiating conflict in the process of personal and communal maturation.

Finally, I offer a brief sketch of the PMC process. Year 1 involves a broad range of listening – to God, through discernment and Scripture, to one another, to their history and to their community in order to learn attentiveness the presence of God in church and wider community and to help them begin to discern their partners on the missional journey. Year 2 begins with discerning a missional challenge and continues with attempts to run missional experiments in partnership with people in the community. Year 3 involves discerning the congregation’s missional vocation and vision of the future, based on all that they have discovered, and to form a simple three year plan to live that out. When I began my time with them in 2015, they had completed the formal process and had set sail on their own with the first year of their three year plan.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See section 3.3

<sup>8</sup> The first draft of this chapter had many more quotations from the data; space has required I retain only as much material as will illustrate the story and give it voice. Further indicative material can be found in Appendix

## 3.2 Journeying outwards – prioritising relationship; crossing boundaries

### 3.2.1 Introduction

At the heart of this story is a congregation who began to realise that they were closed, turned in upon themselves, and that in their hearts many of them longed for a deeper and more open connection with their wider communities. As they entered the PMC process in 2012, they began with a range of listening events and practices including some congregational interviews.<sup>9</sup> When the external Reading Team analysed these interviews, as part of the formal Year 1 process, they concluded by offering this picture:<sup>10</sup>

[O]ne of the reading team had a picture of St X as a beautifully kept castle with a moat full of water around it... What could you or would you like to turn the castle into? What new picture of yourselves might you have?<sup>11</sup>

This metaphor seemed to grip the imagination of members of the church and it was still being referred to regularly when I was with them from 2015-17.

H: Right at the beginning they discerned that our church [had] a bit of a fortress mentality, and we didn't relate terribly well to those outside. There had been in the past, a sort of "them" and "us" between the church and community.<sup>12</sup>

In PMC Year 3, the church articulates its new sense of identity and vocation which has been developing through their listening process in year 1 and the missional experimenting in year 2. Working on this, St X created a number of 'documents', one of which was called the 'vision for embodiment' (VE).<sup>13</sup> It was constructed after a number of

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24. The material removed will either be a quotation that stood immediately after the footnote or will be a more extended version of an abbreviated quotation referenced in the footnote.

<sup>9</sup> PMC-UK. (2018). *Listening 1, 2 & 3: Discovering Your Partners*. Oxford: Church Mission Society-Partnership for Missional Church.

<sup>10</sup> This was three years before I began my research.

<sup>11</sup> Reading Team Report:15 – 10.09.12.

<sup>12</sup> FG1:10 – 14.06.16. See also Appendix 24(i)

<sup>13</sup> These documents come together as one spiritual practice entitled 'Focus for Missional Action'. See PMC-UK. (2020). *Focusing 1, 2 & 3: Visioning for Embodiment*. Oxford: Church Mission Society-Partnership for Missional Church.

‘balloon rides’ – imaginative journeys in which they looked down on their parish and described their pictures of the near future in embodied rather than idealised ways.

What is striking about the picture that emerges is the aspiration to break down barriers with the community, to be a more porous church and for their lives to be less compartmentalised between church and everything else.

People imagined that in the future, because of increase in relationships and partnerships, the boundary between inside and outside church would become increasingly blurred. The Community would see “us” as part of “them” as opposed to “them and us”. “We're doing this” would be owned by a greater mix of people.<sup>14</sup>

In the balloon rides, the biblical parable of birds nesting in tree branches emerged as a way of picturing this developing identity. Generated from lay imagination, it was taken up by the vicar at the Annual General meeting in 2017.

The parable of the mustard seed has come forward again; it's followed us over the last few years. A picture of different kinds of birds in same tree; not just one type of person – all kinds. This is the tree we are called to grow in this place. No longer a castle surrounded by a moat with the drawbridge up, but a tree in which every bird can find a place to roost.<sup>15</sup>

With this desire to be a more porous community came a further aspiration enshrined in their ‘missional vocation statement’ (MVS): a desire to be relational rather than transactional in their dealings with God, each other and their community. ‘Sharing life with Jesus, with one another and with our communities’.<sup>16</sup> The VE and MVS were the foundation from which they developed the three year plan that they were working with when I arrived.

This is what the first three years of PMC had produced before I joined: a shift from a closed and boundaried community to one that sought to be a place of openness and

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<sup>14</sup> VE:4 – June 2014. See also Appendix 24(ii)

<sup>15</sup> FN:184 – 09.07.17.

<sup>16</sup> The MVS is one of the documents they create in year 3. It looks like a purpose/mission statement to those who are familiar with strategic planning. In reality it is a memorable articulation of their new found sense of vocation distilled from their work in the first two years of the PMC journey.

welcome for others. In my time with them, I learned how their imaginations were first gripped by a new story and how that story gradually became more of a reality that they lived into. They wanted to be committed to relationship with the other, rather than seeing others as the means to the church's ends. I will argue that this is a story of communal maturation. But we will see that this is not a univocal or uncontested story – and that too could be part of the maturation.

### **3.2.2 Journey with community**

In my early days with St X, I was struck by their sense of wonder and appreciation of the journey outwards towards their community that they had travelled since 2012 – breaking down barriers, welcoming and building relationships:<sup>17</sup>

'If you had asked us at the beginning to find someone to talk to in the community we would have found it really difficult, but now we are falling over them.'<sup>18</sup>

M: The one that jumped out at me [was] community involvement; something that I think has been a big part of what I've seen in the last three and a half years.

H: I think that's where we've made our biggest impact.<sup>19</sup>

This was increasingly understood not as the church drawing people into their orbit, but 'going out partnershiping' – discovering people in the community who wanted to work with them and form partnerships.<sup>20</sup>

This is a language that was used widely across the church, and people were attentive and open to the possibilities of partnership: with community groups, businesses and

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<sup>17</sup> There were 30 positive references to community engagement. By contrast there were only 2 negative references to community engagement from one source. There were 22 positive comments about a new view of community.

<sup>18</sup> FN:8 – 14.09.15.

<sup>19</sup> FG7:8 – 15.04.17.

<sup>20</sup> FG8:106 – 27.06.17.

individuals.<sup>21</sup> It also affected their approach to church activities; at a meeting of ministry group leaders in my second year, I spoke to people with responsibility for the Church Halls management:

T and CCC talked about the halls; their aspiration is that it should become a shared place of meeting for the community...There was a real sense of energy as they spoke; 'we want to welcome people in; trying to find people and cast the net wide. We are getting more focused on our end goal – community use.'<sup>22</sup>

The treasurer talked about how the finances of the church halls had completely turned around from deficit to credit, which he attributed to the growing vision for partnership:

FF: It's got its own income. And that's because this whole feeling of going out to the community has encouraged some church people like T to take on a responsibility of leadership in the church management. But we've also got some people coming from the community, that aren't to do with the church, that also want to run it because they want this space that can be used for a focus of community work and gathering together.<sup>23</sup>

Partnership changed the way they looked both at their wider community and their calling. The movement of the local Community Group towards the church at the time when they were seeking to move to the community was seen as a mark of God's work – as part of discerning the activity of God.

J: Some of what it's saying for me is that as well as God being at work in the church, to make us look at the community with fresh eyes. He's also at work in the community.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.2.2.1 Reality check 1 – How did the wider community see it?**

I decided to do some surveying outside the church community to test their perception of change in the relationship with the wider community. Those who had

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<sup>21</sup> There were 46 positive references to forming partnerships. These included specific examples of people and groups they had partnered with.

<sup>22</sup> FN:111 – 14.11.16. See also Appendix 24(iii)

<sup>23</sup> Interview with FF:80 – 27.06.17.

<sup>24</sup> FG4:98 – 23.11.16.

connected with the church in its journey outwards had indeed developed a much more positive perception of the church. In some cases, it had caused them to come to the church and to think more deeply about faith.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the survey, I ran a number of one-to-one interviews with the same questions with members of the Community Group. The positive relational experience was also borne out in these:

It's very different to anything I've experienced before in 45 years. I've never seen a church so actively involved in creating a sense of belonging without having to be religious – left to choose to believe. Believing in community – God working in community – rather than having to be a believer.<sup>26</sup>

The interviewee went on to say:

I go occasionally – I was there last Sunday. Churches used to be for weddings and funerals; now a lot of my friends go to church... I've accepted faith more – it's become another facet of my life.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.2.2.2 Reality check 2 – nuancing and critique within the Church**

How broad across the congregation was the enthusiasm for this new-found engagement with the wider community; was it matched by genuine participation from the congregation – or sharing of life, as their vision articulated it?

Some questioned the breadth of engagement:

PP: Though I would say that's particularly been with the Community Group rather than other groups in the community.<sup>28</sup>

Others emphasised the vicar's role as, perhaps, disproportionate.

NN: I think [the vicar] has done the majority of the work on that. Some of us haven't really been in the first phase, but we're looking to support the second phase once people are coming in.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 24(iv) and (v)

<sup>26</sup> Community Interview with AAA – 24.01.17.

<sup>27</sup> Community Interview with AAA – 24.01.17. See also Appendix 24(vi)

<sup>28</sup> FG1:11 – 14.06.18.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with NN:47 – 25.05.17.



By 'first phase' he meant the initial contact; the second phase was about welcoming people once they come to church. The vicar's role was mentioned by a number of people and borne out by responses from the community

PPPP: I don't think I've ever come across anywhere where the link [between church and community] is so close. Because [the vicar] is such a warm, open, jovial guy and he doesn't push it in your face; he teases and we have a good laugh.<sup>30</sup>

The vicar himself commented on how much more at ease he was in the community than in the church and how it was the opposite for his congregation.

[The vicar] talked about how difficult the congregation found it to do one-to-ones: 'the risk of going out to somebody and having a conversation; why would they want to talk to us?'<sup>31</sup>

These references nuanced the story: to say that it was not touching the whole community or that the vicar was a key player does not contradict the fact that community engagement was happening – rather that it was developmental. But there were deeper challenges encapsulated in the comments of this long-term church and community member, who was involved in a community project to plant an orchard in a recreational area in X1.

TTT asked me what my research was about and I spoke about community and personal formation and how it was interesting to do this in a church which has taken on an intentional journey like PMC. He was quick to interrupt and say 'some of the church.' He said that he had never understood it and it seemed that 'we withdrew from community engagement for three years in order to do community engagement – it makes no sense to me.' I asked him if the church had been engaged with the community and he said yes. He cited the 200 kids queueing up to come into the Holiday Club and the relationship with the [local primary] School which used to involve a lot of church – but now just basically [the vicar] and [the curate]. 'We used to get a lot of young parents coming to church – but not now.' He doesn't feel that X1 is well represented in the church any longer. 'Lots have left, finding other churches initially and then stopping all together.' He wasn't expecting any X1-dwelling church people at the Orchard day – so he wasn't disappointed when they didn't come.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Community Interview with PPPP – 16.03.17. See also Appendix 24(vii)

<sup>31</sup> FN:26 – 23.11.15. See also Appendix 24.(viii)

<sup>32</sup> FN:140-141 – 26.02.17. See also Appendix 24(ix)

I was intrigued by this contested story around community engagement (and a number of other disputed themes as well) so I decided to run a FG with some church leaders to explore their response to this. I was struck by their non-defensive approach and their openness to considering the conflicting pictures and recognising the complexity of their story. Having discussed the different ways in which people might understand community engagement based on their history in the wider community, we reached the following exchange:

FF: There's always been a level of engagement with the community, but I think it's through PMC and discernment, that we focused where we wanted to go and be with it, and kept it in mind; and as a result of that, made many positive bridges and links to the community.

C: But, unless they mean Holiday Club, that's the only thing I can think...<sup>33</sup>

### **3.2.2.3 What is community involvement? – the totemic symbol of the Holiday Club<sup>34</sup>**

TTT had mentioned the Holiday Club and I discovered that it was totemic in the contest over the church's narrative and identity; one interviewee actually used the word:

TT Well, some years ago, we ran this Holiday Club. And this had become, under the previous vicar, the totemic Christian experience...

Int: That's an interesting phrase.

TT Every summer it became the thing where everybody came together for the Holiday Club. It was a huge event. We had thousands of people coming over the course of a week.<sup>35</sup>

In community life, we hold on to symbols or totems which are expressive of the character or ethos of our life.<sup>36</sup> These symbols fundamentally express who we are. The

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<sup>33</sup> FG7:56 – 15.04.17.

<sup>34</sup> There were 19 comments about the need for the Holiday Club to stop and the positive things that came out of this. There were 24 negative comments about the ending of the Holiday Club along with a further 11 from younger people about the loss they felt.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with TT:66 – 28.05.17. I think 'thousands' was hyperbolic.

<sup>36</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 5-9.

movement from Holiday Club to 'Sharing Life'<sup>37</sup> is witness to a process of symbolic exchange within the congregation that embodied who they were and their sense of vocation.

The Holiday Club was the brainchild of the previous vicar and encapsulated both his approach to leadership and his central commitment to reaching young people.

FF: And he was in there [the primary school] a lot. And he was encouraging people to come across to church and bringing them in personally. And he launched the Holiday Club.

The Holiday Club stood at the centre of Vicar 2's vision and the church invested a huge amount of time and energy in it – preparing all the materials from scratch. As soon as one finished, they started work on the next and the event itself drew a great number of people into running it. Even those who supported it, acknowledged that it dwarfed everything else in the life of the church:

D. said, 'when we first came it did seem like a Holiday Club with a church attached!'<sup>38</sup>

However, people remember it fondly both for large numbers that it drew in and for the sense of community and relationship that it fostered within the church.

V. gave a long history of the Holiday Club, 'it involved so many people; people could get involved and offer their gifts at whatever level, there was a sense of community, there was spiritual input – worship and teaching for the team before the day started. Many people in the community valued this; our children and young people's work diminished after it stopped.' V. told a story of the church: 'there were several years when we grew – in depth and in numbers. It was a very special time that we look back to.' Holiday Club seems to have been an important part of that. However, they did recognise that there were not the people to carry on running it.<sup>39</sup>

The younger people in the church valued it highly as it was central to their formative experience as young Christians<sup>40</sup>. The sentiments in this quote were echoed by others:

PPP: At the beginning, you were definitely being served, as you're coming and

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<sup>37</sup> The language they use in their MVS

<sup>38</sup> FN:34 – 03.12.15.

<sup>39</sup> FN:33-34 – 03, 12, 15. See also Appendix 24(x)

<sup>40</sup> One of the members of this FG was vicar 2's daughter – which added an interesting dynamic.

singing in the choir... But the role in church changes as you get older; you become part of the youth group, and then you're helping run the youth group, and then you're part of Holiday Club, and then you're leaders in Holiday Club and then you're heading up a group in Holiday Club...<sup>41</sup>

Others recognised its significance even if they were supportive of the decision to stop running it.

H: It brought [people] together, because they were working on a common thing, the workers or your helpers, 'cos needless to say you had to have an army of helpers. And of course the age group went right through from our playgroup to secondary school age and we did have a very strong youth group at one time. I suppose several reasons; one is that Vicar 2 did focus on it enormously.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the appreciation of the Holiday Club, there was also a widespread realisation that it needed to stop and a range of reasons were given for this. It consumed considerable time and energy taking a toll on volunteers whose numbers subsequently dropped:

L: Because you weren't going to get the people to do it. I mean, we'd been doing it for 10 years or more; we were worn out.<sup>43</sup>

Notwithstanding the numbers who attended during the week, actually the church had seen very little fruit from it for a good number of years. More significant was the recognition that it represented a way of being church with the community that most did not wish to continue. It was programmatic rather than relational, it focused on providing a service for people rather than finding out what people wanted and partnering with them in it and it was something that focused on bolstering the inner life of the church rather than engaging more broadly with the transformation of the wider community.

TT: But when [the vicar] encouraged people to analyse it, some people recognised

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<sup>41</sup> FG8:31 – 27.06.17.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with H:8 – 10.07.17.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with L:58 – 29.06.17.

that, actually, it was free childcare to the community. And the number of people who actually came along to church afterwards having been influenced by their kids coming was pretty negligible.<sup>44</sup>

NN: But what is very different between Holiday Club, and what we do now is we used to put it on, now it's a partnership, and we put it on jointly, and that makes it very different.<sup>45</sup>

Holiday Club was the perfect vehicle for Vicar 2's vision and way of working. There is widespread appreciation of his ministry and recognition that the ministry to young people flourished during his time. At the same time, his approach was very directive and nothing happened that he did not sanction. This tends to create a dependency culture and does not liberate the imagination and the responsibility of lay people.

H: With our previous incumbent, you either fitted in with his way or it didn't... People, usually tend to like to work along with what the vicar wants and they just want to be told what to do... and tend not to come up with ideas.<sup>46</sup>

The younger people looked back to this as a very positive time, but it is interesting to note how their vision of formation was firmly rooted inside the church.

PPP: I know that when they were doing Holiday Club it went on for eight years [and] you're mentoring all of the time... we were permanently in that way: "I'm going to learn how to read in church and then I'm going to teach that... The ones in the younger youth, I'm going to teach them how to do it so that you're never going to have a gap."<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2.3 Conclusion

The church had flourished in certain aspects of its life under vicar 2 and embodied a model which might be understood as a 'come to us' approach in which the church understands itself as having something that it needs to give or transfer to others. God is

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with TT:67 – 28.05.17.

<sup>45</sup> FG7:62 – 15.04.17.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with H:29-30 – 10.07.17. See also Appendix 24(xi)

<sup>47</sup> FG8:72-73 – 27.07.17.

contained, within the church whose task it is to bring God to the community; this was symbolised in the Holiday Club.

St X were now exploring a different approach altogether – one which sought to engage more in listening, relationship and partnership with the wider community, shaped by their new perspective that God was already present and active in the other beyond the church.<sup>48</sup> I propose that this led them to an openness to the human ‘other’ that was fundamental to their journey of maturity and one which liberated lay imagination and responsibility.

The next section examines what this looked like in practice and how that practice changed their understanding of themselves, the wider community and their mission. This continued to generate contested stories grounded in different convictions about the life and calling of the church held by different people and groups in good faith. How they approached the internal conversation has to do with the negotiation of power and conflict, which does not necessarily bring out the best in people but is part of the journey towards personal and communal maturity.

### **3.3 Relating to others – a new relationship with the human other**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

The journey outwards described in the last section raises questions about how the church and its members relate to the other – to visitors, strangers and members of the community who do not attend the church. I noted how appreciative many of the congregation were about their ‘journey outwards’, because it seemed to be offering them

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<sup>48</sup> Something that started to enter their imaginations through the initial PMC process as can be seen in their VE – see section 3.2.1.

opportunities to relate to their community which had eluded them in recent years. The invitation to such a journey raises the question about how people might respond either to new people in their midst or the encouragement to take the risk to initiate the formation of new relationships – to ‘share life with their communities’ as their MVS put it.

The hypothesis behind this research is that patterns of relating to the ‘other’ are a significant marker for maturity and this aspect of their journey invites this exploration.

I will chart their experience of forming new relationships, where and why this was embraced and resisted, and how the practice of ‘Dwelling in the World’ (DitWorld) and the formation of partnerships re-shaped their understanding of and approach to evangelism. We will conclude this section by looking at how the practice most relevant to the developing of a public Christian identity, ‘Announcing the Kingdom’ (AtK), was conspicuous by its absence.

### **3.3.2 Passivity and resistance towards the other**

I begin by exploring how resistance to the journey outwards reflects passivity towards or non-engagement with the other. When I first spoke to the vicar, he said, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that the 8.00am service was the growth area at St X, having risen to around 25 in recent months. There were over twenty when I first attended, but by the end of my time the congregation numbered about ten; it declined gradually over the eighteen month period.<sup>49</sup>

Attendance at this service was largely solitary; everyone chose the same seat either singly or in small groups of family or friends that they attended with. I noticed that I also chose the same seat almost every week – a place where I could view the whole of the scattered congregation. People were chatty with each other before the service, but not with

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<sup>49</sup> Appendix 24(xii)

me; they left quickly at the end after a quick chat with the vicar or curate and even when I tried to make conversation, it was generally resisted.

As we walked out I saw L and his wife (Q) heading towards their car. I was intrigued by some of the buildings in the church grounds and I thought I would ask them. L. was quite happy to explain and Q. was smiley, but they were quick to move off after the explanation and asked me nothing nor said anything to welcome me.<sup>50</sup>

I attended this service regularly during my time at St X, but strikingly, almost no-one spoke to me. The exception to the solitariness of the service was the sharing of the peace, but this was an isolated moment. This ritualised relating seemed to work for them but it did not translate into welcome for this stranger.

There is a sense of mutual support and interest at this point in the service, but it is short lived because it is cut off by the progression of the liturgy. Then people do not stay behind to continue or broaden the conversations. If this is their only experience of Christian community during the week, what does it achieve?<sup>51</sup>

I was the only new person to this congregation in the time that I attended and yet they showed little interest in me, even while numbers dwindled around us. I did not revise my tentative early conclusion:

The outcome after two weeks is that I don't really feel welcomed – perhaps accommodated is the best word. Is that the way they would receive anyone, or is it because of my role? But do they even know what that is?<sup>52</sup>

Their bounded patterns of relating were illustrated by the difficulty of gathering a group of people for a FG. I managed to meet with two people after the service for half-an-hour. One elderly, man had no idea what the church was trying to do with PMC; the other was a Church Warden who participated much more widely in the life of the church and was more knowledgeable.

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<sup>50</sup> FN:29 – 29.11.15.

<sup>51</sup> FN:64 – 14.02.16. See also Appendix 24(xiii) and (xiv)

<sup>52</sup> FN:29 – 29.11.15.



Limited conversation with members of this congregation revealed that their concerns were around isolation, failing health and a life with less active connection to the world and reducing social interaction. But the preaching encouraged an outward-facing approach without ever really engaging with the narrowing of their everyday life. The church had an effective ministry with the elderly midweek, but this congregation appeared untouched by this. If the apparent disconnect between church and their world had been attended to, might they have been more open to others beyond themselves? As it is, the solitariness of their spirituality did not turn them towards this 'other' in their midst.

I found the same disconnection with the outside world in the home groups. I will write more about their group life in the next section; here I want to focus on how they related to the 'other.'<sup>53</sup>

Most of the group members had been part of their groups since they began – three, seven or ten years previously. No group had received new members in the past 4 years, except one person who had joined a group recently.<sup>54</sup>

Engagement with the other beyond the group or the church family was not perceived by them as contributing to their growth. Mission references were general and focused on the past rather than generating concrete stories of engagement with the 'outsider.'<sup>55</sup>

PPPPP: I think it's the awareness that you are on a mission, not just like the church mission... like on a mission to create a better relationship with people and with God, I think is really important.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> I asked the groups about their understanding of growth – using a range of words as springboards for their story-telling and I asked them about their journeys with PMC in relation to their growth – see section 2.3.3.1 and Appendices 9a-d).

<sup>54</sup> The developing interviewing strategy is explained in chapter 2

<sup>55</sup> There were 44 references to home groups: 39 focused on the internal life of the group and 5 on mission – 1 of which referenced Alpha courses and 2 the Holiday Club.

<sup>56</sup> FG8:17 – 27.06.17.

QQQQ: I look at it... in terms of the mission that we do out in our communities when we support people on missions abroad and how we can use our wisdom to go out and do things in the world and in our communities.<sup>57</sup>

TTT: The word mission; so, all of us at some time were involved in Holiday Club.

Int: So I sense that there's less mission to engage with compared to before?

TTT: Well, I guess we don't do the big events like we used to.<sup>58</sup>

Animated discussion in the home groups tended to revolve around inner church matters, sometimes disappointments such as FGs 5 and 6 expressing discontent about worship at 10.30am.<sup>59</sup> Complaints included dissatisfaction with the PMC process<sup>60</sup> and experiments in engaging with the other.<sup>61</sup> FG 8 expressed sadness about the loss of the Holiday Club and the decline in the numbers of young people.<sup>62</sup> FGs 1 and 4 were more broadly positive about the church and tended to debate issues rather than complain, but were still focussed on the inner life of the church. One person went a step further in talking about relating to the 'other'; for this person relating to the 'other' was counter-productive to her development.

E: ...trying to connect with other people and get them involved and all that kind of thing, the sort of active, erm, the active, erm, movement to look outward... at the place I was in it was quite a daunting thing – because I didn't feel I was, really, settled and secure enough in my faith and belief to go out there and do what they were aspiring to.<sup>63</sup>

E was troubled and unsettled by her perception that being asked to engage with the 'other' at her stage of spiritual life was a threat to her development. She felt that she needed to be free from the pressure of the 'other' in order to develop enough in her faith to

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<sup>57</sup> FG8:17 – 27.06.17.

<sup>58</sup> FG6:16 and 28 – 04.05.17.

<sup>59</sup> FG5:19-21 – 15.11.16. FG6:43-46 – 04.05.17

<sup>60</sup> FG3:20-23 and 31 – 07.07.16.

<sup>61</sup> FG5:75-76 – 15.11.17.

<sup>62</sup> FG8:107-109 – 27.06.17.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with E:11-12 – 31.05.17.

be ready for the engagement she felt she was being challenged prematurely to make. She found it hard to articulate her feelings and there were long pauses and stops and starts which I have retained in the text. In this interview, I had to resist my desire to offer pastoral care and spiritual accompaniment in this moment of painful transparency.<sup>64</sup>

Some people did choose the more outward-focused relational words like partnership and community involvement.<sup>65</sup> When they did select these, stories were based in recent concrete examples through PMC.

RR: [C]ommunity involvement is the one that I picked. I think we've gone a long way through the last four or five years. I feel now as a church we've moved out away from the church in to the community, into X1 and, hopefully, gone beyond, like Y1. And we've built quite a lot of activities over the last few years. The summer activity, the barbeque on the main green in the village, inviting the community into it and we've had good responses from that.<sup>66</sup>

Overall, experience with the 8.00am service and the home groups points to an approach to relating to the 'other' which is passive or resistant – or perhaps simply a blind spot where the connection between spiritual development and engagement with the other who is different has not been made. However, aspects of the journey with PMC reveal a different trajectory and it is to this I now turn.

### **3.3.3 Dwelling in the World – what is it and how did it develop?**

In contrast to the passivity and resistance to the 'other' described in the previous section, there was a desire to welcome and move outwards in relationship building.<sup>67</sup> This aspiration was enshrined in the MVS. However, because of the way PMC works, this was not a vision set as an ideal at the beginning of a process but rather the articulation of an

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<sup>64</sup> Appendix 24(xv)

<sup>65</sup> See section 2.3.3.1 and Appendices 9a-d.

<sup>66</sup> FG5:16 – 15.11.16.

<sup>67</sup> See sections 3.1 and 3.2.

embodied desire that developed during the first two years of PMC.<sup>68</sup> Now I explore DitWorld, the practice of which enabled this movement towards the 'other'. It arises from the Scripture reading practice of DitW<sup>69</sup> and is a practice of corporate and personal discernment.<sup>70</sup>

DitWorld is a practice grounded in assumptions about the presence and activity of God in the wider world. The corporate practice of Scripture reading (DitW) is intended to nourish this practice – particularly through the passage that is the focus for year 1, Luke 10.1-12 – combined with the encouragement of an Examen style approach to attending to the presence and activity of God in everyday life. DitWorld encourages an outward-focused attention to people's communities and gives confidence by building faith in God's already present activity in people's lives before the congregation enters their orbit. Rather than seeing people as projects upon which to focus evangelistic efforts, DitWorld encourages the congregation to be on the look-out for people of peace – people who share and approve of things they might regard as kingdom values and, as a further stage, partners who might join with the congregation in activities that both see as worthwhile. As well as being attentive, the congregation were encouraged to be intentional about setting up one-to-one conversations with people in their communities who might become partners in joint ventures. One-to-ones are modelled to an extent on the intentional conversations that are a key practice in Community Organising.<sup>71</sup>

Though many in the congregation spoke positively about the experience and impact of DitWorld, it was a practice they found extremely difficult and which they resisted strongly

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<sup>68</sup> See sections 3.1 and 3.2.

<sup>69</sup> DitW and DitWorld are two of the six spiritual practices employed in the PMC process.

<sup>70</sup> The impact of these latter two practices will be the focus of the fifth and sixth sections of this chapter.

<sup>71</sup> Jacobsen, D. A. (2001). *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organising*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 59-64.

in the early stages of the PMC process.<sup>72</sup> In 2013, members of St X attended a meeting with the leader of Nottingham Citizens to help build confidence and skill in conducting one-to-ones; a mark of their desire to do something to address their struggle. By the time I was researching the congregation two years later, they had travelled a significant distance with this practice.<sup>73</sup>

Though not asked directly, interviewees were very clear that this kind of relationship formation in the community was a particular strength of the vicar; the comment here was repeated many times.

NN: Well [the vicar's] been excellent, doing a lot of groundwork with community. I think he's really pushed the boundaries, and got involved with new people... [he's] particularly strong on getting involved with the community.<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, they recognised their own development in this practice and what it has meant to them in forming a more public identity in their community.

EE: [P]robably what I'm more focussed on through this... [is] on who's out there; not just praying for them but actually looking for opportunities when you can talk to people.<sup>75</sup>

Openness to the other was leading to partnerships between church and community in areas of ministry in which the church would normally expect to keep firmly under its control.

MMM: If we're having an event, it's not, "Oh, we'll do it", meaning the church will do it for the community. Now, it's, "we can discuss it; there is a Community Group, isn't there?" [And] some of the church people are on that committee as well. It's a partnership rather than them and us.<sup>76</sup>

FF: I've got a couple of new friends from the Community Group who weren't coming

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<sup>72</sup> I was part of the team that accompanied the group of churches of which St X was a part in the three-year PMC journey and I remember how the move into 'missional experimentation' in year 2 was held up because all the churches were finding it so hard to take the steps involved in initiating one-to-one conversations.

<sup>73</sup> There were 52 references to the practice and influence of DitWorld.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with NN:9 – 25.05.17.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with EE:94 – 07.06.17. See also Appendix 24(xvi)

<sup>76</sup> FG4:54 – 15.09.16.

to church, and are doing so a little bit more often now... Some of our church members have joined that committee; some non-church people and some church people have now joined together in the Hall Management Group.<sup>77</sup>

Congregation members were aware that this might be seen as unusual or radical and noted that some members were uneasy with this. However, they also saw this increasingly as their vision of participation with the community, something that should shape the church's identity and practice.

Int: So, the halls committee... is that a mixture of people from church and not from church?

T: So, \*\*\* [husband] and CCC, I've not ever seen her husband in church. But, I think they had to go onto the electoral roll to be trusted to run the [halls committee]... "Why? You have got somebody that is willing to help. Don't set a hoop up for them. Give them a bridge. Come on".<sup>78</sup>

A later morning service is always likely to be more socially engaged than an early service, but there was evidence in my research that people inside and outside the church had noticed that at 10.30, and in its midweek life, the church had become more welcoming – more porous and less tightly boundaried.

I was struck by the introduction of next week's baptism family at the beginning of the [10.30] service; as well as the children, two adult godparents are being baptised also. They have all come to the Pilgrim Course. I was struck again not just by how welcoming they are to their baptism families (not always the case in Anglican churches!), but also how at home the baptism families feel in the service; today's family introduced themselves and next week's told their story.<sup>79</sup>

People record their feelings of excitement at seeing new people in church, signs of growing porosity.

FF: Me and RRR were looking round the church on Sunday and there was at least twenty people that I didn't even know. I'd never spoken to.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> FG4:91-92 – 15.09.16. See also Appendix 24(xvii)

<sup>78</sup> Interview with T:50 – 30.06.17. See also Appendix 24(xviii)

<sup>79</sup> FN:41 – 10.01.16. See also Appendix 24(xix)

<sup>80</sup> Interview with FF:67 – 27.06.17.

Whilst a key marker of the growth and change in the church was the development of its public identity and witness, congregation members were also aware that they participated in multiple communities and that ‘sharing life’<sup>81</sup> needed to be characteristic of their personal lives if it were to be authentic. For some, DitWorld has been transformational for the whole of their lives and they have found that their public Christian witness has been enriched. One man spoke about a colleague in another firm who was in his view being unfairly treated. He decided to express his support on the day of her interview with HR.

TT: I sent her a text message to say that she can take it how she wishes but I’m going to be praying for her for this meeting on Monday, ‘cos she was anxious about it. And she sent text message back along the lines of, “Well, that’s really thoughtful,” you know? (Laughter) that’s fine. Not, “You’re completely cuckoo.” But, “it was very thoughtful.”<sup>82</sup>

Another spoke about how being attentive to God in everyday life had opened up a surprising relationship with someone of another faith whilst on a hospital visit.<sup>83</sup>

### **3.3.4 What happened to evangelism?<sup>84</sup>**

In the light of their growing relationships in the wider community, congregation members had something to say about the practice of evangelism. They found a new perspective and a sense of relief that they were not pressured to do evangelism or to feel responsible or embarrassed about failing to do what seemed to be an unnatural and alien task.<sup>85</sup> Rather they spoke of how evangelism changes when you see people as partners, in particular becoming more relational and less transactional.

TT: I think it has given people a lot of confidence because instead of talking about evangelism, where people just felt burdened. “Oh, I’ve got to try and find somebody to invite to the quiz.” And it’s actually a quiz where every tenth question

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<sup>81</sup> The short-hand for their MVS

<sup>82</sup> Interview with TT:46 – 28.05.17. See also Appendix 24(xx)

<sup>83</sup> Appendix 24(xxi)

<sup>84</sup> There were 77 comments about their changing understanding of evangelism.

<sup>85</sup> In contrast to E’s fears in 3.3.2

is going to refer to Jesus and I'm going to feel uncomfortable with Steve from work if it's absolutely horrendous... it's just so artificial.<sup>86</sup>

J: I think, previously, there was a sense that the church and the world beyond the church were a bit polarised. I think we have begun to see the wider community, not so much as people who we need to evangelise, but people who we need to be partners with.<sup>87</sup>

This was not a church that was disinterested in sharing its faith but trying to find new ways that would be in tune with a new perspective about God's presence in the world and their partnership with the community.

FF: When we started to do DitW, there was a point at which there was a little bit of a switch for me, I felt very loaded with this need for evangelism at one point when we started talking about relationships with the community, and that we needed to get out there, and start making new relationships and new friends. And there was one passage that we looked at, and I suddenly realised that actually the conversion role is God's, and that I can place that responsibility with him, and that I then will only do what God wants me to do within my gifts.<sup>88</sup>

The absence of the practice of AtK was therefore all the more surprising.

### **3.3.5 The "Cinderella" Practice – Announcing the Kingdom<sup>89</sup>**

In the sermons and during the meetings about new small groups<sup>90</sup>, there was a wonderful opportunity to explore the practice of AtK. In this practice, people look for the activity of God in another and bear witness by trying to give voice to what has been seen in the other whilst being open to what the other may see of God in them. This is not necessarily any easier than 'traditional' evangelism, but it does seem to be more in tune

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with TT:25-28 – 28.05.17.

<sup>87</sup> FG4:53 – 23.11.16.

<sup>88</sup> FG 7:81 – 15.04.17.

<sup>89</sup> There were 23 references to AtK; most were either me explaining it or people saying they did not know what it was.

<sup>90</sup> See sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4



both with their uneasiness about a transactional approach to evangelism and with what partnership has taught them about respecting the experience of the other.

So why was it that the practice of AtK did not figure in conversations when it seemed to offer a way of sharing faith without imposing it on people? I began to ask questions about it:

Int: There's this other [practice] called AtK, and it's never been mentioned to me, all the time I've been here. [Do you know of it?]

VV: No, I don't. I'm going to ask PP, out of interest, if he's heard about it ... presumably that's for people that are already involved, or on the fringe, not complete random people?<sup>91</sup>

When I described it to her she felt it was intrusive and uncomfortable to be saying something about what you see of God in someone else's life.<sup>92</sup>

Another person was aware that it hadn't figured in their journey very much.

FF: Well I knew it was in there and I can't help but feel that we got so stuck and passionate one way or another about DitW and it took a long time to work its way through. And then DitWorld became the next thing.<sup>93</sup>

He equated AtK with evangelism – which he saw as preaching in church – and felt this wasn't his calling.<sup>94</sup>

While discovering a different perspective to traditional proclamation because of their relationships and partnerships in the community, the lack of the practice of AtK meant that their default understanding of evangelism was still imparting something to others.

It may be that new ways of being a church in the community need more support and nurture before people feel confident to learn how to name the activity of God in other people's lives. Nevertheless, with a new-found sense that conversion was God's business,

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with VV:71-72 – 13.06.17.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with VV:73-74 – 13.06.17.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with FF:105-106 – 27.06.17.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with FF:109-110 – 27.06.17.

people were relaxing more and paying attention to ‘sharing life’ – building genuine relationships and partnerships in the community, the impact of which was being felt in the community.

This section describes a burgeoning sense of public Christian identity, which led a number of the congregation to feel that they needed a different kind of corporate gathering – one which would enable them to stay accountable for and be supported in this challenging new way of being. The journey to this is the subject of the next section.

## **3.4 The interplay of personal and communal in the story of growth**

### **3.4.1 Introduction: researching home groups**

A week after my first service at St X, I went to an evening for ‘small groups’ to explore the first year of the ‘long-range plan’.<sup>95</sup>

I sat down with one of the smaller groups.<sup>96</sup> The group members’ attention ebbed and flowed through the meeting. D and E hated DitW and were negative about the purpose of the evening, but they got quite engaged with the question of ‘deepening relationships’ in their home group.

They talked about me coming along to their group some time. I was a bit taken aback and caught unprepared. My first reaction was a bit non-committal; I think I was afraid of being played. Then I became conscious of my response and tried to recover saying, ‘Oh yes I would like to do that.’ I hope that didn’t put them off because it occurred to me that attending home groups could be a good way of getting to know people, seeing how they act out the faith and learning what makes them tick.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The long-range plan is generated through reflection on a number of key parts of the PMC process – in particular the MVS and the VE; both have been explained earlier in this chapter. The ‘long-range plan’ consists of a focus on one thing each year for three years in the light of the first two documents. The first year of the plan begun in 2015 at St X was: ‘deepening relationships.’

<sup>96</sup> Appendix 24(xxii)

<sup>97</sup> FN:24 – 23.11.15. See also Appendix 24(xxiii)

This was the serendipitous moment that led me to the decision to run some FGs with the home groups as a way of meeting a large proportion of the ‘committed’ adult membership.<sup>98</sup> It fitted my plan to enrich the exploration of communal maturation, not only by listening to them as individuals but also by observing how they “performed” faith in community.

### **3.4.2 Home groups stories**

#### **3.4.2.1 Journey with PMC**

Each of the five home groups interviewed revealed their own narrative identity. Groups 3 and 6 were hostile and critical towards the present direction of the church. Group 3 was lively and good humoured yet felt alienated from the wider church, whereas Group 6 was quieter and more cautious with me, carefully managed by its leader; it took me a long time to get an agreement from them to meet me. Group 5 was not hostile to the PMC journey, but felt distant from it as if it were happening somewhere else. None of them had people who were participating positively (if at all) in the PMC journey. The group members tended to back one another up on most things and it felt like they inhabited and reinforced one story which they told me in various ways through the evenings.

Groups 1 and 4 each had some members who had become deeply involved with the PMC journey personally. This generated more dialogue and difference about PMC; Group 1 were broadly supportive of PMC and disagreements were polite and only gently conflictual – but they were there; Group 4 was much more vocal about their disagreements with one another over PMC, but in a way that demonstrated that they knew where each was coming

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<sup>98</sup> Introduced in section 3.3.2.

from and had learnt to live with it. Generally, there was more support for PMC in these two groups, but it was hard to see any difference it had made to the groups in practice.<sup>99</sup>

The home groups were encouraged to make a 'Smart Plan'<sup>100</sup> about how they were going to respond to the challenge of 'deepening relationships.' The groups were left to decide and discern whether this meant within or beyond the group. In two of the groups the subject never arose; one group simply said, 'we didn't do it,' because they felt they were all involved in enough.<sup>101</sup>

Group 3 felt a real sense of responsibility to support the curate whilst the vicar was on study leave, picking up the curate's request for help with the new Pilgrim course (which they did). U had the idea that they plan to talk to people on Sunday. I thought that was a radical and disruptive challenge! U also talked about putting up a plan in church of where all the home groups meet. (Neither of these things happened).<sup>102</sup>

Another developed a plan which involved a deliberate decision to meet up with another home group and a search for a charity to support.<sup>103</sup> Those that did create Smart Plans saw them more as a list of tasks rather than creating an accountable journey around deepening their relationships. Part way through interviewing the home groups, I wrote a memo to articulate what I felt I was seeing:

My reflection on my time with home groups over the autumn is this. Where is the journey outwards to the other happening because I am not seeing it in the home groups? As I spent time listening to the groups, I have felt an awareness of change, something is happening but it feels like it is 'over there.' I formed a question to clarify this. In the transformational journey are they:  
Watching (with approval/good will)  
Participating  
Resisting  
Ignoring or oblivious<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Appendix 23.

<sup>100</sup> Creating a 'Smart Plan' is understood in PMC as a spiritual practice of discernment – rather than a management tool – in which a group tries to discern together God's call to them and create an accountable plan for how they are going to respond. This is not easy to grasp in practice – it seems to take quite a time.

<sup>101</sup> FG5:44 -15.11.16.

<sup>102</sup> FN:35 – 03.12.15. (Neither of these things happened). See also Appendix 24(xxiv)

<sup>103</sup> FG1:18 – 14.06.16.

<sup>104</sup> RL:15 – Analytic Memo -10.12.16.

Despite certain individuals' level of involvement in PMC, the home group perspective was about watching, resisting or ignoring; this limited individuals' freedom to promote a PMC approach in their home groups, even if they wished to.

It was interesting to see how people who could be radical when interviewed on their own became more compliant within the group.<sup>105</sup>

In practice, the challenge to engage with the other, whether inside or outside the church was avoided. The way they spoke about their group life illuminated this.

### **3.4.2.2 Home Groups – safe space for support and learning<sup>106</sup>**

People spoke about the home group as a 'comfortable space' – a safe space in which they were accepted and could be themselves.

SSSS: I really like it because we've been doing it so long, I feel really comfortable with everybody. So it's easy to share in a smaller group with people that you feel you can be open and talk to.<sup>107</sup>

Home groups were places of mutual support and pastoral care – relationships in which they have found strength, belonging, comfort and counsel in the ups and downs of life.

CC: We've been able to share with each other and support and encourage each other and we've told people things that we perhaps wouldn't tell people generally. But speaking personally, it's been a great comfort.<sup>108</sup>

They were also seen as places of learning – for growth in knowledge and understanding. Though one or two people tended to take the lead in this, others were encouraged to participate and take a turn at leading. Home group was a safe place to try this.

TTT: [Y]ou have to think about it a bit more, you learn doing that. That's where I learn

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<sup>105</sup> FN:94 – 26.06.16.

<sup>106</sup> Amongst 44 comments on home group life, 18 were about mutual support, 12 about learning and prayer, 2 about the wider congregation and 4 about disappointments with home groups.

<sup>107</sup> FG3:4 – 07.07.16.

<sup>108</sup> FG5:15 – 15.11.16.

most in preparing to lead, and then in response you learn a lot in that process, and I think as we have shared that a lot more, then you see it in each of you. That learning going on, and that growing as part of that learning.<sup>109</sup>

A sense of identity in the group helped some to participate more easily in the wider church, though for others the home group was their only involvement with St X.

PPPPP: [I'm] not saying don't ever go to church 'cos I think it is good for you to go but...

EEE: But I think that's the importance of your small groups. You're the group that meet and do different things 'cos you're still within that wider family. Sunday's aren't always the best place for people to be because of other things going off.<sup>110</sup>

### **3.4.2.3 What did growth mean for home group members?**

The above narrative begins to come to bear more directly on my research focus on maturation as the group members spoke openly about their personal journeys. For many people suffering and struggle had been very important in growing in faith and they valued the supportive relationships, prayer and biblical wisdom that they had received from one another over the years. But the focus of attention tended to be on sustaining their lives with God and each other – stories of emotional sustenance and therapeutic care from God. In the group exercise, people chose similar words and phrases – fellowship and building relationships, prayer, worship, awareness of God and belonging were the most mentioned, but knowledge and wisdom also figured.

GGGGG: I've been through some really tough times. And if it wasn't for these guys, I probably wouldn't be here today. It was so tough and if it wasn't for when I found friends within this group, and they've supported me and they've helped me.<sup>111</sup>

But home groups were hard to get into; they are not advertised and people talked about them being 'cliquey' and unwelcoming. Some home group members said that they

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<sup>109</sup> FG6:18-19 – 04.05.17.

<sup>110</sup> FG8:14-15 – 27.06.17.

<sup>111</sup> FG4:44 – 15.09.16. See also Appendix 24(xxv)

did not want new people because it would disturb the trust that had developed and would no longer be the safe and comfortable place that they valued.

L: When I raised it at the PCC there were several members of different groups there and not one of them says, “Come and join our group.” So, I put that in my resignation letter. It was almost a plea, but it was not picked up, other than one woman said, “Oh, we don’t like new people coming into our group because then we can’t talk about ourselves and colleagues and our family.”<sup>112</sup>

Members saw the home groups as places of mutual support. The home groups had little outward reference and rarely precipitated any sense of outward movement except on occasion to fulfil some role together in support of the wider church.<sup>113</sup> Insofar as growth was perceived as a purpose of these groups, this was articulated as providing a place to learn through study and be a community of support and prayer where God would sustain them in times of trouble. The name ‘home’ group was interesting – even when one met in a pub. It spoke of a private space for personal and family-style spiritual engagement.

#### **3.4.2.4 The “missing” home group**

There was one group I never managed to meet. I was disappointed about this, because I felt that it had members who were more actively committed to the PMC journey.

Talked to K about her home group; it is not meeting regularly so I can’t really do a FG with them – sounded a bit chaotic.<sup>114</sup>

I discovered that this was not a failure to gain access, but rather a reflection of the complexity and busyness of people’s lives. At the same time, K clearly had a yearning for some kind of small group relationship that felt truer to what she was learning through PMC, but she did not know how to go about it.

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with L:35-36 – 29.06.17. See also Appendix 24(xxvi)

<sup>113</sup> Examples of this were: joining with another home group for a social, making coffee, maintenance or, in one case, helping with the course for beginners in the faith – though this latter was deemed an experience not to be repeated because it disrupted the life of the group.

<sup>114</sup> FN:135 – 29.01.17. See also Appendix 24(xxvii)

K has felt a real strain with this over the years and she and her husband are now wondering about moving church. But they value the way things are being done here and the strain is nothing to do with the PMC journey in her eyes – quite the opposite. She is very encouraged about the small group initiative [see below]... She talked about their irregularity and about asking [parents] to form in relationship groups and work out their own times to meet.<sup>115</sup>

### 3.4.3 Year 2 plan and meetings in Lent 2017

K was not on her own in respect of a longing for a small group experience that would ‘work.’ Some people spoke of how cliquy they found the home groups to be and how hard it was to break into one, whether you were an established member of the church or a newcomer.

There is a desire to belong and connect; it’s voiced by new people and by people who’ve been around for a long time – some of whom felt less like they belong now. In some cases, they are not in a home group.<sup>116</sup>

There was also a growing vision for a different kind of small group – one that was orientated outwards with porous boundaries in which people would ‘share life’ with one another more deeply. The small group initiative was one of the strands of year 2 of the long-range plan with its focus on ‘discovering new relationships.’<sup>117</sup>

AAAA. I’ve been coming to this church for a year now and I haven’t got involved in any home groups. I like the [new] idea because it is flexible, open to others – a place where we could bring people. I like the idea of bringing different groups together – church and non-church; like making a four for badminton with church and non-church people. A group that is open and ready to grow – it’s unexpected and exciting.<sup>118</sup>

Having prepared the ground for the possibility of setting up some new small groups, the vicar offered a series of Sunday evening gatherings during Lent 2017 where this idea was explored. I attended five out of the six of these evenings as a participant. I felt it both

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<sup>115</sup> FN:136 – 29.01.17.

<sup>116</sup> FN:120 – 05.12.16.

<sup>117</sup> 2016-2017

<sup>118</sup> FN:151 – 05.03.17.



inappropriate and logistically difficult to record these evenings, though I was able to take detailed notes at various points and wrote up my recollections promptly in my field notes. There were between 15 and 25 adults present at each gathering – not inconsiderable in a church with a regular Sunday attendance of about 60 adults.

The evenings started with worship and prayer, followed by explanation from the vicar and then a range of reflective work and thinking together, which modelled the way the vicar saw the groups taking shape and were based around the missional practices that were at the heart of the PMC process. So we did DitW and were encouraged strongly to move around to listen to people we did not normally spend time with. The vicar also offered us a number of practical tools for embedding the outward-looking practices of DitWorld and spiritual discernment at the heart of our everyday lives. As a participant-observer, I found this process challenging and formative in my own life.

We spent time building a picture of our circles of relationship where we were encouraged to be open and attentive to the presence and activity of God in our everyday life and responsive to who God was bringing across our path. But the focus was still on personal evangelism; building relationship in such a way as to make such opportunities natural and possible. It generated some predictable and familiar anxieties.

H: My task has been helping people grow in faith [meaning not evangelism].

L: I became a Christian a few years ago and we had lots of non-Christian friends. Now my circles of friendship are narrower and more Christians. I didn't have many circles – family, one or two friends and then halt; not much outward movement.

NN: I put myself at the centre as the most important development is me. Then I have friendship circles – people on a ride with faith, people move in and out on the rings – fluidity. It's about noticing where the proximity is.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> FN:151 – 05.03.17.

These are typical experiences of evangelism in a privatised church. One person focuses their Christian life on the inner world of the church and another laments the loss of relationships outside the church. The third, who had been less socialised into church, had a range of relationships in which he hoped that his faith might have an impact.

As the sessions continued, we were encouraged to practice DitWorld more intentionally in our everyday lives and return subsequently to share our experiences.

On the second evening, we shared where we had encountered God with people. CCCC talked about God providing for her this week. AAAA and H were encouraged, but I noticed how few one-to-one encounters there were which people considered of spiritual significance; including me.<sup>120</sup>

There was lots of wry laughter because of the sense that we don't share life with many non-Christians; but perhaps also a desire for a different kind of life. I sensed both distress and anxiety masked by laughter about what we noticed. There was also a sense for some of God being at work. I wondered whether this was a persistent and elaborate challenge to the privatisation of our faith?<sup>121</sup>

Towards the end of the meetings in Lent, we had begun to be accountable to one another for our life in the wider community and it had helped me to be responsive to the people that I had met in my parish and been praying for.

We shared about what had been happening and H mentioned how she had been praying for my group... I was very moved by H's perseverance in prayer – way better than mine.<sup>122</sup>

During the final session, the vicar invited people to form two groups to think about how they might take this forward: one group for existing home groups and one for those who wanted to form some experimental groups; I spent time listening to each group.

Established home group members had a measured discussion about the balance between maintenance and change, between inviting new people and staying the same.

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<sup>120</sup> FN:154 – 12.03.17.

<sup>121</sup> FN:155 – 12.03.17.

<sup>122</sup> FN:162-163 – 02.04.17.

There was a sense of caution and uncertainty about change and the recognition that home groups were set up to impart knowledge.<sup>123</sup>

H: The groups we have were set up for teaching and once upon a time we had leaders who were very strong on this.

M: Outward focus: who can we invite? People have been invited to home groups since this course has started.

VV: It's made people stop and look.

J: There are relics of a more centrally organised approach; sometimes suggesting groups should be geographical. Thursday night was meetings night. Patterns break down, but habits stay. There is the question of the balance of stability and openness to others.

M (to VV): You're always thinking about who you could invite; maybe not all groups are doing that.<sup>124</sup>

The biggest group was those who were interested in forming new groups;<sup>125</sup> a mixture of established members who felt shut out of the present home group structure, new members who had not been able to find their way in and folk who had caught the vision for something different. By the end of the evening, they had agreed to gather for a Chinese takeaway and make a plan for the future.

There was energy and excitement in the room as they planned their first gathering. But I was struck by the fact that the sessions had revolved entirely around supporting individuals in the public space; there was nothing about forming community with others for mission.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> See section 3.4.2.2.

<sup>124</sup> FN:166 – 09.04.17.

<sup>125</sup> There were 12 people in this group; 5 in the other group.

<sup>126</sup> I will explore this individualised approach in chapters 4 and 5.

### 3.4.4 “Connect Groups”

The new groups were not imposed but offered; in the event three groups were formed, which focused around the practice of DitWorld. What people wanted was a group in which they could reflect on their everyday life in the world as Christians and where they could be accountable for staying with this new way of being church.

K: I think you take a step back because it's different isn't it. Yes, I go to church, but then it wouldn't go any deeper really.

Int: This helps it go deeper somehow does it?

K: Because you just share what you do... You become intentional about spending time with people and the people you think God's calling you to.<sup>127</sup>

They wanted groups that would be open to welcoming new people and they grew significantly in the first few weeks of their existence – particularly drawing in people on the edge.

K: We've got a couple coming along who we didn't know their names. NNN went... “I've said you're welcome to come to the group but I don't know their names from Adam...” I said, “What are your names? Do you want to come this week?” And they started coming, and they are on the periphery of church.<sup>128</sup>

They wanted groups in which their aspiration for ‘sharing life’ would be fulfilled. And by this, I think they meant that they wanted to share the whole of life in community – not just a ‘spiritual’ part and not simply a tangential touching of individuals once a week.

T: So, we were building a foundation at the bottom of the garden for the greenhouse. And, we built it wrong, and I'd cried about it, because life had just got to me. And they said, “Do you know what? Why don't we come round and have the group at yours on Thursday?” So, they came round and we had a barbeque, and we properly shared life. We had all the kids in the garden, everyone with their hair in funky bunches, and some of the blokes were building and we shared a meal.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with K:24 – 09.07.17. See also Appendix 24(xxviii)

<sup>128</sup> Interview with K:34 – 09.07.17.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with T:72-73 – 30.06.17.

I was struck by the fact that I could never get to interview K's previous home group because it never seemed to meet. During a one-to-one interview with her, I asked her how it was that previously she and others were too busy to meet fortnightly, but now they were happily meeting once a week?

K: It's been amazing. We love Thursday nights.

Int: And is that something you wouldn't necessarily have said of home groups previously?

K: Yes, because I always had to lead them; it's the emphasis of, "oh, I've got to plan something else." We did it every two weeks and in the end it just didn't work. People weren't coming; but you commit now; all of us block out Thursdays.

Int: So, what's the difference then between a fortnightly pattern that you can't keep up and a weekly pattern that everyone's committed to? What's happened?

K: People have got to know each other. We've yet to DitW; we DitWorld a lot in our group; four people have lost jobs and been on the breadline and it's really made them view things differently. Two people have had experience of miscarriage and death of baby and people are sharing on a really deeper level.

Int: Did you know this already or is this coming out in the open already in three or four weeks?

K: Yes, yes. There was one meeting where something changed because someone spoke of how they felt and it took a lot of courage and it was earth-shattering in that moment. I miss the people if they are not in church.<sup>130</sup>

I observe that the loss of intimacy with the admission of new people that the home groups feared has not materialised here.

### **3.4.5 Hospitality – a conclusion**

In the context of the journey, writing about hospitality seems like a footnote, which is odd when it is the sister practice to DitWorld and introduced at the same time.<sup>131</sup> The

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with K:31-33 – 08.07.17. See also Appendix 24(xxix)

<sup>131</sup> Appendix 24(xxx)

training for this was not well received, a point echoed to me by the vicar in conversation on another occasion.

VVV: I sometimes feel it's all a bit theoretical. I remember we did hospitality, and we spent ages about the theory of hospitality, which seems like a really practical subject.<sup>132</sup>

Very few comments were made about hospitality and these focused mainly on offering hospitality.<sup>133</sup>

TTTT: It's brought a lot of things out in terms of hospitality. How you can go get your neighbour in and not necessarily even talk about church but just actually getting to know them and other people and letting your light shine even without saying anything if you like. That's good and I've heard quite a few people say that.<sup>134</sup>

There were good examples of hospitality in terms of making boundaries more porous and welcoming people as we have seen in the "Connect Groups". This is reflected, too, in other experiences.

AAA spoke about his first experience of hospitality of the church at a community event soon after moving in and was amazed by the free food and the fact that his kids got to fight in sumo suits.<sup>135</sup>

But there was very little in any of the data about receiving the hospitality of others, despite the emphasis of the Luke 10 passage that they worked with for the whole of year 1; this was the root of TTT's criticism of the failure of the church membership to engage with the orchard project<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> FG1:23 – 05.05.16.

<sup>133</sup> There were 6 references to hospitality – only 1 of which focused on receiving hospitality.

<sup>134</sup> FG2:13 – 26.06.16.

<sup>135</sup> FN:181 – 09.07.17. See also Appendix 24(xxxi)

<sup>136</sup> See section 3.2.2.1.

## **3.5 What is learning and how does it happen? – a new relationship with the ‘otherness’ of Scripture**

### **3.5.1 Introduction**

So far, I have charted an outward journey to the church’s wider community (and to individuals’ personal communities). This had developed a more recognisable public identity for the church and led some to re-evaluate their understanding of mission in terms of partnership and mutual hospitality and recalibrate evangelism as something less transactional and more relational and dialogic. In support of this, some of them had initiated a new type of small group to facilitate and continue to foster this outward relational journey that they had begun to identify and value. Those who were uneasy with this journey were more inclined to see the church community as something to protect and that hospitality was to be offered on the church’s territory through which people might hopefully be drawn into the church.

This conflict invited questions about the nature of discipleship. Bearing in mind its root meaning of learning, I want to explore meaning, purpose and methods of learning in St X’s journey. In this section, the analysis will deepen the themes of growth, maturation, individuality/communality as it builds up a more complex picture of St X’s community.

Church learning happens typically through the communication of knowledge – through sermons on Sundays and through groups for Confirmation, exploring Christianity, catechesis and nurture in the faith in which discussion of the Christian faith plays a part. People take this as the norm and while they may complain about the quality – especially in respect of sermons – very rarely do they ask the purpose of learning and how that goal might be reached.

All these ways of learning were on offer at St X, which had been shaped by Evangelical ministry over the previous 36 years. This tradition is associated with a high view of the Bible and it is questions about attending to Scripture and its role in formation that is the focus of this section. In particular, we will see the conflictual response to a different way of reading Scripture with a different understanding of the nature and purpose of knowledge.

### **3.5.2 Established patterns of learning and growing**

It's 8.00am on Sunday morning at St X and there are new Bibles in the pews – we are encouraged by the curate to follow the passages; three or four people did for the OT, none for the gospel – we're all standing up and people don't naturally follow a book when standing.<sup>137</sup>

This little flurry of Bible opening did not continue at the 8.00am. At the 10.30 service, one or two people followed the Bible reading, but not many. If you sit in the area with chairs rather than pews, there are no Bibles available.

Luke 2.22-40; 6 or 7 opened Bibles – not me, because there was not one near me.<sup>138</sup>

Preaching was more Anglican than Evangelical in the preference for referencing all the readings for the day and correspondingly less exegesis with very little attention paid to the context of the passage; at the same time, it showed no influence of the practice of DitW.

As I come to the end of listening to sermons here, I record my frustration at their insistence on preaching on both lectionary passages. It means we never really go into depth and let one passage speak. At the same time, it lacks imaginative engagement with the worlds of the different congregations. I am also puzzled by the lack of influence of DitW upon the way they preach – even if they don't want to do the full-blown practice on a Sunday.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> FN:38 – 10.01.16. See also Appendix 24(xxxii)

<sup>138</sup> FN:133 – 27.01.17.

<sup>139</sup> FN:179 – 09.07.17. See also Appendix 24(xxxiii)



I encountered the antithesis to DitW in the preaching of the person who was the strongest voice against PMC that I met and an advocate of what I came to recognise as the counter-story. It was more exegetical than most sermons at St X but also very didactic.

TTT used both passages but started by talking about hermeneutics and what we bring to the text, the different kinds of texts and the unique context that the texts come from... I have never seen an attempt to open up the Bible in this way at St X and it kept my attention. But it did take 40 minutes.<sup>140</sup>

The Bible was important to congregants and played a significant part in their spiritual journeys; study of the Bible was a priority for the home groups.

HHHHH: I think the Bible reading one, because...if you're going to do something you have got to read the manual to know how to do it and what goes right or wrong if you don't do it. So I think that's important.<sup>141</sup>

TTT Just spending time thinking about what the Bible says and how it works, that's a stepping-off point for me [to engagement with God], and a place of growth, and that's something we've learned to do together. We've learned to read the Bible together, and to think about it, and to let it challenge us, and I think that's one of the areas we've grown together as a group.<sup>142</sup>

There was rich evidence in FGs and interviews about the significant role the Bible played in the life of the congregation and in their perceptions about growth and maturity. A number of people testified to the importance of particular Scriptures in their own journey – particularly for encouragement in time of difficulty.

H: I was reading the Bible, sometimes a few chapters at a time because I was reading it from Genesis to Revelation. I was at a low point because something pretty awful had happened, and the chapter that I was reading that day, it's Jeremiah. I can't remember the exact chapter now even. It's 'I alone know the plans I have for you'. How does it continue? It's 'plans for your welfare'

J: 'For your future and hope'.

H: Yes. 'For your future and hope', and it was absolutely right for that particular occasion.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> FN:161 – 02.04.17. See also Appendix 24(xxxiv)

<sup>141</sup> FG5:14 – 15.11.16.

<sup>142</sup> FG6:7 – 04.05.17.

<sup>143</sup> FG4:47 – 15.09.16.

The home groups prized learning through discussion of Bible passages and several commented on the sharing of responsibility for leading such study as evidence of growth and development.

E: More recently we've shared the leading; each of us have taken one of the sessions and led it. I think that's a massive step forward for people who are just not used to doing that. I mean SSSS is brilliant; never done that, I think.<sup>144</sup>

However, both groups and individuals tended to see growth in terms of accumulation of knowledge.

JJ: I think we should probably have 'knowledge' because there is no point in any of it, unless you know what it's all about.

MMM: Your growth. You've got to grow in the knowledge.

GGGGG: Yes. You've got to.<sup>145</sup>

This was so marked that in one case an interviewee found it hard to recognise evidence of growth in her own life in terms of relationships because of the lack of development in her knowledge base, due to the struggles of attention as a young parent in church.

VVV: I think I've found it quite hard to grow personally at the moment. I think having children has made it quite hard to grow my faith in some ways, because I'm not able to think when I go to church I don't always get that much out of it, because I'm either at Sunday School with the kids or I'm a bit distracted if I'm in the service. So I think there's less growth that way, but maybe there's more community and fellowship group growth. So, I feel I'm growing more in terms of relationships maybe. But I'm not sure there's been as much growth as I'd like in terms of biblical knowledge.<sup>146</sup>

We have already seen how the perception of lack of knowledge can operate as a barrier to risking any form of outward movement towards the 'other' and my time with home groups revealed that they understood sustaining faith in terms of growth in

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<sup>144</sup> FG3:6 – 07.07.16. See also Appendix 24(xxxv)

<sup>145</sup> FG4:21 – 15.11.16. See also Appendix 24(xxxvi)

<sup>146</sup> Interview with VVV:12-13 – 13.06.07.

knowledge, mutual support and prayer for one another.<sup>147</sup> Growth in knowledge was mentioned by 20 people. People also spoke a lot about mutual support and friendship (21) and about experiencing the strength of God in times of suffering through supportive friendship, prayer and the Bible (24) – an area of growth introduced to my list of words by one of the groups. Nurture courses were seen as helpful to this (16) as was getting involved in some way – 44 comments referring to the inner life of the church and only 4 community facing.

In the PMC congregational interviews mentioned earlier, some of the questions focused on teaching and learning. In the Reading Team’s report, it was observed that the church members understood learning in terms of Sunday sermons and home groups because they had a very instructional view of learning. The report writers raised the question as to whether discipleship goes beyond instruction and encouraged them to ask the question, ‘what is learning?’

What do people think learning is in this congregation? Is it a matter of thinking alone (as some respondents seemed to indicate), or is there an element of holistic transformation and change in body and soul?<sup>148</sup>

### **3.5.3 A new way of learning?**

At the first PMC event, immediately after a welcome and some worship, participants are introduced to DitW with minimal instruction and no explanation. This is how it goes:

- ‘Listen carefully as the passage is read, notice where your attention is drawn; a word or phrase where your mind lingers.
- Find a person in the group you do not know or know less well, a ‘reasonably friendly-looking stranger’

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<sup>147</sup> See sections 3.3.2., 3.4.2.2. and 2.4.2.3.

<sup>148</sup> Reading Team Report:13 – 10.09.12. See also Appendix(xxxvii)

- Listen to that person as they tell you what they heard in the passage. They may mention something they'd never heard before, something encouraging or puzzling, something comforting or troubling, or something about which they'd like to ask a Bible scholar.
- Listen well, because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your partner has said, not what you yourself said. Some people take notes to help them focus and remember.<sup>149</sup>

Having shared with a 'reasonably friendly-looking stranger', the pair then find two others and share what they have heard their partner say.<sup>150</sup> The sharing in twos and fours is meant to pass with minimal comment and no discussion, argument or correction. The task is to hear another person and, as the American originators say, 'listen that person into free speech.' This may lead to further reflection together on what has been heard.<sup>151</sup> So what was the congregation's experience?

### 3.5.3.1 Positive<sup>152</sup>

Some people appreciated a more democratic approach to reading Scripture, which helped them to take more seriously that they had something to contribute.

TT: A new way of studying scripture which is much more equable and democratic and so people listen to one another.<sup>153</sup>

C: [I] did not want to do DitW, hated the idea for lots of different reasons. Partly it's about the preaching always comes from the front, because they've got the training, they've got the experience, why would I take it upon myself, where's the learning in that? Partly, it's about a sort of learning disability; [it] took a lot of conversations in

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<sup>149</sup> PMC-UK, *Listening 1, Dwelling in the Word*

<sup>150</sup> Taylor Ellison, P and Keifert, P. (2011). *Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook*. Robbinsdale, MN.: Church Innovations, 8.

<sup>151</sup> Taylor Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling*, 8.

<sup>152</sup> There were 60 comments about the positive impact of DitW

<sup>153</sup> Interview with TT:18 – 28.05.17.

the background, saying, “Okay, well actually, I’ve got the same thing you have, so we’re on a level playing field, that’s fine.”<sup>154</sup>

Reading Scripture communally was actually an experience of encountering God through listening to the passage together.

CCCCC: Then the highs was realizing that the Holy Spirit was actually talking to us. We were all getting<sup>155</sup> the same thing out of DitW, and by the time that we got to the end of the meeting, it was beginning to make good sense that this is what was happening. That lifted us a lot, and it changed our thinking completely on how we did mission. And, that was good, but it took a lot of doing, and it was not easy.<sup>156</sup>

Reading Scripture was not so much about being educated or informed but a meeting point with God through one another to empower their practice of discipleship and mission.

A wide range of positive experiences of this practice were shared, among which were:

growing confidence, discernment, God speaking, partnering with God, Scripture reading us and us taking responsibility for our own learning. Below is just one example where the practice was shaping the way a group of leaders worked together.

EE: We did it recently, with Youth leaders. We started with DitW, and it just evolved, into a whole conversation about the issues and difficulties we’ve got with youth, but actually the real passion, fellowship, teamwork, and everything that’s going on within the youth leadership team, and what it means to discern how we do that with the youth, moving forward.<sup>157</sup>

### **3.5.3.2 Negative<sup>158</sup>**

There was also negative feedback about the experience of DitW. For some it was a shaming experience because it seemed to be exposing their lack of knowledge or insight.

There was a lot of fear of getting it wrong.

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<sup>154</sup> FG7:42 – 15.04.17.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Getting’ has a specific meaning in contexts where people are influenced by evangelical-charismatic perspectives. It refers not so much to gaining knowledge as to encountering God. The encounter is strengthened by the sense that others are ‘getting’ the same thing.

<sup>156</sup> FG1:9 – 05.05.16.

<sup>157</sup> FG7:51 – 15.09.17. See also Appendix 24(xxxviii)

<sup>158</sup> There were 88 negative comments about DitW. There were 6 neutral comments about DitW.

RR: People aren't so familiar with the Bible as we'd like them to be. So, if you just give somebody a piece of Scripture and they look at it and think, 'Well, I'm not sure I've got anything. I can't see anything that I can say to Fred Bloggs here, "Actually, that's helped me."' So therefore you can feel embarrassed.<sup>159</sup>

NN: They're frightened to make a mistake, they're frightened of misinterpreting what they've read, being incorrect, and that they'd be hauled up for it, and it's certainly not the case.<sup>160</sup>

Others were unnerved by the requirement to reach out to a stranger.

RRR: Oh my word, some people aren't that confident that they can go and find a friendly-looking stranger, and how do you know they're friendly, anyway? Just because they're in the church, don't make them friendly, does it?<sup>161</sup>

Some felt that they did not have the expertise because they weren't clever. Some who were more comfortable with learning were disturbed by the saturation of the passage and having no more knowledge to squeeze out.

DD: But some of them are more eloquent aren't they as well and are able to...

RR: It's like GG isn't it? He's so gifted with the knowledge, he's been brought up with it hasn't he? more so than the average person I think.<sup>162</sup>

PP: Well, I certainly find a kind of saturation point. I don't think I'm finding new things a year later that I haven't seen initially; I think I got that a month later, but not a year later.

DDDDD: Because you're very clever.

Group: (Laughter)

PP: No, no, no, no, no. No. Not having that!<sup>163</sup>

### 3.5.3.3 Negotiating the practice

Those who embraced DitW understood and valued it as a way to democratised learning. In this sense, it approaches Scripture as a means for corporate encounter with God

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<sup>159</sup> FG5:66-67 – 15.11.16.

<sup>160</sup> FG7:41 – 15.04.17.

<sup>161</sup> FG4:73 – 15.09.16.

<sup>162</sup> FG5:81-82 – 15.11.16.

<sup>163</sup> FG1:16 – 14.06.16.

in a way that shaped their practice. They talked about how the Scripture began to 'read them' and how it started to shape the way they look at the world.

Those who were uncomfortable with DitW touched on the very problems which it is designed to challenge: expert culture, learning as knowledge and engagement with the 'other'. Those who could not get beyond the sense that reading the Bible was about knowledge and required expert input continually pushed back on this practice. Even those who favoured the practice felt that there was no mechanism within it to address people's questions about the passages they were reading on a regular basis.

J: I think perhaps the weakness of DitW, is that whilst... it encourages the articulation of questions, it doesn't necessarily provide any answers.<sup>164</sup>

So how did they handle this practice and the love/hate relationships it generated?

There is evidence of the potential it had to generate conflict.

FF: There were a lot of people that loved it and liked it straightaway, and a lot of people that didn't like it at all

RRR: Yes.

MMM: Yes. People that really didn't.

JJJ: Really didn't. Yes. Very extreme.

H: Uncomfortable with it. Yes.

J: They didn't want to do it.<sup>165</sup>

Church members developed a number of strategies for handling this. Some had elaborate strategies for avoiding the practice. Some people felt that it was unavoidable and impossible to escape and that their discomfort with it was never addressed.

RRR: As a person that doesn't like doing it, I feel I'm not listened to, because you guys still do it and I don't feel I've got the option to opt out if I want to.

GGGGG: That's true. You don't feel you can opt out. Or if you do opt out then you're a failure.

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<sup>164</sup> FG4:70 – 23.11.16.

<sup>165</sup> FG4:60 – 15.09.16.

RRR: I think you're very self-conscious trying to do the DitW, that to get up and walk out from it you feel just as self-conscious. It's which one do you go with.<sup>166</sup>

The main driver for negotiating the practice was the avoidance of conflict.

FF: Yeah, and the reason I don't do it at finance is because I know some people don't like it, so rather than create a situation of conflict, when we've got business to take part in, even though I actually love it, and fully enjoy DitW every time I do it, I don't want to impose it upon others.<sup>167</sup>

I found this sense of the ubiquity of the practice puzzling because I only seemed to encounter it at meetings led by the vicar and not once at a Sunday service. In response they spoke about the experience of doing it on a Sunday and how that had been more or less discontinued, due to many people's sense that this was not what they came for on a Sunday.

PP: And I think that has certainly been scaled back as the church has gone on, and it gets done sometimes now. And I think actually that suits a lot more people a lot better, but not everybody.<sup>168</sup>

But at the same time, they enumerated to me the number of different contexts in which DitW was being practiced, including in one case with the wider community: Explorers, Pilgrim, Youth Group, Pastoral meetings, PCC, Leaders' meetings. Those who spoke about this were convinced about the transformative effect. There were other meetings where they had not persevered with it – especially the home groups.

And sometimes they modified the practice to make it easier to cope with. But, in this case, the challenge of listening to the other and sharing what they have heard was neatly avoided.

EE: So a slightly different way of doing DitW. "Let's read it through together. Okay, what struck you straight away?" They'd do that without batting an eyelid. You then tell them they're DitW and they'd go, "Am I?"<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> FG4:77-78 – 15.09.16.

<sup>167</sup> FG7:48 – 15.04.17.

<sup>168</sup> FG1:17 – 05.05.16.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with EE:58 – 07.06.17.



Some people said they felt that PMC had hijacked their learning as a newish Christian and that they felt that they had a need for more basic knowledge in order to be confident to do the missional things they were being asked to do.

E. I didn't feel I was settled and secure enough in my faith and belief to go out there and do what they were aspiring to. Because I felt myself very much to be a beginner, unsure and feeling my way, tentative, baby steps.<sup>170</sup>

Even some who were most committed to PMC spoke about how knowledge in terms of instruction had been important to them – especially starting off on their journey of faith.

FF: I didn't actually choose 'knowledge' but I don't know why because it probably is the key to me, to everything. Certainly, the more I grew as a Christian the more books I bought, the more I read around it and into it, trying to answer questions. Then we attended Alpha. Then we had our original study group. Really, it was a thirst for knowledge and every question I had got answered to my satisfaction.<sup>171</sup>

This conversation continued as follows:

RRR: Unlike some.

FF: Yes.

MMM: You're not actually our doubting Thomas, but you've got more questions than...

RRR: Yes.

MMM: You do like going off at a tangent, don't you?

RRR: Well, well.

MMM: Which this group allows. The last one was not so easy.

RRR: Well that's because you all go...

JJJ: Oh right.

MMM: Well, in all honesty, it's probably only the kind of questions we do all have.

FF: Yes.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with E:12 – 31.05.17.

<sup>171</sup> FG4:39 – 15.09.16.

<sup>172</sup> FG4:39-40 – 15.09.16.

Some people take things at face value, others have questions. Some are willing to experiment, others fear getting it wrong. This group is wrestling with differences to some extent, but they are quick to defuse the difficulties. The ‘doubting Thomas’ comment caused lots of relieved laughter, but the speaker felt they had to acknowledge the reality at the end all the same. But the tension had been lifted for now – only to return later in the meeting as we talked about struggles with DitW.<sup>173</sup>

## **3.6 How the practices of reflection and discernment encourage lay people to take responsibility – a new relationship with the ‘otherness’ of God**

### **3.6.1 Introduction**

In the course of narrating the church’s journey with PMC, all but one of the ‘disruptive missional practices’ have been introduced. ‘Focus for Missional Action’ is the practice which set the course for the church’s new journey that they had begun to discern in the first two years of the process.<sup>174</sup> Prior to this, the introduction of the practices of ‘DitWorld, and, to an extent, Hospitality and AtK had helped the congregation to learn to be present and form identity and partnership in the public world.<sup>175</sup> Each of these practices is grounded in experience of God, but it is DitW<sup>176</sup> and one further practice that I come to now, Corporate Spiritual Discernment (CSD), that do the ‘heavy lifting’ in terms of developing people’s encounter with and experience of God, an encounter that is closely tied to the church’s identity and engagement in the public space; both are introduced in year 1 of the process.

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<sup>173</sup> St X’s journey with DitW raises theological questions about learning, which I will return to in chapter 4.

<sup>174</sup> See section 3.2.1.

<sup>175</sup> See sections 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.5 and 3.4.5.

<sup>176</sup> See section 3.5.3.

### **3.6.2 Corporate Spiritual Discernment**

If DitW explores encounter with God through Scripture, then CSD aims to help people be open to the Spirit's activity and to the discernment of the presence and activity of God in their midst and in the wider communities in which they live. This practice requires the development of reflection – both personal and theological – and it is the one which helps people to notice and name the activity of God in their lives, in the church and in their communities and therefore fuels and directs the partnership work that emerges from DitWorld, Hospitality and AtK.

The data from St X, explored in this section, gives evidence that the practices of reflection and discernment are central to the development of lay responsibility and vocation, and to the increasing abandonment of passive aggressive behaviour. This will also invite reflection on how the church has handled issues of power and conflict. All of these have implications for maturation.

The practice of discernment was introduced to the whole congregation as a way of decision making through listening to one another and to God rather than basing decisions upon majority vote, prudence, compromise or capitulation to the strongest voices in the group. It is based upon the convictions that deep listening to God, through Scripture and through careful attention to one another and the wider community will lead to discernment of the call of God in the particular circumstances in which the congregation find themselves. The underlying theology of the practice concerns the presence and activity of God in the world and the church, calling the congregation to take seriously the otherness of God as the primary agent in mission.

The practice is introduced about four months into the process and initially based around the question: “What missional gifts have we discovered that God has given us?”

Those who gather are first encouraged to a particular approach to mutual listening:

‘Attend ... to listen to someone in and beyond words.

Assert ... to speak honestly, without apology or domination.

Decide ... to make a communal or personal decision, to come to terms with an issue.

Act ... to live out our faith in the world; action will be the fruit of this conversation’.<sup>177</sup>

They attend carefully to one another but are expected also share their own views .

Together they come to a decision upon which they will act. The way they are encouraged to do this is through ‘brainstorming’ their question from the perspectives of the Christian tradition and Scriptures, contemporary culture and their own experience (including reflection upon the work they have been doing together in the process).

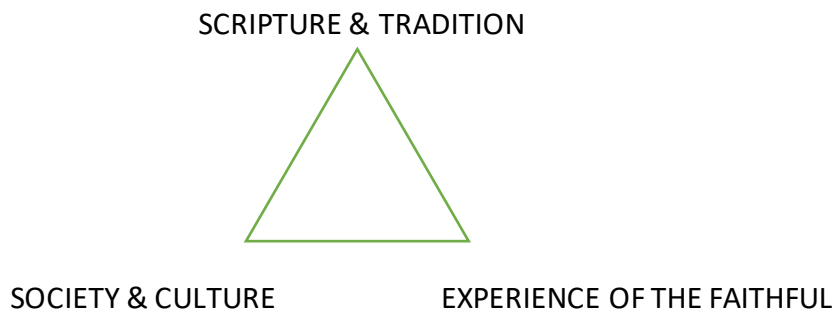


Figure 1: ‘Brainstorming’

After this, they engage in a ‘floated conversation’ in which attention is given to ensuring that each person’s voice is heard, then trying to summarise at the end the discernment that has emerged. If this takes place in a group larger than 10, this work is done in small groups and then shared with the larger group at the end.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> PMC-UK, *Listening* 2, 8.

<sup>178</sup> PMC-UK, *Listening* 2, 8-16.

### 3.6.3 Two experiences of Corporate Spiritual Discernment<sup>179</sup>

My first experience of CSD at St X occurred just over a week after my first Sunday service with them. The occasion was a gathering of the home groups to explore the first year's focus of a three-year attempt to live out their MVS.<sup>180</sup> The focus in the first year was 'deepening relationships.' The home groups had been invited to come together to explore how they might engage with this priority.<sup>181</sup>

When [the vicar] said there was 'work to be done' around this question over the coming year, there was a noticeable rise in the anxiety on my table.<sup>182</sup>

My table noted similarities with the desire for community in church and culture, but they never made the connection between the two. They noted how much more they enjoyed their study in the group when it connected with everyday life issues, but it did not make them think about making changes from their normal pattern of study guides. They found it impossible to reflect together on what they thought God might be saying to them about deepening relationships.

To wrap up the meeting, the vicar laid out the time frame for this journey of discernment, inviting folk to share short sentences beginning 'God is...' that reflected their discernment; one or two folk shared. Though the meeting felt measured and quite spacious it still seemed a lot to achieve in 1½ hours. My group offered nothing: 'we haven't done any "God is..." sentences' was all they said.<sup>183</sup>

Towards the end of the meeting, I was struggling to interpret my role as participant-observer. I had taken a limited part in the group discussion; as a participant had I the right to make any observations; or as an observer should I stay silent? In the end, I decided to offer one reflection:

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<sup>179</sup> There were 16 positive comments about discernment, 4 puzzled, 1 negative and one neutral.

<sup>180</sup> In PMC, this is called the long-range plan – it is simpler than it sounds. Over three years, the congregation identifies one thing to focus on each year which they believe will help them to live out their MVS

<sup>181</sup> See section 3.4.1.

<sup>182</sup> FN:21 – 23.11.15. See also Appendix 24(xxxix)

<sup>183</sup> FN:23 – 23.11.15.

I pointed out the period where I had felt there had been some energy in the group – when they talked about letting go of the set material and giving time to the more personal relating of faith and life.<sup>184</sup>

I noticed how they interpreted ‘relationship’ as ‘friendship’ and focused purely on the internal life of their group. Despite raising some questions, the group had not been able to step outside their own perspective to reflect and ask questions about their own practice, or try to discern what God might have been saying to them.<sup>185</sup>

My second experience with CSD took place over a year later. On this evening the question posed to those present was: ‘What in our experience is God up to in calling us to share life?’<sup>186</sup> The meeting used the same structure and reflective approach – starting in small groups but then coming together for the ‘floated conversation’ as there were only sixteen people there including me. I noticed that I stayed in the observational role and offered no input.<sup>187</sup>

I wondered whether this was because I was becoming more attuned to the role of participant-observer or because they were so clearly engaged with reflective practice that I did not feel the need to try to prompt or guide them. Here is one example of their more reflective, questioning and attentive approach:

BBB: Do churches have profiles, cultures, personalities? What does the world need from the church? What sort of church speaks? It’s so different to how it used to be – approachable.

EEEE: it’s a different place since we used to come, more open, more communicating; we’re not preached at, but talked to. Some of the younger people at the Baptism last Sunday, you could see them thinking, ‘what is this?’ it’s not what they expected.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> FN:23 – 23.11.15.

<sup>185</sup> As it turned out, the closed and inward-focused nature of the home groups was one of the key discoveries of the early stages of my research – something which began to germinate for me at this meeting.

<sup>186</sup> FN:156 – 14.03.17.

<sup>187</sup> Appendix 24(xl)

<sup>188</sup> FN:157 – 14.03.17.

On returning to the larger group, they shared the fruits of their brainstorming and then proceeded to follow the different threads in an expansive conversation, paying attention to each other and noting larger emerging themes around what they sensed God was doing with them:

Providing opportunities: to grow, develop, meet new people.  
Teaching us about what he wants.<sup>189</sup>

Many of the key themes about reflection and discernment were present, focusing particularly on their new found understanding of the importance of spending time with people, building partnerships and the two-way flow of hospitality.

VV: I think we are [learning] because I think we are looking for it. “God is working his purpose out”.

FF: Discernment runs through it all. Counter-cultural; taking time for people with no reward and not selling; when it’s not your family, why would you do that?

C: In looking for partners, we are looking to spend time, not clubbing them over the head; orchard, walks, quizzes; so someone like FFFF doesn’t feel he can’t join you even though you’re a faith group because you joined him.

DDDD: I told my neighbours about the quiz and the Christmas service and they came – even though it was in church. They’re coming to the quiz and bringing their neighbours. Spent time – slow, but it’s happening.

NN: Events that are relaxed with lots of people – you recognise faces and then they’re not coming as strangers to church.

DDDD: I didn’t think we could have knocked on their door and asked them to church.

EEEE: You created your own small group outside church.

Curate: There was a vision about people who didn’t come to church inviting their friends.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> FN:157-158 – 14.03.17.

<sup>190</sup> FN:158 – 14.03.17.

They spent time reflecting on connections that were developing and why that was happening but they also asked questions about discerning the gaps in what they were doing – parts of the community that they were not touching or that were passing them by. Their approach was not to plan new forms of action but to ask one another what they thought God was saying or doing. At the end of the meeting, as before the vicar invited them to articulate some sentences about what they thought God was doing. Here are just a few:

God is...

Looking to Team X

Igniting

Helping us look outwards

Asking us to notice where the Holy Spirit is at work

Encouraging us by showing us places where he is at work and challenging us about where we might be working

Opening our eyes to other opportunities

With us now

Here

Showing us the way if we dare to look

Changing us

Faithful to what he promised

Helping visions of 3 or 4 years ago come to pass.<sup>191</sup>

There was a marked difference from the previous CSD. It was noticeable how much more naturally it came to them to start a sentence with 'God is...' Through this practice, they were learning to allow God to be a subject in their conversations, which meant that they could step outside their habits and assumptions and view their world with new eyes. When God becomes understood as an agent in community life rather than an ideology it is possible for imagination to be expanded and culture to change.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> FN:160 – 14.03.17. See also Appendix 24(xli)

<sup>192</sup> I will reflect further on this in chapter 4.



### 3.6.4 Learning to reflect – the practice of discernment

This kind of change did not come about quickly or easily, neither was it embraced across the whole church. Some found the idea of slowing down and trying to ask questions about what they were seeing and doing unconvincing and annoying.

D: This church has always been good at talking and not doing anything and PMC has just made that worse.<sup>193</sup>

NNNNN: There were two trainee curates we had. They did a series of meetings, and as soon as they came, “Oh, we’ve got to do this discernment,” I said, “Right, that’s it, I’m going home.” I said, “I’ve nothing against you, I just can’t.”<sup>194</sup>

Others talked about the struggle they experienced with discernment, showing evidence of the seriousness with which they are taking this journey.

VVV: I always find the presence, I find that so difficult to know what that means.

Int: So when they use this ‘discernment’ word...

VVV: I find that really hard. I find it hard to discern what’s – Oh, I’m just trying to think of an example. I don’t know. There’s some people that... Oh, I don’t know. It’s tricky. How would you know, and what’s...I suppose if I’ve got a big decision, I pray about but in the end I feel like I end up doing what I want- I never know- I find it hard to know what God’s saying.<sup>195</sup>

VVV continued to reflect at some depth about the place of reason and emotion in discernment and how she tended to assume her husband’s more rational approach is the correct one, even though emotion played a greater role in her own experience.

But amidst the struggle, there was also new learning, indicating the scope of the journey that a good number were making with the practice of discernment and the skills of reflection; it had a range of related effects. It generated a growing awareness of God related to more conscious attempts to look for the presence and activity of God.

H: You become more aware of [God] - because you’re looking for it-

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<sup>193</sup> FN:34 – 05.12.15. See also Appendix 24(xlii)

<sup>194</sup> FG6:59 – 04.05.17. See also Appendix 24(xliii)

<sup>195</sup> Interview with VVV:86-87 – 13.06.17. See also Appendix 24(xliv)

FF: Yes. We're more aware, aren't we?

H: Of where God might be working. Before, one never really thought about it. Well, obviously, in a sense you do, but, again, you expect God to be working within the church, don't you? One can see that God isn't limited to the church.<sup>196</sup>

In PMC, discernment is practised communally but is also encouraged personally. The structure and method of CSD is complex and involved and needs quite careful leading from someone who is skilled in reflective practice. The integration of the three strands of the 'Triangle' is a sophisticated process and people continued to find this difficult even if they stressed less about it over time. The personal model is simpler and is akin to the Ignatian '*Examen*.' Reflection and discernment had increasingly become part of people's lives.

K: It takes time; at times you don't live the life you're supposed to, because you're not in that space of listening to God and reflecting. I think there is a lot of reflection. It's not a race. I'd love to see big things happen but it's the small things that make the most impact. They are the sort of things that draw me to God more. But, I also question him a lot more and some of those questions will never be answered, not here. You look at the Bible and question, what are you saying to the church? To me?<sup>197</sup>

### 3.6.5 The impact of the reflective life

For those who have been open to and learnt to practice reflection and discernment, there have been a range of impacts which are not easy to map in a simple causal way, but nevertheless come together in a picture of growing maturity; I mention some key themes now. First, being involved together in seeking to discern God's call generated impetus to relate to the 'other' in new and more relational ways that we have seen earlier in this chapter.

NN: In my mind evangelism is just going out and it doesn't matter who it is, just try and bring mission to them. Whereas, with missional focus, it's seek them out, being discerning.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> See Appendix 24(xlv)

<sup>197</sup> Interview with K:75 – 09.07.17. See also Appendix 24(xlvi)

<sup>198</sup> Interview with NN:17 – 25.05.17. See also Appendix 24(xlvii)

Second, it created a growing sense of responsibility for and ownership of the direction of the church.

RR: [A]t least once a year; the church gets together and discusses this timeline and how far we've got and what we've achieved in the last year and where will we go in the next five years. And so we all have an input into it.<sup>199</sup>

JJ: That's why I wanted to add in "taking responsibility"; that is critical to me, in terms of, if I want to live a Christian life, then it's about me taking that and doing something with it. Both in church and outside church. How that manifests itself can be many different ways but I think, during this PMC process. RRR and I have actually started the Mental Health Team. So if you want something tangible, [this is it].<sup>200</sup>

This sense of responsibility, though experienced as a struggle by some, nevertheless began to touch the life of the church more widely.

Int: What's the impact of moving from a model where you are supporting the vicar to one where you're getting more involved in finding the direction?

NN: I think a lot of people are still having problems with that, a lot of people can't adapt to it. I know from discussions that people don't want to move from the old model.<sup>201</sup>

TT: Instead of there being a desert wind when volunteers are being asked for, people are stepping forward a bit more, and saying, "Well, I can see the value of that. And so I'll be part of it." It's part of the democratisation'.<sup>202</sup>

This in turn developed into a discovery of leadership for people who had never imagined this.

JJ: It has made me view things in a different way. Whether I might have done that without the process I do doubt very much. It has brought things that I wouldn't have necessarily thought of into the life of what we do and how we do things. Personally, I didn't ever think I would take up an aspect of ministry in the life of the church and be leading it. If somebody had told me that five years ago- I would've said, "In your dreams."<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> FG5:24 – 15.11.16.

<sup>200</sup> FG4:29 – 15.09.16

<sup>201</sup> Interview with NN:26-27 – 25.05.17.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with TT:60 – 28.05.17.

<sup>203</sup> FG4:114 – 15.09.16. See also Appendix 24(xlviii)

The growing sense of responsibility along with the experience of democratisation had some interesting impact upon the way in which they engaged with conflict. The 'Reading Team Report' noted that most mediation was done by the vicar and there were not good mechanisms for attending to conflict. There was a tendency to preserve a calm surface, seeking to avoid rather than face conflict, grumbling behind the scenes rather resolving things face to face; there is nothing very unusual about this. My experience of listening to St X reinforced this issue as a continuing part of the picture. Here is a sample of responses when the question of conflict arose:

J: We're good at avoiding it. Good at keeping it low-key.<sup>204</sup>

Int: Does St X do conflict?

L: No, it does walking away.

Int: What, walking away as in, "I don't come anymore"?

L: Yeah.<sup>205</sup>

This passive approach to conflict may in part explain the difficulty I had in doing a FG with the 8.00am congregation. Rather than tell me directly they did not wish to do it, they said nothing or conveyed the impracticality of meeting after the service through a mediator; something that still registered with me.

The 8.00am folk proved difficult to get together – this was partly practical but I think reflected also some complex power and confidence issues.<sup>206</sup>

And they still looked to the clergy to resolve conflict:

RR: And I have said to people if you are not happy for whatever reason, then you need to go and tell [the vicar] or [the curate]. So we can do something about it. It's no good moaning and not do anything about it and then leave. We need to know and I think people find that difficult to do.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> FG4:75 – 23.11.16.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with L:60-61 – 29.06.17 See also Appendix 24(xlix)

<sup>206</sup> FN:94 – 26.06.16.

<sup>207</sup> FG5:61 – 15.11.16.

And the clergy are drawn in to assuaging individual discomfort and offering pastoral solutions.

GGGGG: Yes. I said to [the vicar], “I feel so uncomfortable” [with DitW] and he really apologised to me for it, and then he said to me, “Right. I’m going to suggest something. Take it away, work through it yourself, write bits and bobs down.” That’s what I did.<sup>208</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been attempts to deal with conflict in a more adult to adult way, as in a situation of major conflict between some leaders.

K: The Luke 10 passage [showed us] that you extend peace and you extend peace, but if that peace isn’t returned don’t waste your energy. That has changed, I think both [the vicar] and I, [the vicar] more so. HHH will complain, but bottom line, we’ve changed. So it was decided at that meeting and we had another finance meeting and someone came back and said, “Oh, well HHH was very upset about that,” and [the vicar] went, “Yeah, I expected that” and then moved on. It’s always going to be her first breath. At the moment, it doesn’t impact.

Int: So it’s not being held to ransom by that?

K: No, not now. I think there was, but not now.<sup>209</sup>

Their growing sense of ownership of the church’s mission along with the ability to reflect (note the comments above on Luke 10) is beginning to form their approach to conflict, helping them to find ways of encouraging meeting over differences; this is a mark of growing personal and communal maturity.

However, as a congregation, they lacked systemic approaches for addressing conflict.

J: [Struggle with DitW has] just been the experience of a lot of different groups coming up against a problem in this area. I don’t think there has ever been a strategic approach to tackling it.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> FG4:77 – 23.11.16.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with K:70-72 – 09.07.17.

<sup>210</sup> FG4:71 – 23.11.16.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter narrates a journey of change in a church community and the different ways in which this change was embraced or resisted. Change in itself is not a marker of maturation, but the journey has provided a backdrop in which the hypothesis of this dissertation has been formed and explored: namely that maturation takes place in the context of relationship with the other and that this process happens in the interplay of communal and individual development. This chapter explores data on otherness and spiritual development present in St X's experiences and shapes and illustrates an interpretation of this in the varied ways that participants responded to the other in their midst.

This otherness is in evidence in the congregation's growing public engagement with the other in the wider community and facing up to difference in their midst. It is also demonstrated in engagement with the 'otherness' of the biblical text as well as a greater practical expectation about an encounter with God as an agent in their communal life. Whilst they did not often draw conclusions about their own maturation, there are examples where they are clearly noticing change in themselves.

One person, who described himself as initially very sceptical about PMC ("I thought it was a load of tosh") and who still considered the process too cumbersome, nevertheless made a proposal for what lay behind the features of personal and communal change amongst the congregation.

TT: I do wholeheartedly believe in the process – because I think it has led to a transformation in people's spiritual confidence

Int: Are there other things in this journey that have been formative for you or for others would you say?

TT: Well, I've witnessed other people developing in confidence. "Well, actually we'll

take control of this and we'll run with that. And here's an idea, vicar," which is precisely what [the vicar] wants to happen.<sup>211</sup>

For some the practice of reflection which focuses at once on the self, the community and God, encouraged them to attend to the presence and activity of God in their communities and their own lives and to ask questions about what the life of God in the world is really about and how they might want to engage with this. They were developing both the willingness and the ability to ask questions about the church's practice and about their own life with God.

Some seemed to be developing curiosity about the way in which God was at work in their world and willingness to challenge and be challenged about things that they had previously taken for granted. Others found this journey troubling, opaque or meaningless or seemed either unwilling or unable to engage with the reflective process.

While some seemed threatened and unnerved by new insights, others were able to embrace change and were willing to try something to see if it made sense to them. Indeed this difference of response was noticed by more reflective people and led them to ask questions about whether there might be ways to help people to deal more positively with new perspectives.

K: I think we went through the pains of childbirth, with the first [missional experiment]. So did the MIT<sup>212</sup>; the people that left that team really struggled, so, I think there needs to be something out there for them.

Int: What, you mean they struggled with the process?

K: Yeah, but I think we all did. I think you need more leadership than that, or training to take those sort of roles within the [PMC] process. I think it is quite a lot to take on in the sense of the change.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with TT:13, 25, 51-52, 61 – 28.05.17.

<sup>212</sup> Missional Innovation Team: a small group charged with the responsibility of forming community with non-church people around an agreed missional challenge.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with K:14-15 – 09.07.17.

By contrast:

EE: I wasn't the sort of person that would sit there and go, "I'm not gonna do this."<sup>214</sup>

In the context of this research enquiry, their journey with otherness and difference speaks to the understanding of what spiritual maturity consists in, albeit diversely. This and other questions about maturation arising from this chapter will be explored in the next two chapters.

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<sup>214</sup> Interview with EE:62 – 07.06.17.



# CHAPTER 4: MATURITY THROUGH COMMUNITY – A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## 4.1 From findings to reflection

The purpose of this research was to explore processes of maturation through experiences of communal growth and change. The findings chapter has attended to data that narrates a process of movement and resistance at St X. This chapter reflects on what this may reveal about maturity and maturation. The key features of their story were:

- Journeying outwards from private to public Christian identity based on partnership, relationship and mutual hospitality in a pluralist context; an aspiration articulated in their MVS and VE.<sup>1</sup>
- Changing relationship with the human other – both proximate and distant – and how the practice of DitWorld helped them to foster partnership and attention to the ‘other’ in their communities and shaped the way in which they shared their faith.<sup>2</sup>
- Exploring public Christian life with different “communal vehicles”.<sup>3</sup>
- Engagement with the otherness of Scripture through the practice of DitW, democratising communal reading and privileging encounter over knowledge.<sup>4</sup>
- A relationship with God as ‘other’, discovering more deeply God as agent through reflection and the practice of CSD; encouraging greater lay responsibility and a bolder approach to attending to power and conflict.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See section 3.2.

<sup>2</sup> See section 3.3.

<sup>3</sup> See section 3.4.

<sup>4</sup> See section 3.5.

<sup>5</sup> See section 3.6.

Though this story was told by a good number as positive and developmental, this was not a univocal story or an un-conflicted journey as the previous chapter made clear. Freedom to say 'no' was an important factor in community formation at St X, because it validated the agency of each person without which there can be no authentic journey to personal and communal maturity. I will consider this in more depth in chapter 5, where I will further propose that maturing community happens where difference and disagreement is both confronted and embraced in an atmosphere of enquiry rather than where compliance with a pre-set vision is sought.

In this chapter, I will argue that whilst the maturation of a community is dependent upon individual journeys of change, at the same time it is in the movement of change within the community, where shared stories are told and shared identities formed, that the context is created in which personal change can be expressed, held and sustained. They are two deeply intertwined yet distinct realities, ebbing and flowing from one to the other.

## **4.2 Introduction – overview of the argument**

As introduced in chapter 1, maturity is a concept derived from psychology with varying perspectives around ideas of attachment and differentiation. It has been understood in incremental and developmental ways but fundamentally in individualistic terms – even when articulated within social psychology.

In this context, community can be problematised as a resistance factor for individuation and can be seen either as the 'enemy' in the process of individual development to maturity or an instrument in what is fundamentally an individual quest.

I argue from my findings that community maturation can and should take a significant dialogical and integrative role in personal formation and that personal formation

develops best as it contributes to communal development. Rather than setting individual and communal over against each other in the journey of maturation, I propose their creative interdependence in response to seeing this at work in St X. This is because a key factor in personal and communal formation is the way in which people relate to the 'other' in every context in ways that are socially and spiritually differentiated.<sup>6</sup>

In the course of this chapter, I will show how engaging with the other was a key to understanding change and development at St X and therefore why the interrelationship between personal and communal formation is central to Christian maturity.

Though the focus of this research is the process of maturation, at the outset I needed some provisional definition of the nature of maturity beyond the individualised focus of psychology. In chapter 1, I located this in a kingdom-shaped teleology.<sup>7</sup> The biblical and theological priority of engagement with the other within this theology goes some way towards explaining why relationship with the 'other' speaks into the nature as well as the process of maturation.

There are a number of writers who have recognised the formative importance of community, have practised it – though mostly in structured communities – and have articulated a theological vision, though mostly some years ago.<sup>8</sup> However, there is a yawning gap between the theological ideas and ideals that they present and the practical pragmatism of much contemporary church life.

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<sup>6</sup> The background to these concepts can be found in sections 1.2.3 and 1.2.4.

<sup>7</sup> See section 1.2.4. This has scope for further development, which I will propose in chapter 5. But it was important for this research to give priority to the exploration of process of maturation, which in turn may give rise to further reflection upon its nature

<sup>8</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (1954). *Life Together*. London: SCM, 7-26. Nouwen, H. J. M., McNeill, D. P. and Morrison, D. A. (1982). *Compassion*. London: DLT, 49-85. Williams, R. (2007). *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another*. Boston, MA.: New Seeds Books, 11-35.

Exploring the process of communal maturation allowed me to observe how people engage in practices that seek to integrate theological vision with personal and communal transformation. St X's journey suggested that this happens through an iterative relationship between individuation and communal formation that grows both personal and communal maturity.<sup>9</sup>

The chapter demonstrates the impact of individualisation on formation in this culture, leading to an attenuation of both communal and personal maturation. It shows the centrality of engagement with the other in liberating the journey of maturation and therefore the centrality of communal formation in interdependence with the personal in order for genuine maturation to take place.

### **4.3 The ubiquity of individualism: strengths and weaknesses**

Previous study had alerted me to the power of individualism in contemporary western culture.<sup>10</sup> This FW impressed on me something of the sheer controlling force of individualist perspectives – for good and ill – in a way that only embodied experience can. Attention to writing on maturity and development shows its ubiquity.

#### **4.3.1 The importance of individuation**

In chapter 1, I noted how psycho-spiritual writers argue for the importance of individuation – whether this be Fowler's idea of movement from the commitment to group identity and ideology in stage 3 to a more critically reflective individuation in stage 4 or the

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<sup>9</sup> There was an important thread which relates to the process of communal maturation concerning how members of St X negotiated difference in the stories they told. I will return to this in chapter 5, where I will explain why I reserve it until this point.

<sup>10</sup> Ladd, N. (2003). *God is in Control: The Understanding and Experience of Suffering in a Consumer Culture*. Cambridge: Anglia Ruskin University – Thesis for MA in Pastoral Theology, 10-43.

correlation of spiritual development and attachment through the use of object relations theory.<sup>11</sup>

It is possible to draw on the strengths of Fowler's observations without committing to his structuralist framework, shedding light on the resistance to change at St X. The home groups tended to embrace a single narrative and kept their distance from changes going on in the church. Even where individuals were engaged with change, this had no impact on the group as a whole and the home groups as "communal vehicles" could not foster or support a journey of change.<sup>12</sup> In this context, individuals had to step outside the home group structures to follow new directions and this was hard because it could feel like an act of disloyalty to the group.<sup>13</sup>

That an individual might follow a journey of individuation to move to a new way of being and that this might involve critical reflection about their present experience, seems to be a good way of describing what happened for some at St X. Rather than interpreting this as an abstract or internalised journey corresponding to a stage in life, it seems more accurate to describe this as a journey that an adult may take at many times in response to concrete experience of God and others in their communities and in the wider world. Savage's model of 'Integrative Complexity' is a more helpful way of understanding this experience of disorientation and reorientation as a feature of adult life rather than an age-related stage.<sup>14</sup>

Though I will go on to argue that the role of community in personal formation is neglected in Fowler's thinking, I acknowledge the value of his work for articulating the

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<sup>11</sup> See section 1.2.3.

<sup>12</sup> See section 3.4.2.

<sup>13</sup> See also the cautious discussion about home group change in section 3.4.3.

<sup>14</sup> Savage, *Joseph*, 132. See also Appendix 25.

individual's journey. PMC works with a diffusion model of change which allows people to adopt change at varying paces or not at all.<sup>15</sup> With this approach, responding 'yes' or 'no' is equally an expression of human agency and allows for individuation in a way that may encourage responsibility and ownership. This suggests that the existence of story and counter-story in a community might be a mark of communal maturity in which people confront a journey of change - both embracing and resisting, which does not override their individual agency.

Furthermore, some participants were able to be inquisitive and curious about new possibilities and willing to throw themselves into the experiment. EE talked about how she found herself naturally open to exploring change and new possibilities.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, E spoke about feeling uneasy about the changes, abandoned in relationships and unsupported on the journey.<sup>17</sup>

The insights from object relations are helpful in interpreting these contrasting journeys. K talked about how, from the beginning, she was intrigued to know more about PMC but she recognised that for others it was much more of a struggle. She considered that some people needed more help to come to terms with the new direction and she associated this specifically with mental health concerns.<sup>18</sup>

### **4.3.2 The limits of Individualism**

I have indicated the importance of individuation in understanding the process of challenging group identity at St X and how the ability to have personal agency within the group process is important for healthy development both personally and communally.

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<sup>15</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 36-58. The model for diffusion of innovation is drawn from Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations* (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). New York, NY.: Free Press, 168-218.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with EE:89-93 – 07.06.17.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with E:13-21 – 31.05.17.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with K:10-14 – 09.07.17.

However, there is much evidence that several aspects of communal life were very resistant to change and that individuals could not navigate change in these groups even if they felt drawn to it.<sup>19</sup> But is this necessarily evidence of immaturity?

I have presented a picture of individual spiritual well-being and maturity as it is understood in psycho-spiritual theory and empirical study.<sup>20</sup> However, the lack of genuine engagement with the other who is different in gatherings like the 8.00am service and the home groups, meant that even this individualised vision of growth was far from in evidence.<sup>21</sup>

The 8.00am congregation arrived and left as individuals – even if they sat in family groups or with long-term friends. They were happy so long as they received what they came for, and asked no questions about dwindling numbers. They accepted my presence, but made little attempt to include me and showed minimal interest in why I was there. They had a short moment of managed sociality at the peace but no inclination to take this further; no attempts were made to introduce experiments of meeting a ‘stranger’ in the peace as at 10.30. The 8.00am service was an interesting study of unchallenged group life because the ministers at St X were content to let the service alone and concentrate their efforts on the larger service at 10.30am.<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, by contrast, because experiments in engagement with the other were made at the 10.30am service, it became the focus of complaint for some.<sup>23</sup>

Home Groups were impervious to new members because of the need to protect the safe space. Their aspirations for group life and growth revolved around developing learning

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<sup>19</sup> See Sections 3.3.2. and 3.4.2.

<sup>20</sup> See section 1.2.4.

<sup>21</sup> See sections 3.3.2. and 3.4.2.

<sup>22</sup> See section 3.3.2.

<sup>23</sup> For example, FGs 5 and 6 – see section 3.3.2.

and sustaining faith through therapeutic spiritual support. Members developed a single narrative about themselves in relation to the church and saw the group as their personal lifeline. Even by the standards of individual well-being and maturity presented in chapter 1, this is an attenuated vision.<sup>24</sup>

The form that individualised spirituality took at St X, characterised most clearly in the home groups, was for the other to be the means of developing and sustaining personal spirituality. This can best be described as ‘instrumental individualism’ in which other people become the source or the backdrop for a person’s story of development.<sup>25</sup> The stability of the group’s relationships is central to this which explains why the groups were critical of anything which risked undermining the security of their established community life. This in turn generated an inability to ask questions about what a calling to a maturing life might look like.

Given this, it is possible to suggest why the Holiday Club was totemic for them. It was the one place where they could confidently say they reached out to the community and tried to draw them to faith and to the church – which they knew was a key part of why they exist. The backdrop of the Holiday Club allowed them to maintain the security of their group life whilst giving the illusion that they were a church reaching out to their community. The reality was that the impact of this in the wider community had waned over time and the younger people who had grown up with it expressed its value in terms of strengthening their inner church life rather than offering that life to others. At the same time some acknowledged that they had lost connection with people outside the church over time.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See section 3.4.2.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 473

<sup>26</sup> See section 3.3.2.3.



Most if not all of the psycho-spiritual writing goes no further than an individual understanding of maturity and therefore has no concept of a reciprocal role for community in personal formation.<sup>27</sup> All of these writers recognise the importance of relationship for personal formation; they do not imagine that it takes place in a relational vacuum. However, because they are either hostile to the community as oppressive institutional presence,<sup>28</sup> unaware of its importance<sup>29</sup> or philosophically committed to individualisation,<sup>30</sup> community and relationships tend to become instrumental or transactional in the cause of personal formation. Even those who do recognise the importance of community do not have much to say about how it might actually function creatively in formation.<sup>31</sup>

This is true also of popular writing from my own evangelical tradition. The landscape of literature on formation rarely touches on the role of community. There is a role for 'fellowship' but this is related solely to the help required to enable an individual to fulfil the requirements of discipleship.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See section 1.2.3.

<sup>28</sup> O'Murchu, *Adult Faith*, 1-70.

<sup>29</sup> Watts, *Theology and Psychology*. Watts, F. (ed.). (2007). *Jesus and Psychology*. London: DLT.

<sup>30</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182-183.

<sup>31</sup> Loder, *Logic*, 194-199. Westerhoff, *Children*, 51-105. Wedell, S. A. (2012). *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*. Huntington, IN.: Our Sunday Visitor, 219-235. Collicut, J. (2015). *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation*. London: SCM, 160-176.

<sup>32</sup> Sanders, O. (1962). *On to Maturity*. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott. Packer, J. I. (1973). *Knowing God*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Watson, *Discipleship*. Tozer, A. W. (1987). *The Pursuit of God*. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications. Henrichsen, W. A. (1988). *Disciples are Made not Born: How to help others grow to maturity in Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co.: Cook Communications. Hybels, B. (1990). *Honest to God? Becoming an Authentic Christian*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan. Wimber with Springer, *Dynamics*. Croucher, R. (1993). *Live: More Meditations and Prayers for Christians*. Melbourne: JBCE. Bennett, R. (2001). *Intentional Disciplemaking: Cultivating Spiritual Maturity in the Local Church*. Colorado Springs, CO.: Navpress. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*. Cole, N. (2005). *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass. Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*. Ortberg, J. (2010). *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan. Peterson, E.H. (2010). *Practise Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. Platt, D. (2011). *Radical: Following Jesus no Matter what it Costs*. Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books. Peterson's book is the only exception – and that only to some extent.

The exception to this is social psychology which can help explain why individualism might lead to an attenuated vision of growth and to this I now turn.

## **4.4 The journey with the ‘other’ in community as maturation**

### **4.4.1 Attending to the ‘other’ as the pathway to maturity**

#### **4.4.1.1 Social psychology – a gateway to thinking about communal maturity**

At first glance, it might appear that social psychology is another permutation of individualism. Social psychology describes the ways in which group life shapes and in many cases limits individual responses. Social Identity Theory suggests that groups form around the need on the one hand to categorise and stereotype to simplify the world ‘out there’ and on the other hand to support self-esteem through group identity.<sup>33</sup> This description correlates with Home Group life at St X.

At the same time, social psychology introduces categories for critical thinking about the way in which communities function. Focusing on the constraints of group life upon the individual reveals the tendency towards the maintenance of an unchallenged status quo; a parallel to Fowler’s stage 3. This offers a way of thinking about the life of a community more widely than simply its impact on individuals.

For example, majority perspectives can lead to polarisation and towards what is known as ‘groupthink’.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, group life may foster change and transformation under the impact of ‘minority influence’ as a catalyst for innovation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hewstone, M. and Stroebe, W. (eds.). (2001). *Introduction to Social Psychology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 500-515. Hogg, M. A. and Vaughan, G. M. (2008). *Social Psychology*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 54-55 and 125-135.

<sup>34</sup> Hewstone, and Stroebe, *Introduction*, 426-433.

<sup>35</sup> Hewstone, and Stroebe, *Introduction*, 405-425. Savage, S. and Boyd-MacMillan, E. (2007). *The Human Face of Church: A Social Psychology and Pastoral Theology Resource for Pioneer and Traditional Ministry*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 14-25. Hogg and Vaughan, *Social Psychology*, 255-265.

Moreover, social psychologists argue that the individualistic emphasis of Western culture is grounded in the category of the independent self rather the interdependent self of more collectivist cultures.<sup>36</sup> This relativizes the reification of the individual.

These theories have considerable potential for understanding the communal dimensions of change and development, but very few practical theologians seem to have attended to this.<sup>37</sup> What I propose from my data is that the ways in which groups function, often unconsciously, will have a significant impact on their fruitfulness for personal and communal development. It is this existence on the cusp of the personal and the communal that makes social psychology so resonant for this study.

The key concept is 'differentiation of self'.<sup>38</sup> The spiritual practices in PMC invite relationship with the other who is different and therefore engender the challenge of differentiation as opposed to 'fusing', where we seek to subsume our self and the other as one, or 'distancing' where we avoid relationship with the one who is different.<sup>39</sup> This theory will play a significant role in the unfolding argument about the role and nature of community in fostering personal and communal maturity.

#### **4.4.1.2 Maturity as contextual**

The process of community formation for St X involved a challenge to an instrumental and transactional approach to relationships, demonstrated in their MVS.<sup>40</sup> This is marked by observations of a changing attitude to the 'other' outside the congregation where they

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<sup>36</sup> Hogg and Vaughan, *Social Psychology*, 613-615.

<sup>37</sup> The exceptions are Savage and Boyd-Macmillan, *Human Face*, 3-29 who apply these concepts to Christian ministry and Collicut, *Psychology*, 160-170 who explores them in the context of hospitality.

<sup>38</sup> This concept that plays a significant role in PMC and is articulated as a spiritual practice: 'God-centred self-definition.' See section 1.2.4.

<sup>39</sup> Majerus and Sandage, *Differentiation of Self*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> See section 3.2.1.

began to see people less as targets for the mission and more as people with whom they wanted to build long-term relationship.<sup>41</sup>

One of the shared characteristics of those who were drawn to the PMC process was how positive and excited they were by the growing sense of relationship with their wider community.<sup>42</sup> Something about deepening the connection with their community moved people and inspired the journey of change.

It is easy to assume that individualism is a given and that models of growth which are individualistic simply report the world as it is. This is because individualism is a ‘common moral vocabulary... the “first language”’ that we share.<sup>43</sup> Bellah’s seminal work explored the way in which Americans in the 1980s negotiated the relationship between the private and the public spheres in an individualised culture. Beginning with some brief case studies, he develops metaphors to describe how different people try to live their understanding of this relationship – two of which are uncompromisingly individualist – the manager and the therapist – and two which seek a more public engagement in their lives – the concerned citizen and the movement activist.<sup>44</sup>

Though time has moved on and I am writing on another continent, the essential challenge is the same, particularly concerning the spiritual versions of therapeutic individualism on the one hand and community formation and development on the other, something that contemporary scholars in the UK also explore.<sup>45</sup> This is because the

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<sup>41</sup> See sections 3.3.3. and 3.3.4.

<sup>42</sup> See Section 3.2.2.

<sup>43</sup> Bellah, R. N., Sullivan, W. M., Madsen, R., Swidler, A. and Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Bellah et al, *Habits*, 3-51.

<sup>45</sup> Millbank notes the unyielding force of individualism in modernity in the face of ideologies that have sought to limit it. Millbank, J. (2006). *Liberalism versus Liberalism in Church and Postmodern Culture*. 2/1, 1-27. Pattison explores the impact of the therapeutic in pastoral care. Pattison, *Critique*, 82-105. Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology*, 208-220.

dominant cultural understanding of the self is still individualism. Taylor argues that in a disenchanted world in which God no longer shapes patterns of life and imagination, the porosity of personal openness to the spiritual is replaced by the 'buffered self' – a boundaried and autonomous self, grounded in disengagement; a mind-centred personhood, which is self-referential.<sup>46</sup> Such 'disengagement' may not be 'hospitable to a sense of community'.<sup>47</sup> This is the backdrop for the kind of individualistic formation which sees relationship as the means to individual ends, whether this be of the expressivist or instrumental kind.<sup>48</sup> This can be interpreted in turn as the commodified and transactional nature of relationships,<sup>49</sup> the 'reflexive project'<sup>50</sup> or the moral imperative of individualised authenticity.<sup>51</sup>

But there is something attenuated about this vision of personal formation. The understanding that those who responded to PMC at St X were feeling towards, had to do with the way in which individualised Christians seek an appropriate public expression of faith, a parallel journey to Bellah's 'concerned citizen'.<sup>52</sup> This was driven first by their instinctive sense and then their reflective experience that the way in which people were responding to the Christian gospel was changing and that they needed to adapt to that change.

In an individualised culture, we may want to use people for our own formation but we are deeply aware and suspicious when this flows in the other direction. In this journey,

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<sup>46</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25-43.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473.

<sup>49</sup> Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid Love*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 12-15.

<sup>50</sup> Giddins, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Redwood City, CA.: Stanford University Press, 75.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, C. (1991). *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 25-29. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473-504.

<sup>52</sup> Bellah et al, *Habits*, 20.

St X were able to articulate their discomfort with traditional, instrumental approaches to evangelism and embrace a more pluralist perspective through partnerships.<sup>53</sup> This was carried in their imagination by the metaphor of the church as moated castle morphing into the biblical metaphor of the mustard seed, with the variety of birds nesting in the branches of the tree.<sup>54</sup> This experience is what missiologists try to conceptualise through the idea of ‘post-Christendom’ and may suggest a challenge to the dominance of instrumental individualism in the culture of St X.<sup>55</sup>

Some people at St X gradually grasped the need to adapt the way that they sought to be present in their wider communities. This can be seen in a number of ways: in their approach to church community, in their partnerships with the wider community and in their approach to reflective, contextual learning.<sup>56</sup> It was grounded in their engagement with the ‘otherness’ of Scripture and in growing sense of differentiation in their spirituality.<sup>57</sup> The PMC journey facilitates this because it encourages porosity in relation to God and the other. But because it makes this journey in an individualised culture it has to shape this in the context of human agency in which individuation remains important. I will explore these themes in the remainder of this chapter.

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<sup>53</sup> See sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4.

<sup>54</sup> See section 3.2.1.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, D. (2003). *Mission After Christendom*. London: DLT, 13-68. Murray, S. (2004a). *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 145-250. Murray, S. (2004b). *Church After Christendom*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 67-126. Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 21-38. Frost, M, and Hirsch, A. (2013). *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 33-49. Hirsch, A. (2016). *The Forgotten Ways*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids, MI.: Brazos Press, 41-73.

<sup>56</sup> See sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.6.4.

<sup>57</sup> See section 3.5.3.

#### 4.4.2 Otherness in relationships

The journey that St X made with PMC can be seen as a journey away from instrumental individualism towards the fundamental importance of the subjectivity of the 'other' in the formation and development of both. This suggests a role for community in personal development which is more than simply the backdrop to individual narrative; the articulation of this as a maturing process is the focus of the next sections of this chapter.

Members of St X created new small groups to focus not on learning and therapeutic care, but in which they might be accountable to each other in sharing life more holistically and opening up that life to others whom they did not yet know. The difference can seem subtle unless you have seen it at work. It represents a commitment to take seriously the subjectivity of the other whether this means the way they seek to share the whole of life with group members or to develop a relational Christian identity through partnerships and personal relationships in the wider community. Most of those who opted for the "Connect Groups" were responding to a desire that their faith be appropriately public and engage more holistically with everyday life – inside and outside the church community.<sup>58</sup>

This journey can be understood as resisting the subject/object divide within modernity to embrace a more embodied and mutual approach to personal knowledge. Instead of seeing fellow church members or groups as objects for our development or non-church people as objects for gospel message, members of St X sought a more relational and collaborative approach to the construction of knowledge.<sup>59</sup> This was uncharted territory for

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<sup>58</sup> See sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4.

<sup>59</sup> See sections 3.3.4 and 3.5.3.

an Evangelical church used to the idea that they have the responsibility to impart an unchangeable and unchallengeable message to their communities.<sup>60</sup>

The dualisms of modernity have been well rehearsed; public/private, fact/value, reason/faith, head/heart.<sup>61</sup> Irigaray has extended this critique not simply to the Enlightenment but across the whole of Western thought.<sup>62</sup> She argues that the Western intellectual tradition has a solipsistic concept of self whereby the embodiedness of the other is something to escape, possess or control:<sup>63</sup> a critique addressed to a monosubjective, monosexual, patriarchal and phallographic philosophy and culture'.<sup>64</sup>

Irigaray argues that the male objectification of the world generates the silencing or possessing of the other; the 'reduc[ing] of the feminine to a passive object'.<sup>65</sup> She proposes an inter-subjectivity of embodied encounter in which the distinctiveness of story and personhood of communicating subjects is not violated but respected.<sup>66</sup> This involves attentive effort, which she describes as a movement from 'sensation', which experiences the other as object, to 'perception' which involves the deliberate decision to listen closely. This is a decision to embrace the 'otherness' of persons in embodied relationship.<sup>67</sup>

Because Irigaray does not see this as the fusion of subjects, she proposes the idea of a 'third space' in which there is genuine attention to difference, the creating of a

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<sup>60</sup> Hull, *What Prevents*, 117-143.

<sup>61</sup> Newbiggin, *Gospel*, 14-38. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 234-247 and 368-392. Campbell, C. (2005). *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. York: Alcuin Academics, 138-160 and 183-187. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 57-59 and 83-84.

<sup>62</sup> I have restricted myself in this piece to the constructive works of Irigaray. These are based on a much fuller deconstruction of the Western philosophical tradition, which goes beyond the boundaries of what this project can reasonably assess. See Hamley, I. M. (2019). *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: An Irigarayan Reading of Otherness and Victimization in Judges 19-21*. Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 1-32.

<sup>63</sup> Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 30-39.

<sup>64</sup> Irigaray, L. (1994). *Democracy Begins Between Two*. London: The Athlone Press, 30.

<sup>65</sup> Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 17-29.

<sup>67</sup> Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 40-47.



differentiated 'relationship between two subjects, the aim of which is to leave to the other his or her subjectivity'<sup>68</sup>

Though Irigaray grounds her work in the objectification and silencing of the feminine in western culture, it is also possible to see the impact of the 'monosubjective' in communal relationships in a congregation.<sup>69</sup> She acknowledges the implications of her approach to cultures and ethnicities, a path I want to develop here.<sup>70</sup> This invites attention to other modes of power and silencing, based around positional power, academic expertise, social class, ethnicity – without forgetting gender. It might even extend to attention to the physical space in which dialogue takes place – an idea that Irigaray explores in her critique of Heidegger.<sup>71</sup>

'Third space' is a helpful concept for understanding the democratisation of learning and encounter that St X explored through spiritual practices – especially through DitW and DitWorld – and a good image for the relational epistemology that they were developing. Their approach to 'sharing life' is one in which they were increasingly open to the subjectivity of others both inside and outside the church. To cultivate such an approach to communal attentiveness required character and emotional honesty.

#### **4.4.3 Community formation, differentiation and the journey with God**

At St X, the two practices of DitW and CSD provided the 'heavy lifting' in terms of people's encounter with God.<sup>72</sup> In DitW, St X discovered a communal practice that shaped their identity and vocation over a significant period of time.

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<sup>68</sup> Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 51 and 62-67.

<sup>69</sup> Irigaray, *Democracy*, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Irigaray, L. (1999a). *Entre Orient et Occident*. Paris: Grasset French Text Edition, 156. Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 57.

<sup>71</sup> Irigaray, L. (1999b). *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. (Construct Series). Austin, TX.: University of Texas Press.

<sup>72</sup> See section 3.6.1.

Much Christian teaching carries the assumption that lay people do not have the expertise to read ‘behind’ and ‘within’ the text without expert guidance.<sup>73</sup> The influence of this knowledge-based approach was evident at St X.<sup>74</sup> DitW challenges the idea of knowledge as something we appropriate with the help of an expert and then move on. Rather it encourages long-term engagement in which the act of knowing comes through community participation in the narrative, challenging individualising readings and helping others’ voices to be heard, and in the process subverting and re-drawing the role of the ‘expert’.

The practice involves developing attentive listening; the creating of a ‘third space’ in community – a journey in hospitality – where people learn to attend to each other’s personhood, history, location and culture in the reading of Scripture. Bringing together Taylor and Irigaray at this point, I suggest that this approach to reading challenges the ‘buffered self’ that paradoxically seeks to maintain its autonomy and distinctiveness through fusion and the melting away of human boundaries in a quest for “the answer” or “our way of doing things” that preoccupies the life of so many communities, consciously or subconsciously. “Our answer” becomes the answer of the “expert” or the controlling voice(s) in the community – the monosubjectivity that Irigaray describes. DitW subverts these established practices.

DitW has some family resemblance to the tradition of communal reading that has a long history within Protestantism, with emphases on community over dominant individual, caution about intellect and privileging of doing over knowing.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See section 1.3.3.2.

<sup>74</sup> See section 3.5.2.

<sup>75</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 293-300. Pieterse, L. (2011). *Reading the Bible after Christendom*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 49-66.

Contemporary biblical theologians are also exploring the responsibility of the community's reading as an enactment or performance of the text, which is a genuine encounter with God through God's story. Wright offers the metaphor of a play in which the actors improvise the incomplete fifth act (the era of the church) by careful immersion in the first four (Creation, Fall, Israel and Jesus), a way of reading which he claims offers real if provisional knowledge of the text.<sup>76</sup> Wright's approach is open to accusation of controlling metanarrative, something he tries to counter by suggesting a dialogical and communal approach to interpretation.<sup>77</sup> Brueggemann is more cautious about metanarrative, seeing Scripture as a more contested space in which rather than practice a story that is in some sense already given, we encounter God in a dynamic way within story and counter-story, in many but not just any ways.<sup>78</sup> Brueggemann's Ricoeurian hermeneutics offers both a justification and an approach for reading 'in front of the text' through DitW that takes it beyond the accusation of 'reader response' as some people fear through a discipline of attending to otherness both in people and in the text of Scripture.<sup>79</sup> Long-term attention to a single passage gives time to go beyond initial impressions and responses, raise deep questions, name problems and allow formation shaped by the Scriptural story, mediated both by the voice of the other and practice in everyday life. The fact that this is a communal practice demonstrates the significance of the other for development and maturity.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Wright, N. T. (1992). *The New Testament and the People of God*. London: SCM, 32-36 and 139-142.

<sup>77</sup> Wright, N. T. (2011). *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to read the Bible Today*. New York, NY.: HarperCollins, 26-28.

<sup>78</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1997). *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute and Advocacy*. Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Fortress, 61-89.

<sup>79</sup> Stiver, D. R. (2001). *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*. Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 87-136.

<sup>80</sup> See section 3.5.3.

Chapter 3 set out the diversity of reaction to DitW in relation to learning and revealed this as the most contested and the most diffused practice in the church's journey with PMC.<sup>81</sup> This represented a renegotiation of the way they understood learning that can be articulated as follows:

Is learning to be understood as accumulating knowledge to be ready for life in God's world or as practical wisdom gained by reflecting together with Scripture on the experience of sharing life with God, with one another and our communities?

People at St X were conscious of how their biblical imagination had been formed through their year-long attention to the Luke 10 passage as it both fostered and illuminated their practice of journeying out, seeking 'people of peace, partnership, receiving the hospitality of others and meeting God in the public space.'<sup>82</sup> There was less conscious awareness of the impact of 2 Corinthians 4.1-10 though I saw how it formed in them the ability to see God in the process of letting go things they had valued – like the Holiday Club – as well as embracing the new things they were beginning to embody.<sup>83</sup> Acts 6.1-7 explores the way in which conflict is handled within the community; this seemed less embedded in their practice.<sup>84</sup> What seems clear is that their persistence with the practice of DitW formed their imagination as they lived out their encounter with God within the narrative as Brueggemann suggests.

The communal reading in DitW encouraged people to engage with the 'otherness' of Scripture as a voice with its own life-world – as it came to them in their own reflective listening and through the voice of the proximate other in the congregation. Rather than

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<sup>81</sup> See sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, section 3.6.5.

<sup>83</sup> This is the passage for the second year of the process. See PMC-UK (2019). *Experimenting 1, 2 & 3: Missional Experimenting*. Oxford: Church Mission Society-Partnership for Missional Church, *Dwelling in the Word*.

<sup>84</sup> This is the passage for the third year of the process. See PMC-UK, *Focusing 1, Dwelling in the Word*.

gleaning cognitive knowledge, this approach focused on encounter with the presence of God, which in turn developed their Christian imagination as the story shaped their everyday life in the public world in new ways; this is what they were trying to nurture and develop through the “Connect Groups”.<sup>85</sup>

As with DitW, so also with CSD, people are encouraged to engage with the other, the human, both proximate and more distant, and most importantly the divine other. What this does in practice is to challenge ideological expressions of faith where the voice of God might be silenced through a univocal narrative. Brueggemann argues that the disruptive breakthrough of painful reality was life-giving in ancient Israel and can be so for us, when we lay down our ideologies.<sup>86</sup>

Brueggemann challenges the Western assumption of entitlement to a certain kind of place in the world irrespective of those who are excluded by it;<sup>87</sup> something that was picked up by Schaeffer many years ago when he lamented the choice of the disappointed 60s generation to buy into their parents’ commitment to ‘personal peace and affluence.’<sup>88</sup> At St X, these cultural assumption led to a vision of the Christian life driven by comfort and therapeutic care that we saw in the home groups.

Brueggemann argues that false reality needs to be disrupted by prophetic challenge and that this involves the encounter with God as agent – something that ideology smooths away.<sup>89</sup> The practices that were introduced into community life at St X aimed to disrupt and

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<sup>85</sup> See sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4.

<sup>86</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1986). *Hopeful Imagination*, London: SCM, 46. Brueggemann, W. (1988). *Israel’s Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 55-121.

<sup>87</sup> Brueggemann, *Reality, Grief, Hope*, 1-14.

<sup>88</sup> Schaeffer, F. A. (1976). *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 131-135.

<sup>89</sup> Brueggemann, *Reality, Grief, Hope*, 52-55.

re-shape habitual patterns of personal and communal life.<sup>90</sup> This worked primarily by encouraging genuine expectation and engagement with God as agent – the primary player in the drama. This need for disruption is not unique to St X but something that arises because of the tendency of human systems to default to the status quo – or in terms of organisational theory – the homeostasis of systems.<sup>91</sup> Another way to see this is that our ‘conceptual system’ is ‘fundamentally metaphorical’ and that our ideas, experience and ways of living are formed and shaped by a relatively small number of ubiquitous metaphors.<sup>92</sup> Innovation and change do not ‘come out of nowhere’, but are ‘built using the tools of everyday thought,’ which suggests that worlds are changed as the metaphors are shifted.<sup>93</sup>

This was the disruptive experience that St X engaged with as they renegotiated the metaphors that shaped their understanding of knowledge and learning. It involved movement from a commitment to an ideology of learning which maintained the status quo through passivity and resistance, to a journey of openness to divine word and action in concrete experience, which required differentiation of self that allowed place for the subjectivity of the other – not least to God; this I take as a facet of maturation.

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<sup>90</sup> Duhigg, C. (2013). *The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do and how to change*. London: Random House, 60-93 and 154-181.

<sup>91</sup> Senge, P. M. (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organisation*. London: Random House, 83-88. It would be possible to pursue this analysis using organisational theory, but space does not permit. Reed, *Dynamics of Religion*. Obholzer, A. and Roberts, V. Z. (1994). *The Unconscious at Work: Individual and Organizational Stress in the Human Services*. London: Routledge. Gabriel, Y. (2004). *Myths, Stories and Organisations: Postmodern Narratives for Our Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Senge, P. M., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J. and Flowers, B. S. (2005). *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society*. London: Nicholas Brearley. Douglas, M. (1987). *How Institutions Think*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Long, S. (ed.). (2016). *Transforming Experience in Organisations: A Framework for Organisational Research and Consultancy*. London: Karnac Books. Percy, M. (2017). *The Future Shapes of Anglicanism: Currents, Contours, Charts*. Abingdon: Routledge. 145-159.

<sup>92</sup> Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 3, 57 and 249-250.

<sup>93</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 251.

Furthermore, I suggest that DitW inculcated a more mature relationship with God which moved them from passivity and therapeutic need to partnership. This way of relating is responsive to Scripture from the creation narratives to the call of Abraham.<sup>94</sup> It is expressed in the dialogical relationships that God has with key figures in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as Jesus talks about his disciples as friends to whom he reveals God's intentions and Paul when he describes the Corinthians as God's fellow workers.<sup>95</sup> These are a differentiated relationship which allows room for honesty, doubt, challenge, uncertainty and question within a relationship of trust, manifested most powerfully in the Psalms.<sup>96</sup>

The development of the awareness of God between the two CSD sessions that I attended something over a year apart, demonstrates just how much community practices can contribute to spiritual formation. Participants' ability to articulate the word or action of God, though a mediated experience, suggested relationships to a real and personal presence in ways that were more mature than their previous personal and communal life.<sup>97</sup> There was a greater differentiation in their relationship with God, embracing the otherness of God, and encouraging people to experience God less as constraining and shaming and more as inviting to experiment, risk and the acceptance of failure.

They became more confident about God's presence in the world and less anxious about their performance as evangelists. Practices of reflection and discernment heightened their sense of God's presence and activity in the wider community and encouraged them to take more responsibility for the church's public identity, looking for opportunities for

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<sup>94</sup> Genesis 1.26-28, 2.15-25 and 12.1-3.

<sup>95</sup> Genesis 18.16-33, Exodus 32.7-14, John 15.12-17 and 2 Corinthians 6.1.

<sup>96</sup> In my Masters dissertation, I explored the contrast between the passivity in consumer religion and the bold dialogical relationships with God in the Lament Psalms of the Old Testament (Ladd, *God is in control*).

<sup>97</sup> See section 3.6.3.

partnering with God and their wider community in mission.<sup>98</sup> This helped them to transition from an instrumental approach to evangelism – seeking people to join their activities and courses – to a relational approach of co-operation with God within the wider community and its hospitality. Theologically, this accords with the *Missio Dei*: rather than ‘having’ a mission, the church is caught up ‘in the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father which includes the church’.<sup>99</sup> Not everyone at St X found this appealing, but those who did developed, often quite profoundly, in their spiritual lives, marked not least by a greater willingness to take responsibility, face conflict and embrace questions and uncertainty.<sup>100</sup>

The democratisation of the reading of Scripture at St X combined with the practice of reflective discernment of the presence and activity of God was transformative of personal and communal spirituality marked by differentiation in relation to Scripture. This allowed them to wrestle with its distinctive voice, but in relation to the presence and activity of God, which can be understood in terms of the ‘mediation of the Spirit’.<sup>101</sup> The experience of agency in their spiritual journeys grew through the interplay of communal and personal formation. This is why they created “communal vehicles” to embody and inhabit the changes that were happening to their personal spiritual vision<sup>102</sup> It is to this that I turn in conclusion of this chapter.

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<sup>98</sup> See sections 3.6.4 and 3.6.5.

<sup>99</sup> Moltmann, J. (1977). *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*. London: SCM, 64. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-393. John 17.20-26.

<sup>100</sup> See sections 3.6.4 and 3.6.5.

<sup>101</sup> Cartledge, M. (2015). *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 60-87.

<sup>102</sup> See section 3.4.3.



## 4.5 The interplay of the communal and the personal in the journey of maturity

Many at St X took a personal journey which moved them away from instrumental individualism and into an engagement with the 'other' within and beyond the boundaries of the church; this is reflected in the many stories they told about engagement with the 'other'.<sup>103</sup> The development of the "Connect Groups" reflected their need to find a "communal vehicle" that would support and encourage this developing vision of a public Christian identity, both personally and corporately. I observed that genuine growth and development depended upon the interplay of personal conviction and communal identity. Something needed to happen for an individual to see and embrace new possibilities but in order for that personal change to embed, it needed a communal expression in which to find shared identity and accountability.<sup>104</sup>

In the "Connect Groups", people were creating a new vehicle to foster a new way of being, communally. In small groups, they practiced DitWorld, gathering around the question and experience of what God was doing in everyday life amongst the people that they met. This encouraged the formation of a public Christian identity.

I was puzzled by the fact that, in a church which was clearly on a journey outward towards the 'other' in its community, I could not find evidence of this in the home groups. There were a couple of groups where PMC was making some deep personal impact, but this was not changing the life of the group as a whole. Generally the PMC experiment seemed to be something taking place somewhere else.

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<sup>103</sup> See sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.

<sup>104</sup> See sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4.

As a “communal vehicle”, the home group model was not capable of fostering or supporting a vision of outward movement. Moreover, though they were regular and committed gatherings of people, they did not seem made for the more holistic ‘sharing of life’ that the church was edging itself towards in its new sense of vocation.

The first reason for this was that the home groups were grounded in privatised practice, which focused on the interior life of the group and saw the task in terms of support and the accumulation of learning. Secondly, because the model was individualised, it was predicated upon the support of personal spiritual journeys, despite gathering people together.<sup>105</sup> Some deep personal relationships were formed, but this was not characteristic of the life of the group as a whole. Third, in practice they functioned as bounded sets because they needed this to sustain safety and mutual support.<sup>106</sup> Even if people within them saw a different vision and wanted to follow it, the vehicle systemically would not allow it.

To theorise this I propose a less individualised and less staged approach to Fowler’s ‘stages’ 3 and 4. Fowler sees the security and affirmation provided by peer relationships as something that needs to be left behind on the journey of individuation.<sup>107</sup> The experience at St X with the “Connect Groups” suggested a more complex interplay of the personal and the communal. Certainly group identity and ‘groupthink’ can be restricting and create forms of community that are resistant to new insight; this is what I observed in the established home groups.

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<sup>105</sup> Something I noted in section 4.3.2 as characteristic of evangelical formation.

<sup>106</sup> Note the use of the word ‘home’ even for a group which met in a pub (section 4.3.2.3) and also the way in which D and E were puzzled by the use of the words ‘small group’ instead of the more family and privatised language (FN:21 – 23.11.15).

<sup>107</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182-183.

But communal formation is not necessarily the antithesis to individual authenticity. New personal insight at St X prompted the desire to form community around the new perspective which was both identity-forming and accountable. It is not an 'either-or' but rather an iterative and dynamic journey between the personal and communal which is healthily formative, and this required a fresh "communal vehicle".

"Communal vehicles" can and will become stagnant. Some of the original home groups have received new people for the first time in the face of the challenge of the new "Connect Groups" and perhaps they can reinvent themselves, but they are probably too wedded to individualised and privatised culture to achieve this.<sup>108</sup>

New "communal vehicles" express personal transformation in a way which will help it to be shared and sustained. Without this, new transformative insights will not embed either personally or communally; there is a dynamic interplay between the two which is hard to predict but easy to see when it happens.

St X's journey was made possible through long-term commitment to collective spiritual practices, which allowed people to change and develop together. Those who were tentatively exploring a new vision expressed this through shared communal practices that took them beyond instrumental individualism and into a new vision and practice of life together in the public world.

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<sup>108</sup> Watkins, *Practical Ecclesiology*, 170-175 offers an interesting parallel to this when she shows in her research with 11 Catholic and Anglican groups how outward-focused plans for evangelisation were turned into inward-focused renewal activity due to the force of established and inherited practices in these communities.

## 4.6 Conclusion – maturity as a communal task

Whilst I entered the research journey with a broad hypothesis about ‘otherness’ and the importance of community for understanding and articulating processes of maturation, I had not formed a detailed proposal about this. I did not want to proceed too far down this road before I participated in the research context.

There have been three discoveries on the journey which I consider to be significant. First, I had not anticipated either the strength or the unique impact of individualisation on relationships with the ‘other’ in the research context. In particular, that relationships were rendered instrumental in the narrow quest for individual formation.<sup>109</sup> Individualising perspectives were influential even where aspirations were communal.<sup>110</sup> Their personal journey to maturity was restricted and attenuated by an inability to be open to the other. My discomfort with this drew me to consider the role of community in personal development in a new light.

Second, I recognised that ‘otherness’ as a concept needed considerable nuancing and the interplay of relationship between otherness with all its varied forms and faces was a significant factor in the journey of maturity. That this is a theological task is made clear by the interplay of relationship between the Scriptural narrative, the subjectivity of God and the human other – both proximate and distant; any conceptualisation of maturity will need room for these ‘others’. From the data, it seemed that maturation was generated by the agency of God and that where St X began to open up to this through communal spiritual practices, growth and transformation took place through interdependent relationships.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See sections 4.4.2, 4.4.1.2

<sup>110</sup> See section 3.4.3. See also 5.3.1

<sup>111</sup> See sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3.

Third, what this research has demonstrated is that communities too are invited by God on a journey of maturation and that they can open up to this through communal spiritual practices, in which they learn genuine openness towards the many 'others' in their life. This communal journey, in turn, enables growth in the personal journey of individuals, liberated by their participation in open community for a new kind of relationship with the 'other'.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See section 4.5.

## CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES AND FURTHER RESEARCH

### 5.1 Introduction – the purpose of this chapter

All research takes place in a moment of time. I believe this research reveals important things about Christian maturity but it also opens doors to further possibilities which might be fruitfully explored.

First, I look at the potential impact of communal maturation upon the missional formation of congregations in the PMC process, attending to questions of public identity and working with conflict in the community. This leads to questions about the kind of leadership that is required for a more democratised communal responsibility and development.<sup>1</sup>

I then turn to the implications of this research to PT, specifically what the learning about communal maturity might contribute to theological anthropology and ways of approaching Scripture in practice that are hermeneutically coherent, whilst at the same time making room for the priority of the Scriptural voice.<sup>2</sup>

Third, I give attention to the way this research offers fuller analytical attention to the lived experience of congregations in making judgements about the health and development of congregations within the CofE.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, I review my own learning and development through the perspectives of otherness and communal maturation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See section 5.3

<sup>2</sup> See section 5.4

<sup>3</sup> See section 5.5

<sup>4</sup> See section 5.6

## **5.2 Christian maturity: where this research has arrived at and where it might develop from here**

Maturity is contextual and culturally constructed. In this study, it is grounded in the Christian tradition, but is articulated according to the lived experience of people and in this case of the congregation of St X. Specifically, in this cultural context, it involves challenge to and resistance from instrumental individualism and a focus on relationship with the 'other' as interdependent subject as the environment for personal and communal formation.

The outcome of this research proposes a view of mature development that sees the 'other' not in instrumental terms as an object on which one's subjectivity is played out, but rather in relational terms in which mutual subjectivity is respected and people construct together a way of being and growing in community which is dynamic, provisional and contextual.

For this reason, formation and the path to maturity is an iterative and dynamic relationship between the communal and the personal: genuine individuation challenges communal stagnation and new "communal vehicles" become the means by which people negotiate together a shared and changing reality. A "communal vehicle" like the "Connect Groups" at St X, mediates this formative process through shared practices. It was their journey with these communal practices that I have narrated in chapter 3.

It would be a mistake to suppose that what I am proposing here is a technique for generating maturity as if this could somehow be planned in advance. St X arrived at their idea for "Connect Groups", as they did the other experiments in and with community that they made, as their imaginations were shaped through their immersion in the biblical narrative and through their perseverance with the practice of discernment – taking seriously both their listening to Scripture with and through each other and engagement with God as

an agent in the process. What I am suggesting is the importance of relationship with the other who is different for the shape that genuine formation will take.

I have argued throughout this piece, that St X's narrative was not univocal and their journey has been a messy transformation that has left people with very different perspectives. The process of diffusion of change is inevitably complex, and in the first part of this chapter, I want to look more closely at resistance and how this might be construed as part of the maturing journey or as a form of exclusion from it – an area of learning and future research, I suggest, for PMC. Further themes relate to PT and to CofE practice, concluding with a reflection on my own maturation as an academic practitioner.

### **5.3 Maturity, resistance and missional practice – learning for PMC**

Overall, I see St X's journey as a journey of maturity – positive and conflictual – in which the congregation has begun to develop a public identity and people have grown personally and in community through openness to the other. But there are ways in which the journey might have been facilitated more deeply.

#### **5.3.1 Growing a public Christian identity**

The practices of DitWorld and Hospitality were meant to enable the formation of bi-cultural community for mission, engaging in missional experiments with a mixed group of church and community on an agreed action.<sup>5</sup> In their early experiments,<sup>6</sup> St X had mixed experience of this, but avoided the opportunity of reflecting on these as 'excellent failures'

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<sup>5</sup> 'Bi-cultural' is the word that PMC uses to describe the formation of community between church and wider community. It might be argued that multi-cultural or cross-cultural is a less binary way of articulating this and one that gives room for the possibility that they might be engaging a variety of communities in both church and neighbourhood.

<sup>6</sup> This was in 2013 in year 2 of the facilitated process.



because of the serendipitous appearance of the Community Group, who became their default partners in everything they did.<sup>7</sup> Their partnering focused on one-off events or inviting community people in to share responsibility on church projects. Though these were radical and transformative, it did not lead them to develop further communal experiments.

Nevertheless, the experience of ‘journeying outwards’<sup>8</sup> created a hankering in some for outward-focused community life, which culminated in the “Connect Groups”.<sup>9</sup> In the preparation for these groups, I was surprised that the focus of DitWorld was on personal engagement in the world, rather than forming bi-cultural community – a mark of the all pervasiveness of individualism.<sup>10</sup>

I returned in November 2018 to run a FG with the “Connect Groups” to see what had happened since. They had continued to meet and had grown numerically and their shared life was based around the spiritual practices.<sup>11</sup> They had discerned together some possible missional experiments but they recognised that this had not developed into any missional partnerships.<sup>12</sup>

K: I don’t think our group has got anything like to a partnership phase. We did talk about the next step, particularly for the ambulance station: it would be to try and get to meet with them, to have coffee with them, to hear a bit more about what they do and how best we could assist work with resources. Not really a chaplaincy, but that kind of idea...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See section 3.2.2. The missional theory in PMC encourages risk as necessary for effective innovation. This requires a level of ease with failure that congregations find hard. A ‘failure’ becomes ‘excellent’ when experience is reflected upon and learnt from together. See Keifert, *We are Here Now*, 88-92.

<sup>8</sup> See Section 3.2.1

<sup>9</sup> See sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4

<sup>10</sup> See Section 3.4.3.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically DitW, DitWorld and CSD.

<sup>12</sup> An initiative to bring water and doughnuts to the local ambulance station during the extreme summer heat and one to offer cards and food to those on the edge of the church who were going through hard times. FG9:10-19 – 15.11.18.

<sup>13</sup> FG9:28 – 15.11.18.

Public presence was still very much on the agenda, they were generating ideas and trying to discern and there were hints of things that could turn into communal missional experiments, but it had not happened in the year since I had last been there. Moreover, their practice of DitWorld had remained focused on individual presence in the world.

The other factor that might have developed the public Christian identity of the congregation further was the practice of AtK. The curate commented:

...the vicar and I don't understand AtK very well.<sup>14</sup>

AtK proposes a different approach to witness than they were used to – one in which the sharing of faith involves witnessing to the voice and presence of God in other people of little, different or no apparent faith and giving them the room to do the same.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it requires enough differentiation to be able to speak about faith from one's own perspective.

This cuts to the heart of my interest in maturity. With AtK, engagement with the other presupposes meeting God in others and they in us. DitW with neighbours encouraged the congregation to listen to God more widely than just amongst the congregation; St X was very fearful of doing this. Diffidence about speaking of God in public is common in post-Christian cultures. AtK encourages the finding of appropriate language to open people's imaginations rather than close off conversation.<sup>16</sup> The challenge of AtK is not simply that it invites us onto other people's ground to see what God is doing but also calls us to receive the substance of their spiritual pilgrimage – being changed by the journey with the other without compromising either's integrity.

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<sup>14</sup> FN:108 – 29.09.16.

<sup>15</sup> See Section 3.3.5

<sup>16</sup> These would be an interesting focus for further research. See Cameron et al, *Talking about God*.

In Acts 10, Peter repeatedly receives a disruptive vision before he is willing to take a journey to Cornelius that upturns his cultural norms and leads him to enter a home which, to him, is ritually unclean. Once inside, God again disrupts Peter's expectations as the Spirit falls on the Gentile gathering before he has finished telling them the story. It is a mark of Peter's (eventual) openness to the other that he recognises the presence and activity of God away from familiar paths.<sup>17</sup> The fact that this is so earth shattering for the community of disciples is underlined by the fact that it is explained in full, again, in Acts 11. The ability to meet God in the other whilst sharing your own journey is a differentiated practice; this is a sign of maturity. Being preoccupied with a narrow view of common identity and the cultural symbols that sustain this may be easier, but ultimately it will neither help people see Christ nor help them grow in that encounter – personally and communally.

There is a deep level of differentiation involved in learning to articulate conviction whilst remaining open to the insights of the other. Integrative Complexity (IC) is a helpful model for understanding this.<sup>18</sup> Openness to the other generates unsettling challenges to settled assumptions.<sup>19</sup> But in time, it may lead to complexity and re-integration of new insights.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, it is not contradictory to choose low IC from within a complex perspective – that is to say, that some issues for us are non-negotiable.<sup>21</sup> This is only an immature position when it is used to avoid facing complexity and difference.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Not something he was always able to sustain – Galatians 2.11-14

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 25.

<sup>19</sup> IC3

<sup>20</sup> IC5

<sup>21</sup> IC2

<sup>22</sup> Savage, *Joseph*, 132. See Appendix 25.

### 5.3.2 Conflict, power and maturity

I followed Hopewell in exploring their story as a ‘mythos’ which encapsulated their ‘ethos’. Eschewing his favoured Greek and Roman myths, I chose more accessible folk tales.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Hopewell, I did not feel that one story encapsulated the journey of St X; what I observed was story and counter-story.<sup>24</sup> The existence of story and counter-story at St X might be construed as evidence of a level of maturity in the congregation in its ability to avoid expelling difference from their midst – as happens in many congregations during times of change. The most outspoken critic of PMC, TTT, preached regularly at St X and was very involved in children’s work.<sup>25</sup> Some of the 20s-30s saw themselves as meaningfully involved in new initiatives with young families, despite their scepticism about PMC.<sup>26</sup>

However, there is a question as to whether these stories, rather than interpenetrating one another create separate worlds with a lack of mutual understanding. The discernment process in PMC invites self-emptying to come to a shared sense of the mind of Christ. To this end, the congregation dwells in Philippians 2. There is a danger that self-emptying becomes the exercise of one person’s power over the other.<sup>27</sup> So the discernment process is balanced by the encouragement of public resolution of conflict grounded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year dwelling text.<sup>28</sup> The negotiating of power in the PMC process and its relationship to maturation invites further research.

Though St X made some progress in engaging with conflict, they nevertheless felt that they had no systemic approach to dealing with it. Conflicts over the process tended to

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<sup>23</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 103-118 and 146.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 26.

<sup>25</sup> FN:161 – 02.04.17 and FN:168 – 30.04.17.

<sup>26</sup> FG8:36-40 – 27.06.17.

<sup>27</sup> Different perspectives on this question are debated in Hampson, D. (ed.). (1996). *Swallowing a Fishbone: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. London: SPCK, 1-16, 82-111, 120-124, 169-170.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 6.1-7 - PMC-UK, *Focusing 1, Dwelling in the Word*.

be addressed personally with the vicar or dissipated through the use of humour.<sup>29</sup> There were those who felt on the outside in this. For example some people talked about PMC process being imposed and silencing conflict, others spoke of the alienating experience of the closure of the Holiday Club.<sup>30</sup> Community maturity does not mean everyone agrees with everyone, but that we learn how to move forward together through a genuine engagement with difference.

In Hopewell's categorisations, the story at St X belongs to the 'charismatic' worldview in which the activity of God enables a journey to new places trusting in God's Spirit; faithfulness involves change and risk, looking for fresh encounter with God in the present. The counter-story bears the hallmark of the 'canonic' worldview. The proponents were suspicious of experiential encounter with God through DitW and trusted in more exegetical approaches to Scripture. Their authority was not so much encounter with God as faithfulness to Scripture. They saw themselves as bearing steadfast witness to what had been held dear over the years.<sup>31</sup> New life would be born out of death, something they reflected on in respect of PMC and St X.<sup>32</sup>

PMC understands the process in which community forms and develops healthily as the maintaining of a balance of two polarities: between those who guard the integrity of the tradition, where the focus is on 'belonging' – in this case the holders of the 'canonic' counter-story – and those who are open to the breaking in of a new reality, where the focus is on 'joining' – here, the holders of the 'charismatic' story.<sup>33</sup> At its best, the former

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<sup>29</sup> See sections 3.5.3 and 3.6.4.

<sup>30</sup> FG3:23 & 31 – 07.07.16 and FN:33 – 03.12.15.

<sup>31</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 67-86. The background for this can be found in section 2.3.4.

<sup>32</sup> Speculation about both these outcomes can be found in FG3:21-22 – 07.07.16; FG6:56-60 – 04.05.17.

<sup>33</sup> Rooms, N. and Keifert, P. (2019). *Spiritual Leadership in the Missional Church: A Systems Approach to Leadership as Cultivation*. Grove Leadership Series L38. Cambridge: Grove Books, 20-24.

expresses continuity and commitment; at its worst, cliques and stagnation. The latter at its best expresses welcome to the other and difference; at its worst it is unrooted and lacks stickability.

Whilst the two stories co-existed to some extent at St X, they did not interrelate at a level of mutual learning. My sense is that there is an invitation to greater communal maturity in the way people listen to, engage and disagree with each other's story. The evidence was not there for this in the data, which is why I have placed this material in this chapter as a prompt for further research.

The foil to this communal challenge is a challenge to personal maturity. The PMC journey employs disruptive missional practices; a diffusion process that makes space for human agency in the process of change. However, some individuals became 'stuck' in this process and frustrated by the repeated message that push back is an important mark of diffusion. I am convinced that this is true, but it does not help those who feel abandoned within the process of change.<sup>34</sup> My conclusions about the importance of individuation suggests that more attention might be paid to individual formation within the process in order to enable conversations around difference to be safer and more fruitful.

### **5.3.3 Leadership and maturity**

Over the last thirty years, leadership models have focused increasingly on strategy and management – drawing heavily on business models.<sup>35</sup> In this approach, leadership is understood in terms of 'influence' or 'persuasion'.<sup>36</sup> In the early stages of this leadership

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<sup>34</sup> See sections 3.6.5 and 3.7.

<sup>35</sup> Wright, W. C. (2000). *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 62-103. Hybels, B. (2002). *Courageous Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 29-72. Lawrence, J. (2004). *Growing Leaders: Reflections on Leadership, Life and Jesus*. Oxford: BRF, 192-214.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, *Relational Leadership*, 2. Bonem, M. and Patterson, R. (2005). *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving your Church, Fulfilling your Role and Realizing your Dreams*. San Francisco: CA.: Jossey-Bass, 2. Coutts, J. (2019). *Church Leadership*. SCM Studyguide. London: SCM, 13.

revolution, there were those who wrote in defence of a more pastoral or contemplative model.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, strategic management has remained dominant in the intervening years. The Green Report on senior leadership in the CofE has been foundational for the Church's approach to leadership in recent times and is rightly seen as being shaped by contemporary management principles.<sup>38</sup> Contemporary writing challenges the top-down strategic approach from a number of perspectives; for example: mission, ethics and psychological awareness.<sup>39</sup> None of them move away from the picture of the leader as an individual who influences others: 'this language is not going away any time soon'.<sup>40</sup>

The turn to the subject in modernity generated a move from authority as governance for the common good to leadership as influencing the free choice of individuals. MacIntyre notes the dominant modes of authority in modernity – 'Rich Aesthete, Manager and Therapist' – as different modes of leadership by influence.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Peterson, E. H. (1987). *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1-3. Nouwen, H. (1989). *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. London: DLT, 28-29. Peterson, E. H. (1989). *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 56-60. Stackhouse, I. (2004). *The Gospel-Driven Church: Retrieving Classical Ministries for Contemporary Revivalism*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 220-253.

<sup>38</sup> Green, S. (2014). *Talent Management for Future Leaders and Leadership Development for Bishops and Deans: A New Approach*. Report to the Archbishop's Spending Task Group. Paul, I. (2014). Should Bishops come from a 'Talent Pool'? – <https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/should-bishops-come-from-a-talent-pool/> - accessed 28.07.20.

<sup>39</sup> Cormode, S. (2009). Cultivating Missional Leaders: Mental Models and the Ecology of Vocation. In C. Van Gelder. (ed.). *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 99-119. Kessler, V. and Kretzschmar, L. (2015). Christian leadership as a Trans-Disciplinary Field of Study. [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2074-77052015000100006&script=sci\\_arttext&lng=es](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S2074-77052015000100006&script=sci_arttext&lng=es) – accessed 22.07.20. Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*. London: Vermillion, 19-43.

<sup>40</sup> Higton, M. (2016). Faithful Improvisation or Talent Management? A Conversation between the FAOC Report and the Green Report. In L. Alexander and M. Higton (eds.). *Faithful Improvisation: Theological Reflection on Church Leadership*. London: Church House Publishing, 195.

<sup>41</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 23-31. Coutts, *Church Leadership*, 10-14. Note the connection with Bellah – see section 4.4.2.2.

In contrast to managerial forms of leadership, PMC encourages the accompaniment of the laity in mission, neither controlling the field nor abrogating responsibility. This is a differentiated role, which involves the ability to ‘hold the emotional field’ on a journey of change. Some writers offer this but not from the perspective of community formation.<sup>42</sup>

Though it is not envisaged that this role should fall solely to the clergy, at St X this was the case. The vicar needed more help to explore the nature of his role, especially after the end of the three year process. Here are some of the areas that needed more attention:

- Keeping the church’s focus on its missional vocation: ‘Sharing life with Jesus, one another and our communities’ was a powerful challenge to instrumental individualism; it needed more reflection on the reactive power of individualism, particularly in the way he approached DitWorld in the “Connect Groups” and elsewhere
- The church needed help to develop a systemic approach to attending to conflict, not simply defaulting to the vicar on every occasion.
- In an individualised world, agency remains an important factor in maturation; help was needed to understand and explore this in terms of conflict and individuation.
- Helping the “Connect Groups” to explore the formation of cross-cultural community for mission rather than allowing the missional focus to be individualised.
- Making space to understand the root of differences within the congregation.

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<sup>42</sup> Peterson, *Working*. Nouwen, *In the Name*. It is striking how old these examples are.



These challenges are rooted in the ubiquity of individualism; attention needs to be given to leadership that will foster communal maturity. This is a substantial challenge in the context of busy ongoing ministry in a time of change; thought needs to be given to a responsive contextual approach to key aspects of ministerial leadership – ordained and lay – as they pertain to the maturation of community.

### **5.3.4 Reflective practice and expertise**

Through repeated reflective corporate reading, the aspiration is that the Scriptural narrative begins to form and shape corporate and personal imagination rather than be seen as knowledge to master and move on. Moreover, the fact that attention is paid to listening to the ‘other’ imbues in people the idea of God speaking through the ‘other’ and prepares the way for attentive engagement with the ‘other’ beyond the congregation, which lies at the heart of the journey to public Christian identity. Some people grasped this meta-theory in relation to Luke 10, even though it is never explained, as PMC considers that this journey is best made through reflecting on experience of the practice rather than being told what to expect.

However, the explanation of the practice of DitW includes the phrase, ‘what might you want to ask a biblical scholar if one were passing by?’ Congregants observed that questions raised during DitW are never addressed.<sup>43</sup> The hegemony of reflective practice has been challenged particularly in contexts which tend to over-individualise and decontextualize and in situations of culture change where issues of power are in play.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> FG4:70 – 15.09.16.

<sup>44</sup> Fenwick, T. J. (2003). *Learning through Experience: Troubling Orthodoxies and Intersecting Questions*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 22-34.

Socialisation into dominant paradigms may occur that are not necessarily in the best interests of participants.<sup>45</sup>

Though open to accusations of power and dominance, judicious use of ‘expertise’ might be helpful both for the spiritual leader and for the congregation to deepen their inhabiting of biblical imagination. The danger of a closed and self-referential reading of Scripture might be addressed by connection with the wider wisdom and practice of the universal Church. But where we are trying to give space to unheard and disempowered voices, this involves humility and servanthood on the part of the one offering the insight, and encouragement to the receivers to be critically reflective about what is offered. The practice of DitW gives room for the ‘expert’, but in a changed relationship. No longer controlling the territory by providing the answer, rather they make a contribution to the shared practice of the community. A sign of maturity in the congregation will be the ability to receive this not only as confirmatory or explanatory but also as appropriately critical or suspicious.<sup>46</sup>

This requires an agenda for maturation for all involved.

### **5.3.5 What happens when a leader moves on?**

The question of how this fledging experiment in democratisation might survive a change of minister was raised by members of the congregation.<sup>47</sup> This is no longer speculation because the vicar has moved on and I was asked to join the PCC in May 2019 to facilitate their reflection about the future.

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<sup>45</sup> Welkin, M. (1991). Shaking the Foundations: The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*. Vol. V. 21-42.

<sup>46</sup> Ladd, *Releasing the Voice*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with H:61-63 – 10.07.17.

This will be a tough challenge in a diocese which does not support PMC and is committed to technical and managerial interventions. This study has shown the extent of the challenge in following a maturing and democratising communal journey amidst the powerful cultural resistance of instrumental individualism, not unlike the challenge of the democratising work of the Spirit that Paul envisages in I Corinthians 12 and which brought him into conflict with the patriarchal hierarchy of first century households.<sup>48</sup> Some lay leaders continue to pursue the journey of communal change as they prepare for the appointment of a new minister and in the process are bold enough to challenge the church to sustain the things that it has learnt. This is involving them in listening to different perspectives and to challenging one another to reflect on what they have learnt and not to lose it.

K: I think it just hit me last night that we have the same conversation over and over again, and L doesn't get it because he wasn't part of the [PMC] process and struggles to apply the process now! Fortunately, God has gone before us.<sup>49</sup>

## 5.4 Practical theology

This research has something to offer theology from an empirical standpoint – something that is central to PT. First, the research draws conclusions about the process of maturation; this invites further reflection on the contribution of PT to the understanding of maturity and human personhood. Second, questions of authority and the nature of

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<sup>48</sup> Meeks, W. A. (2003). *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Newhaven, CT.: Yale University, 76-77.

<sup>49</sup> Email conversations with K – 22.11.19, 23.11.19 and 25.11.19.

Scripture have been a central question in PT for many years and have recently emerged again to the forefront of debate; this research can contribute to this debate.

#### 5.4.1 Theological anthropology

The outcome of the research journey in terms of the relationship between communal and personal formation has a contribution to make to theological anthropology, which there is room only to sketch at this point.

Drawing on the work of Dumont and Strathern, anthropological studies in the twentieth century, in comparing non-Western and Western cultures, have offered the idea of the 'dividual' as a way of talking about the interdependent communal self in pre-modern cultures over against independent agency of the individual self in modern Western culture.<sup>50</sup> This is recognised as something of an ethnocentric over-simplification due to the comparison of lived experience in context with Western philosophical concepts of individualism. Nevertheless, the distinction stands if on more of a continuum than a dichotomy, whilst recognising that the 'modern' self can have multiple roles and identities.<sup>51</sup>

Taylor's concepts of 'buffered' and 'porous' offers a critique of the individualist turn in Western culture, an attempt to challenge the inevitability of individualism and offer a different account of the self, which is shaped through interdependence with the other<sup>52</sup> and grounded in shared narrative and history.<sup>53</sup> Smith contends that porosity is the ontological nature of human beings and that 'the reified Western ideal concept of the individual... has

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<sup>50</sup> Dumont, L. (1980). *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*. M. Sainsbury, L. Dumont, B. Gulati (trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Strathern, M. (1988). *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, K. (2012). From Dividual and Individual Selves to Porous Subjects. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23, 53-54.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, From Dividual, 56-60. See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 25-41. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25-54.

<sup>53</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204-225. Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, 20-21.

alienated us moderns from our 'essential species-being'.<sup>54</sup> This research offers a grounded and lived account of the journey towards porosity in an individualised culture, one that could be shaped theologically by the interplay between individual and communal in the New Testament context.<sup>55</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Attending to Scripture in practical theology

One of the tasks before PT at the present time is the debate about the authority of different disciplinary voices.<sup>56</sup> We have already explored the debate between Tillichian correlation and Barthian '*analogia fides*' in which some people have articulated the priority of the theological voice in Barthian Trinitarian terms.<sup>57</sup> There are few Evangelical attempts to do PT systematically. One notable example is Anderson's Christopraxis – grounded in lived experience of the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world which, whilst challenging simplistic Evangelical approaches to Scripture offers no systematic approach to interdisciplinary voices.<sup>58</sup> Root seeks to remedy this, offering the metaphor of hypostasis as a framework for maintaining the distinctiveness of voices in PT.<sup>59</sup>

These are coherent intellectual constructs, but they appear hard to work with in practice where the relationship of voices is complex and interpenetrated. The result is that

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<sup>54</sup> Smith, *From Individual*, 60.

<sup>55</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 547. Meeks, W. (1987). *The Moral World of the First Christians*. London: SPCK, 40-64 and 91-93. Meeks, *Origins*, 23-25. Downing, *Persons in Relation*, 52. Dunson, B. C. (2010). *The Individual and Community in Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Century Pauline Scholarship. Currents in Biblical Research*. 9/1, 70-73. Thompson, J. W. (2011). *Moral Formation according to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 19-41.

<sup>56</sup> Graham, *State of the Art*, 176-177.

<sup>57</sup> Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling*, 61-104. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 79-86. Loder, *Logic*, 34-38.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, R. S. (1989). *Christopraxis: The Ministry and the Humanity of Christ for the World*. In T. Hart and D. Thimell (eds.). *In Christ in our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World; Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*. Exeter: Paternoster Press, 11-31. Root, A. (2014b). *Evangelical Practical Theology*. In K. A. Cahalan and G. S. Mikoski. (eds.). *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 89-92.

<sup>59</sup> Root, *Christopraxis*, 182-185.

the empirical work tends to be done before the theological reflection, which is like an inverted form of applied theology. More specifically, these models do not seem to offer a way of attending to Scripture in practice and therefore cannot offer an answer to the dilemma of the absence of or the fear of controlling use of Scripture in PT and pastoral practice.

The practice of and reflection upon the experience of communal listening to Scripture in this research offers a more dynamic and practice-based approach to the relationship of voices based on the hermeneutics of Brueggemann. I am suggesting that an approach from the direction of biblical hermeneutics might offer a dynamic presentation of the interplay of disciplinary voices which is less static and hierarchical but nevertheless can offer a way of giving Scripture priority.<sup>60</sup> This is not a one-directional application approach, but one which takes seriously the voices of culture in the process of rendering an authoritative, if provisional, Scriptural approach. It is possible to listen seriously to cultural voices without losing touch with the Scriptural voice.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, attending to the unique and strange voice of Scripture may enable us to see that the strangeness we encounter is not necessarily the result of critical scholarship or cultural distance, but may reflect our reluctance to engage with 'God's proper otherness'.<sup>62</sup> Brock's emphasis on engaging with otherness, through immersion in the examples of Augustine and Luther, and his conviction about entering God's story, chime well with the immersive approach to Scripture in PMC and the hermeneutics of Brueggemann that have guided this

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<sup>60</sup> See section 4.4.3.

<sup>61</sup> Watson, F. (1994). *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 221-240.

<sup>62</sup> Brock, B. (2007). *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, xv.

interpretation.<sup>63</sup> Brock's metaphor of 'singing' as the language of encounter is shaped by the worship of the Psalms and would be a good starting point for further reflection on personal and communal attention to Scripture.<sup>64</sup>

## **5.5 The Church of England and congregational studies**

### **5.5.1 Introduction**

In chapter 1, I introduced the CofE's response to the reality of numerical decline and the research base that this response is based upon. In this section, I offer critical reflection on that research base and on the assumptions of what constitutes a growing church and how that may be achieved. I place this reflection in the context of my re-appropriation of Hopewell's contribution to congregational studies; specifically how the application of his narrative approach to studying St X might offer a useful re-framing of the debate about church growth.

### **5.5.2 External and internal reading**

Hopewell's categorisations help to see how the CofE's preferred mode of analysis at the moment is 'mechanistic' – one which relies on external analysis and privileges quantitative measurement – numbers and finance.<sup>65</sup> On this model, it is easy to analyse St X: under the previous vicar the church grew; under the present vicar the church has declined.<sup>66</sup>

But closer attention both to the statistics and to the narrative of the church reveals a different picture. People in the congregation are aware of numerical decline, but they have

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<sup>63</sup> Brock, *Singing*, xix.

<sup>64</sup> Brock, *Singing*, 241-363.

<sup>65</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 23-26. See section 1.2.5.

<sup>66</sup> The ministry of the previous vicar was included in a Grove booklet on examples of moderate church growth in the diocese. See Howe, A. (2005). *Leading Ordinary Churches into Growth*. Grove Evangelism Series. Cambridge: Grove Books.

a nuanced approach to the reasons for this; not even the most sceptical place it all at the door of PMC. They also tell stories of new people coming. They articulate changes in terms of social and cultural factors or in terms of the impact of different vicars.

FF: But when Vicar 2 left and the vicar came, I think that there were quite a lot of those that were already moving on. Because the children had become teens... or [gone] to college and university. And so the thing that seemed to have linked that person to the church, was removed, and unfortunately quite a lot left as a result of it.<sup>67</sup>

The statistics show a relatively small decline in adult attendance over ten years, which has begun to stabilise. The sharp fall has been in the attendance of children – something that is accurately observed by the congregation and connects to the huge investment of time and effort put into this by vicar 2 and the corresponding falling away of a ministry so hugely dependent upon him when he left. At the same time, there has been a considerable increase in non-church families seeking baptism for their children, suggesting a growing connection with the wider community.<sup>68</sup>

Relying on external analysis alone would lead the diocese to seek to recapture the experience under vicar 2; I have heard this exact rationale expressed. In reality, it is more likely to replay the same see-saw effect because of the clerical dependency of the model and the failure to establish local responsibility and ownership. This will not deliver the ‘seismic revolution in the culture of the church’ called for in the church’s recent report on lay discipleship and vocation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with FF:70 – 27.06.17.

<sup>68</sup> See Appendix 27. See especially graphs 1 and 3.

<sup>69</sup> Archbishop’s Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 2



### 5.5.3 Numerical growth and maturity

Christian maturity is not defined in terms of numerical growth, but that does not make it irrelevant; the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles, sees numerical growth as a marker of the impact of the gospel, especially as this is expressed through the developing life of the community.<sup>70</sup> PMC research in the USA suggests a 17% growth in worship attendance in congregations that have journeyed with the process for five years.<sup>71</sup> Despite some anecdotal evidence of new people coming, St X has not yet seen this level of numerical growth.

Anxiety about decline in the CofE has led to a top-down interventionist approach following a gap model of change: identify the problem, set the strategy, implement the change; there is long-term evidence of the ineffectiveness of this approach.<sup>72</sup>

Top-down strategy does not give congregations the chance to participate in the discernment of direction and therefore perpetuates passivity. Moreover, it encourages a technical and instrumental approach to mission, which minimises the challenge to change and reflection on the missional journey. Rather than encouraging openness to the other, it seeks to remake the other in our image. Setting God's People Free (SGPF) begins by quoting Paul's aspiration for congregational maturity and how he makes this the goal of all his hard work<sup>73</sup>; it is hard to see how the CofE's strategy will foster this.<sup>74</sup>

Focus on external analysis of numerical decline is blinding the Church both to wider questions about growth as maturation and to the contribution of local lay Christians to the

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<sup>70</sup> Newbigin, *Gospel*, 222-233.

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix 4: note sections highlighted in yellow.

<sup>72</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Colossians 1.28-29.

<sup>74</sup> The report notes the number of reports of the last eighty years with the aim to 'liberate' the laity. It puts the failure of these down to lack of funding, resourcing, goals and outcomes. Even by its own managerial standards, it is hard to see that the 2017 report is fairing much better.

solution for the Church's malaise.<sup>75</sup> Blunt statistical instruments need to be supported and qualified by local contextual analysis and attention to the narrative of the congregation. This is particularly relevant when there is a change in vicar, a journey that St X are entering on at this time. SGPF urged that attention be paid to the lay voice in the church; researching the narrative of the church would be one way to be faithful to this intention.<sup>76</sup> The discipline of Hopewell's approach to the narrative and idiom of congregations offers effective methodology for this task.

The research at St X has developed an understanding of how a community matures through spiritual practices that encourage it to engage with the other and form a public identity in mission. The implications of this research is that giving time to form mature community will create lay identity and responsibility in mission which can offer a firmer foundation for ongoing commitment to numerical growth than depending on the ebb and flow of clergy.

## **5.6 My development as an academic practitioner – a maturing journey**

PT is a reflexive process; ethnography too is a reflexive process in which the researcher also plays a role. This suggests that both the research and the theological reflection should involve change on the part of the researcher. In this section, I reflect on my own journey from the perspective of maturation, using a shape proposed by Slee.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 88-100.

<sup>76</sup> Keifert, The Return of the Congregation, 13-26. Sadly the process for the appointment of a new vicar at St X has systematically silenced and passed over the voice of the laity.

<sup>77</sup> Slee, N. (2015). Research as Transformative Practice. Paper given to the DPT Summer School. Cardiff: Cardiff University.

### 5.6.1 Desire

Desire to study, to write, to explore how church fosters or inhibits growth guided me to the DPT. I have always valued study, but have found it hard without a structure; the DPT gave me that. Accompanying St X grew a desire to narrate the story of a community that I came to value after sharing life with them for so long. The desire to write became both telling their story authentically and offering something from my reflection and research to a wider readership. Their journey of maturity interwove with my own, both in my developing academic identity and in exploring PMC with them as a way of being authentic in mission. My journey as a person, as an academic and a practitioner connected with my journey as a researcher and ethnographer. Feelings about being a researcher, being immersed in their story, exploring PMC, ebbed and flowed as I wrestled with maturity in myself, as they did in their journey. There is a vulnerability about handling one's own feelings in the context of research and the 'subjectivity of the observer cannot but "influence the course of the observed event..." But '[R]ecognising subjectivity in social observation [is] a means to a more important end – achieving significant forms of objectivity'.<sup>78</sup> I would not choose the word 'objectivity' but reflexivity certainly helped me to attend to the breadth of participants' stories whilst recognising the necessity and appropriateness of my own interpretation.

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<sup>78</sup> Behar, R. (1996). *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 6.

## 5.6.2 Discipline

‘Discipline sustains desire, desire enlivens discipline’.<sup>79</sup> The DPT has been part of my life since 2011, influencing everything, even down to when we took holidays. Desire alone does not sustain this.

The discipline of academic study though invigorating was extremely challenging and in the process of learning new theory and new ways of thinking and writing, established patterns were unsettled – so much so that I took a year out; it was here that desire drew me back into the discipline and helped re-shape my academic identity.<sup>80</sup>

The Community of Practice in the DPT was a discipline and a joy. Sometimes it is hard to sustain energy in a long day school or offer input to others when you are preoccupied with your own work. But engaging with others and their difference was both a challenge and a support – not least in learning to offer provisional understanding and receive generous critique. My personality is one that is cautious about revealing what I think until I feel ready.<sup>81</sup> Combined with my evangelical defensiveness, this made the provisional nature of academic research very unnerving and stressful.<sup>82</sup> The journey towards openness to the other and risking my unformed views was one of maturation for me.

The discipline of listening carefully to voices I was not drawn to in the research context or forcing my introvert self to yet another coffee time after the service – these are formative experiences over the long haul. The sheer tedium of the research journey is part of its gift – because this is about meeting the extraordinary in the ordinary.

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<sup>79</sup> Slee, Research.

<sup>80</sup> See section 1.5.

<sup>81</sup> I am a ‘5’ on the Enneagram – see Rohr, R. and Ebert, A. (2014). *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*. New York, NY.: Crossroad Publishing, 119.

<sup>82</sup> See section 1.5.

The discipline of keeping records, writing field notes, research logs, journals and supervision notes eventually became a structured habit and my anchors in the process. There was a constant tension between FW, writing field notes, reading widely and analysing – especially in the midst of a full-time job. I never felt that I got the balance right on this.

Research skills development was a constant challenge, some mundane, some, like the speed reading seminar, revelatory. Overcoming my technophobia to teach myself NVivo proved a vital decision for the analysis.<sup>83</sup> It was hard to access skills training as a part-time student; I wish I had managed more, earlier.

### **5.6.3 Testing**

Scripture consistently speaks of testing as central to growth and maturity.<sup>84</sup> The DPT challenged deeply my academic and theological identity bringing me to a place where my thinking more closely matched my life and ministry. I am extremely grateful for this, but it was a gruelling experience. Similar experiences of darkness and light, fog and clear skies, confusion and clarity marked the whole journey. Making decisions about methodology, theory, FW, analysis were sometimes intuitive moments of illumination; more often they were a process of struggle and hard work. A number of times I felt I had conquered academic anxiety only to find it return in a new guise. I was still unprepared for the agony of writing the thesis. Times of flow juxtaposed with times of helpless stagnation – times when I could hardly imagine writing another word.

These moments became a focus for prayer and I learnt that I had to accept the overwhelming darkness and try to release the anxiety it generated to God. These experiences threw me back upon my desire to complete this project. Sometimes it was a

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<sup>83</sup> See section 2.3.4.

<sup>84</sup> Romans 5.3-5. James 1.2-4. 1 Peter 1.3-9.

matter of stubbornness that I was not going to let this defeat me; at others I found myself motivated by my desire to be faithful to the generous gift of their time and their hearts that St X had given me as well as the deep sense that there was something important here that I could communicate more widely.

#### **5.6.4 Finding form – what endures?**

Throughout the process, the struggles, darkness and anxieties yielded to moments of seeing and understanding – whether this be in FW, analysis or writing. It was a wonderful experience watching the interpretative themes take shape or seeing how key theoretical ideas illuminated the community's journey.

The culmination of this for me was the realisation that these transformative practices were enabling people to grow beyond the 'buffered self' of expressive and instrumental individualism into a porosity of self and community that was able to allow the other to enter and shape their world through partnership rather than control, including a partnership with God who became present to them in and through others.

The recognition of the depth of the challenge in this is overwhelming.<sup>85</sup> I feel the challenge to write about this journey and offer it more widely even while I recognise this story will be controversial and counter-cultural in contemporary church culture; I fear coping with people's responses. I also feel the challenge to my own ministerial practice as I am now involved in delivering PMC in another diocese and leading the process in my own church.

As St X has clarified its own missional vocation, so my own vocation in missional accompaniment has sharpened. As St X has been on a journey of personal and

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<sup>85</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.

communal maturity, so I believe my own journey has been one of development where I know with greater clarity how God is calling me in the latter years of ministry; the DPT has been a very significant part of this journey.

The journey with my DPT cohort and my research context has consistently and relentlessly drawn me out from my private and protected world to engage with the other who is different. Over time, this journey outwards has become less fearful to me as I now see it as transformative and life-giving. St X too have found the joy and the strain of the outward journey towards the other; for both of us this has been a maturing journey which we could not have made without the interdependence of communities

## CONCLUSION

‘You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian’<sup>1</sup>

‘People come to church for many reasons; they stay because they find friends’<sup>2</sup>

In a culture of expressive and instrumental individualism the rationale for being part of a church community is the offer of an intimate and private space in which to belong – relationships that support and affirm the individual’s identity without trespassing too far on their autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

The Journey that St X made with PMC paints a picture of what growing in maturity looks like in such a culture. Specifically, it reveals the communal nature of the maturation process as people learn to relate to the other not as objects in their own quest for fulfilment or authenticity but as equal subjects in a co-creative journey of mission with God, with all the messy negotiation that this implies.

In their journey, they were beginning to learn the importance of ‘differentiation of self’, enabling them to become more confident about their own contributions but more open to the many ‘others’ – human and divine – with whom they formed relationships. That the human others included partners in the community as well as the church was one of the discoveries that inspired them the most. But they also learnt to be open to God as an agent in practice, not just in theory.

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<sup>1</sup> Anon.

<sup>2</sup> Wimber, J. (1984). *Signs and Wonders*, Part 1. Conference Talks at Methodist Central Hall, London.

<sup>3</sup> Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 1-36.



The journey demonstrated the need for shared practices in which to negotiate change of this nature, because it is through practices that the interplay between individuation and communal formation takes place.

The thesis of this research is that church communities have a call from God to maturity as much as persons – and that these callings are interdependent; what is presented here gives a picture of the way in which this may happen. Furthermore, there is evidence here about the contours of that maturation in terms of relationship to the other. This invites further research and theological articulation.

There have been two significant aspects of the methodology of this research. First, I have sought to liberate the voices of lay people within the church – something the church talks a lot about but does little in practice. It might be argued that all good ethnographical research should do this. However, whilst I take full cognisance of the fact that this is my interpretation of their journey, I have sought to allow their voices to shape the articulation of the journey and not simply be the data for my theorising.

Second, this is a PT dissertation and as such is committed to working from practice – nothing exceptional in this. However, I have sought to make this theological ‘through and through’ in the belief that the unique contribution of PT to social research should be its theological undergirding and the ability to find a language for ‘talking about God in practice’.<sup>4</sup>

There have been many endings during this research journey; leaving the research context, accepting an end to analysing, and bringing this writing to an end. It has been an

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<sup>4</sup> Cameron et al., *Talking about God*, 7-17.

extraordinary journey of change both for St X and myself, yet it feels like scratching the surface – just a moment in time.

I have learnt that it is creative to reach conclusions which are substantial enough to base one's life upon, yet still provisional – what Ignatian spiritual guides call, “good for now.” This may not seem particularly profound, but for someone who was formed in a tradition that had to be right at all times, it has been liberating. There are insights here to live by about communal maturation that can be transformative for people who find themselves enmeshed in an individualised culture yet longing for something that is more deeply connected and interrelated. This is a maturing journey for this time; a journey that St X have walked and one that I am walking in a new way, in part because of them; for that I am deeply grateful.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 – Marks of maturity

Journeying – open to God (including hard questions)

Belonging – loving one another

Serving – offering our gifts and time

Giving – habits of generosity

Blessing – being salt and light

In practice, the first four focused on church life. The fifth mark was more outward focused, but the fact that the marks as a whole do not raise questions about individualism meant that people were left with an individualised stance both towards the church and the world.

## Appendix 2 – “Alongside” communities

Mutual Discipleship

Colossians 3.16	
Honesty	Genuineness
Biblical Relationship*	
Knowing	Understanding

\*Biblical Relationship – foundations of a discipling community

2 Corinthians 1.4     Accepting

2 Corinthians 1.5-6     Vulnerable

Matthew 7.1-6     Non-judgemental

Galatians 6.1-6     Non-patronising

James 3.13-18     Teachable

Though there is an implicit invitation to attention to the other in this structure, the challenge of individualism is not named. Moreover, Appendices 1 and 2 do not offer any practices that might help people to embody the discipleship qualities that are named. Furthermore, the lack of focus on the ‘distant other’ (the stranger/neighbour) led to inward looking discipleship focused on the congregation. Neither of these models were well prepared to deal with the power of therapeutic and instrumental individualism.

## Appendix 3 – Partnership for Missional Church

Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) is a three-year process (with an optional fourth year for consolidation). Churches participate in mission through partnership with people in their wider community in a shared commitment to transformation. It is based upon the theological premises that God is already present and active in the world (*Missio Dei*) and that welcoming the stranger is fundamental to making that connection.<sup>1</sup>

It has been developed by Patrick Keifert a Lutheran minister, practical theologian and professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary in St Paul's Minnesota. In the 1990s, Keifert established the Church Innovations Institute, 'a church related non-profit, seeking to "innovate your church's capacities to be missional."' <sup>2</sup>

PMC is run by this organisation and has become established in the USA, South Africa, Scandinavia and, most recently, in the UK. Five years ago, PMC-UK was set up, based with the Church Mission Society in Oxford, to run PMC in this country. Church Innovations runs a thorough and ongoing research base for PMC in the USA; I aim to contribute to this for the UK.

PMC is not a programme or a consultancy, but rather a journey of spiritual formation in which congregations learn to embody a practice of mission as they partner with God, with each other and with their communities, through the inculcation of a number of 'disruptive missional practices' – all of which involve attention to the other.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 57-93.

<sup>2</sup> Luther Seminary Faculty, St Paul, MN.

[http://www.luthersem.edu/faculty/fac\\_home.aspx?contact\\_id=pkeifert](http://www.luthersem.edu/faculty/fac_home.aspx?contact_id=pkeifert) – accessed 02.07.15.

<sup>3</sup> Keifert, P. and Rooms, N. (2014). *Forming a Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations*. Grove Pastoral Series 139. Cambridge: Grove Books, 20-24.

The first year involves an in-depth process of listening – to discover partners in wider community. Discovering God as primary partner in mission, through the practice of ‘dwelling in the word’, where people listen to God’s word through each other, is the foundation.<sup>4</sup> It also involves listening to the church’s history, through a time-line event, and to one another and to the wider community through a series of structured and semi-structured interviews.

Through this careful practice of listening, the church identifies an ‘adaptive missional challenge’, employing the practice of ‘communal spiritual discernment.’ An adaptive challenge is one that is faced when we do not know the answer or even the questions for the context we find ourselves in. Rather than taking a ‘technical’ approach, applying a known solution to a problem, it recognises that the way forward involves fundamental personal and communal change.<sup>5</sup> This is rooted in the recognition that, increasingly in a post-Christendom context, the church’s traditional ‘answers’ no longer connect with society.<sup>6</sup>

The second phase focuses on experimentation with the adaptive missional challenge. Through the spiritual practices of ‘dwelling in the world’ and ‘hospitality’, the congregation seeks ‘people of peace’ in the wider community who identify with the missional challenge and become partners who want to work with them. The aim is to form a ‘bridge community’ with congregation and community in missional experimentation. The focus is less on the project and more on building the capacity to form community in God’s mission with those beyond the church. The assumption is that innovation involves trial and error and failures upon which people reflect and learn from. This is based on the theory that change is not a linear or deficit-based process, but rather a process of ‘diffusion of innovation’ in which

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling*, 15-18.

<sup>5</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, 69-100.

<sup>6</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 21-38.

awareness of missional possibilities grow into habitual practice through shared experimentation.<sup>7</sup> These experiments in shared action with the wider community walk a tightrope between the extremes of instrumental evangelism on the one hand and social programmes on the other. It does this by inviting partners on a spiritual journey through sharing in the practices of 'Dwelling in the Word' and 'Announcing the Kingdom' (noticing and naming the activity of God with partners).

Out of this period of experimentation, it is suggested that significant change takes place in the congregation and in the way it both sees and relates to its community. In the third phase, through the spiritual practice of 'focus for missional embodiment', the missional experimentation from phase 2 is embodied by the church in terms of its identity and vocation. The expectation is that the church has begun to transform from a community sponsoring endless activity to be done to or for people to get them into church. Now it is beginning to embody a way of life grounded in formative spiritual practices; a way of being missional in partnership with God and with others in the wider community.

It is an action-reflection model which involves the intentional practice and development of reflection and reflexivity for clergy and laity alike as the church community engages together on the journey.

Whilst at St John's College, Nottingham, I was responsible for ensuring the involvement of ordinands in the PMC process by placing them for two years of their training in one of the participating churches. This gave me opportunity to observe the impact of PMC on trainee ministers and influenced my practice and theorising as a theological educator at the time.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 1-38.

<sup>8</sup> Ladd, N. M. (2014a). Theological Education at the Crossroads. *Dialog*. 53/4, 356-364.

## Appendix 4

### Partnership for Missional Church – A Proposal for Parishes and Benefices

#### **Introduction: Culture change towards mission in a changing culture**

For several years now most of our provision in Diocesan training and development has focused on individuals. Clergy and lay leaders have been equipped, either for taking up ministry roles or to reflect upon their leadership and return to their context. While engaging individual leaders has produced positive fruit in a number of ways and continues to do so, it is fair to say that this approach has not delivered large-scale culture change in congregations towards an outward-looking missional orientation. The background to this is that for the past 30-40 years our Western culture has been undergoing a significant change (or “paradigm shift” as it is known by some) which is not as yet complete. Every organization faces the challenge of adapting to this changing culture (e.g. Woolworths who didn’t and M&S who may have) and our churches are no exception. The question is then how can the culture of a Christian community, a congregation, be directly engaged with in ways which transform that culture – and, at the same time make it a significant player in its own community and context? One possibility which has been around in the USA for 20+ years and more recently in South Africa and is at present being piloted in Somerset in this country is something called **Partnership for Missional Church** (PMC). This paper outlines what is involved in the PMC process and commends it for your consideration. The Diocesan Bishop’s Council has agreed to funding a pilot project, in conjunction with other interested partners, which at this time are Leicester Diocese and St. John’s College.

#### **What does it involve?**

PMC has been developed by the organization *Church Innovations*, (CI), headed up by U.S. theologian Pat Keifert and others which is based in USA but works internationally. Over the last 30+ years it has developed an extended and comprehensive version of what we might call ‘mission audit’ for deep and lasting congregational change. See [www.churchinnovations.org](http://www.churchinnovations.org)

Another pilot process (the first in UK) ran with 12 congregations in Somerset between Anglicans and Baptists led by Bath & Wells Diocesan Missioner, Roger Medley.

[http://togetherinmission.co.uk/?page\\_id=61](http://togetherinmission.co.uk/?page_id=61)

Theologically the process (those involved insist it is an organic process and not a programme) sits in a ‘missional church’ frame and connects with the Gospel and Our Culture network that grew out the work of Lesslie Newbigin. There are several things to note about its emphases;

- Works with the sense that God is active and at work in both church and world and that we need to discover ‘God’s preferred future’ for a given church – in this sense it ties up directly with our vision *Joining together in the transforming mission of God*
- Is a learning process for everyone which returns theology to its original *locus* in the congregation (See Keifert’s *Testing The Spirits*, Eerdmans, 2009, or Jane Williams, *Church Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011) while involving the theological “academy” – in our case St. John’s
- Empowers widespread participation & church members as disciples
- Is not prescriptive or about quick fixes but addresses fundamental orientations, attitudes and approaches to discipleship and community transformation
- Every church discovers a different outcome
- Is a patient, long-term, deep, ‘faith-filled’ and spiritual process
- It therefore touches in significant ways on all of *Living Worship, Growing Disciples and Seeking Justice*.

In USA (where around 95% of all congregations have less than 50 members!) research shows that congregations who stay in the process (there is an attrition rate as it isn't a 'quick fix') grow in worship attendance, conversions, lay leadership base, and in partnership with constituencies outside the church (see later figures). Many of the congregations involved have been Episcopalian – with some whole dioceses getting involved.

### **Overview of the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) Process:**

Partnership for Missional Church is a three to four year journey that engages congregations in practices that help them discern what God is up to in their place, what is referred to as “God’s preferred and promised future”. The work is undertaken with clergy and different levels of lay leadership to guide and assess the process. The partners developed at all levels enter into a journey that begins with conversations that will ultimately bring together clusters of around 12-15 congregations in a three year journey, with a possibility of a 4th year of learning and reinforcing the change. The PMC cluster meets for three times per year for three years, called Phases. Each year/phase contains three, two day events where the ministers meet together with the delivery team for a day (Friday) and then the clergy and congregational participants meet together on a Friday evening and Saturday. Each year/phase also has a different focus;

#### **Phase One: Discovery**

This could best be described as a time of learning to listen. We listen to Scripture, our congregations and our communities – and for the leading of the Spirit of God in allowing ourselves to be shaped and formed for sending into the world. We also learn to listen to our partners, those who help us understand ourselves and the context in which we live and work. A number of inventories, self-studies and evaluations are used to take the pulse of each congregation or group, which will aid in the second phase of the project. The data is collected locally and interpreted by a ‘reading team’ (and here the academy, St. John’s College is involved in developing and reflecting upon this data).

#### **Phase Two: Experimenting**

The discoveries of the first year’s work are translated into experiments.

After learning about who we are, where we live and who we are sent to, the next logical step is to take action. The information uncovered during the first step will hopefully lead us into developing experiments for innovating missional transformation. This involves more risk taking, and while not every risk will be rewarded, there is as much to learn from the mistakes as from the successes.

#### **Phase Three: Visioning for Embodiment**

In phase 3 congregations will begin moving toward living in God’s preferred and promised future. After discovering and learning from the successes and failures of the experimenting phase, churches and their leaders will develop their own plans for congregational transformation, and will better know how to focus attention and energy toward attaining those goals.

#### **Phase Four: Learning and Growing (Optional)**

All through the process clergy and lay leaders have been involved in developing spiritual disciplines and recognize ways to grow leadership within their congregations. Many congregations realize at the end of Phase Three that they were just at the beginning of significant and long lasting change. There are many ways for them to move forward and continue the journey of learning, experimenting, planning and effectively executing their plans. Some clusters elect to continue using Church Innovation



services for a fourth year of learning and growing and reinforcing the changes and the new practices of spiritual discernment.

### **What happens for a given congregation?**

The PMC process is designed to help congregations grow in many ways by developing:

- a God-centred, biblical vision for mission
- a greater sense of God's activity in their congregation and community
- ownership of the mission of the congregation by more members
- members committed to and capable of making disciples
- both a vision for mission and a practical plan of action to achieve it
- the particular strengths of the tradition of the congregation
- practical skills for managing change and attending to conflict
- dramatic expansion of lay involvement
- a decision process for planning activities and budget
- a faithful and hospitable congregation
- relationships with other Partner congregations

Fifteen years of research from the U.S.A. on the PMC process have learned that congregations *who stay in through all phases of the partnership* showed a . . .

- 17% median growth in worship attendance over a 5 year period
- 77% correlation to the longevity of pastorate
- 64% correlation to growth in adult conversions
- 74% correlation to increased lay leader base
- 73% correlation to increased participation of young adults after confirmation/high school
- 62% correlation to developing a new constituency base in situations of high social change

Interestingly, not only does the PMC process fit with a Diocese which already is *joining together in the transforming mission of God* but given the decreasing numbers of stipendiary clergy towards 2020 it provides possibilities for deepening lay involvement and invigorating mission as we move forward.

### **Conclusion**

This is a very recent development in this country and the fruits remain to be seen – but the track record elsewhere is impressive and would suggest PMC provides one way of addressing the issue of realizing culture change in given congregations towards mission, wider participation, deeper discipleship and growth. Of course PMC is not a silver bullet which will overcome all our missional challenges (in fact it expressly states that there is no silver bullet we can apply to our current dilemmas) but it addresses the issue of cultural change in ways which we have not addressed previously and as such seems worthy of your serious consideration.

Rev Canon Dr Nigel Rooms

Director of Ministry and Mission

Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham

February 2013

## Appendix 5a – Email to the vicar of St X

From: Nick Ladd

**Sent:** 18 July 2015 19:17

**To:** 'A'

**Subject:** my research

Hi A,

Remember our conversation at the PMC day in June about the possibility of me doing an ethnographical research journey with St X?

Well, I have submitted my proposal and ethical review and would like to talk about getting the process going.

I have a letter of request to send to your PCC secretary to seek the approval of the PCC. In it, I explain something about the research and its possible benefits and offer a discussion about parameters for conducting the research.

As it needs to be a fairly long period of participation/observation, I would like to get going as near to the beginning of September as possible. But I don't know when your next PCC is going to be.

We are going on holiday on Wednesday – any chance of a quick phone conversation before then if you are around?

Best wishes,

Nick

Revd Nick Ladd, MA

Director of Ministry and Formation, Director of Practical Theology, and Tutor for Admissions

St John's College Nottingham Ltd, Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham NG9 3DS



[REDACTED]



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## **Appendix 5b – Letter to the Parochial Church Council of St X**

My name is Nick Ladd, I am a member of staff at St John's, College, Nottingham and part of the delivery team for Partnership for Missional Church (PMC). Currently, I am studying on the Doctorate of Practical Theology programme at Birmingham University and I am at the point of beginning my research project. I am looking for a church that has participated in PMC in which to conduct an ethnographical study of the impact of PMC upon community formation and development.

This will involve me acting as a 'participant observer' in the life of the church and community for a year, participating in as wide a range of the church's life as is realistic in the time. Participant observers are researchers who involve themselves in the life of a community. I would want to be open with the church about my role because the intention is to create knowledge and understanding with the congregation in the spirit of PMC's appreciative inquiry approach. In the course of the year, I will conduct sixteen interviews with people in the congregation and twelve in the community and conclude the research with three focus groups in which participants can review and contribute to my findings.

I recognise that you could be opening your life to me at vulnerable times, and I want to ensure you of my complete discretion and respectful behaviour towards the church, confidentiality during the course of the research and full anonymity for participants and the church during the research and in subsequent writing.

I believe that deepening the church's reflection on its journey, through telling its personal and communal stories, will strengthen its life and mission. Furthermore, PMC is new to the Church of England and St X is one of the first to engage with the process. Your reflective learning would be a gift to the wider church as it seeks to find ways to connect with different communities in a changing culture. If the PCC is willing to explore this possibility, I would be pleased to come and discuss with you the parameters of my involvement.

With thanks,

## Appendix 6 – Participation during field work

Here is the list of church and community activities that I participated in during my time with St X. With nearly all of these, I participated a number of times.

- Church services – including one Christmas Day
- Baptism services
- Coffee time after the 10.30 service
- Home Groups
- PCC meetings
- AGMs
- Leaders' meetings
- Youth leaders' meeting
- Study courses
- Discernment meetings and other 'PMC' type meetings
- Planning and strategy meetings
- Social events including men's breakfast
- Visits to the local pubs
- Community Group meetings
- Community events
- Many informal conversations – with church and community members
- Walking the parish

## Appendix 7 – Denotation of interviewees

I chose an alphabetical approach to naming the congregants, working my way through the alphabet, ignoring letters that might be confused with numbers (I and O) and ones I had used for different purposes like X.

There were a lot more people than letters of the alphabet so I simply started again with repeating letters, AA, BB, AAA, BBB, etc.

Paradoxically, I found that I remembered people more easily by using letters than by introducing different names; certain letters or letter combinations still conjure up the person to me.

There was one issue that made me review this. Might this approach be obscuring gender issues? What I noticed when I studied this closely, was that there was no obvious contrast in people's responses according to gender. Those who were enthusiastic or sceptical were equally women and men. Any sense of being uneasy or threatened by the process did not exhibit any gender bias. Both men and women talked extensively and freely about how they saw personal and communal growth and the contribution or otherwise of PMC to this.

Where I did anecdotally notice a difference was in respect of age and social class.

The people most engaged with this church and with the communal journey of the church were aged between 40 and 70. The 20s and 30s were much more on the fringe of the church and saw their development largely around issues of belonging and relationship. Those over 70, especially those who came to the 8.00am service, were somewhat unconnected to the community's journey and were generally less willing to speak about their personal journeys – this is not to say that these weren't considerable or profound, but rather more difficult to access within my time frame.

The other observation I would make is that there was a different response according to social class. Using the more recent research on social class in Britain, I would judge that St X is made up of 'established middle class' some 'traditional working class' and a good number on the border between the two.<sup>1</sup>

My observation was that those from the 'established middle class' were most likely to be strongly for or against the PMC process and to be vocal about it, whereas those from 'traditional working class' or on the border between the two were less vocal and more passive in their engagement with the process. This may say something interesting about the way in which social class shapes the church's life.

These are anecdotal rather than analytical observations and I would not want to make strong claims from them. However, it suggests interesting lines for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Lab UK. (2013). Social Class Survey. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22007058> - accessed 19.08.19.

## Appendix 8 – Excerpts from field notes

I offer a selection of excerpts from my field notes: from different stages, different kinds of meetings, different levels of recording and reflection and demonstrating some of the challenges of the process

Black – narrative

Red – my account of what I have heard or seen, including direct quotations

Blue – analysis and reflection

Green – reflexivity

[PURPLE] – analytic themes and ideas – possible categories

Yellow – research planning and process

### **15.11.15 – first visit to Church (Early in the Process – Sunday experience)**

Went to services at St X for the first time – 8.00am and 10.30am. On the way, I was thinking about some foreshadowed problems – ideas that I have about possible focus of observation:

8.00am service – arriving

It was a grey blustery November day as I arrived for the 8.00am service at St X. The wind was swirling the leaves around and across the path and it was quite cold; met A. and B. just inside the front door, getting the church ready for the service.

18 people plus myself, the vicar and the curate; normal ‘said’ communion service. Vicar and curate did almost everything; a different person read the gospel, but all other readings, sermons, liturgy and prayers done by clergy. People quite chatty with each other before the service – that’s not typical of many early services, particularly in more formal congregations – is that its evangelical heritage? A number gave me a warm welcome, but was that because I am not afraid to make eye contact? No-one made the effort to talk to me after the service, even though I stood around until nearly everyone had gone. Most left pretty quickly after the service – vicar and curate said farewell at the door. The sermon picked up and responded to the outrages in Paris on the previous Friday; there were some thoughtful ideas – but nothing that picked up the outrage, the anger or the fear in any visceral way. Where was the deep emotional connection? It felt at one remove – almost as if the preacher was saying this because they ought to, not because it stirred them. Where is the connection with the ‘other’ here? This feels typical to me of middle class congregations – the vicissitudes of life always feel just that little bit further away. In fairness, there was some good stuff about action for peace, not demonising Muslims, but again, a bit simplistic – either Muslims were all against this or they were the terrorists – no acknowledgement about complex emotions and motives – that Muslims might be conflicted. There was not touching on our history and responsibility – but maybe that wasn’t the time to do it – I don’t

know. There was some relation to the Scriptures – but fairly thin. I wondered whether anyone would consider what their actions might be out of this sermon – or even if the preacher imagined that they might.

#### [MIDDLE-CLASS DISTANCE FROM LIFE]

I did my bit at the beginning of the service; I had written some notes, but didn't follow them entirely. I mentioned my ministry background and my interest in what fosters growth and maturity and about how I always said I would research this if I did a doctorate. I talked about going to the 'huddle' with my idea and them taking it to PCC and the sense that it resonated with their desire to tell/explore their story. I didn't say anything about my involvement in PMC or about interviewing as I had planned.

Breakfast with the vicar; chat around what the journey has been and how they come to own that journey or not. How do the 'five documents' articulate the journey or not. Talked a bit about the 'Pilgrim course' and how that in his mind fits with PMC – in the way it reads Scripture and encourages the exploration of habits.

#### 10.30 service

Morning worship – 55 adults and about 15 kids. Same sermon with a bit more space. Mainly modern songs, no hymns; no extended time of worship. A few points where I felt he might have let it roll and give a bit of space. Still 1¼ hours, don't know what took the time – maybe the sermon.

Interesting conversation before the service with D and E. They've been in the church for about 5 years described themselves as 'after A' over against 'before A'; I don't know whether that had any significance – whether people recognise a different era with A and whether that is a way of talking about change? They wanted to know who I was and I felt it important to introduce myself and explain briefly what I was doing there – though this was before my formal introduction. They wanted to quiz me about it, especially D; classic comment – 'so, are you going to write that down!' Said with humour, but just a bit of edge. What was that about – suspicion about someone being nosey or being an expert coming to catch us out? Conscious of the researcher. My sense is that they were probably 'family' – but 'new family' – after A?

#### [WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?]

Welcomed and did my bit again; I was more relaxed – partly practice, partly a more informal gathering. So stuck less to my script – but said more about the mutual learning of this journey; I also said more about the ethnographical journey – about how genuine participation makes it possible to see things more through their eyes – that I am becoming part of them for 18 months, so far as I can. I also introduced the question of interviews and how that helps to put what they say alongside what I see.

Found myself consciously reflecting on what it might mean to be a participator. E was advertising a church's together Christmas event on 12 December; I found myself going through the list of jobs (she had given me a slip of paper with the list) seeing what it might

be appropriate for me to do – join the scratch choir on the day? Help set up or clear up? Felt offering to be on the prayer team would be a step too far; too much too soon for a newcomer – ought to be asked.

So I did what I would do if I were a member. I helped bring the ‘shoe box’ gifts up to the front of the church and then helped to carry them to B’s car after the service. That’s the sort of thing I did when I first came to St Barnabas – helped clear up the chairs. It is an interesting negotiation of my social space and place.

Went to coffee after the service – this involves the effort/decision to move from the church building over to the hall. If I were an occasional visitor I probably wouldn’t have made the step – certainly not without being asked. As it is, I had already made the decision but was hanging around B’s car until the boxes were packed and she said ‘are you coming in for coffee’.

I met F who is married to someone whose name I cannot remember (G) and they have a 20 year old at Manchester University and a ten year old. He played the guitar in the service. He knew Inham Nook from when he worked in the health centre (no longer functioning) for NHS direct. He now works at a council outdoor pursuits centre in Loughborough. I found myself making connections with my own experience of this – the basic social connecting that is fundamental to entering a new social space.

Then chatted to H and her husband (J). I knew them both from PMC – especially H. I think she may have been (still is) the PMC steering group chair. They have been in X1 for quite a while and gave me some history about the area – three areas X1, Y1 and Z1. Y1 has a monthly service in the evening made up of elderly folk; people moved onto the (private) estate together in the 60s and have grown old together; newer, younger people are moving in now. Morning service (Messy Church like) just before Christmas that I will go along to and go to the evening service in January.

Talked to D again and carried on the discussion about being a researcher. Talked about how my participation with them allowed me to see/get inside their story. We talked about what if my interpretation was challenging and how would that work out and would I give feedback to the church; interesting conversation about what I guess was the ethics of the process. He still felt a bit more than just interested – still sussing me out, I think. Same as I felt before the service. I don’t think hostile, but perhaps cautious? I think he wanted to see whether I was aware that this is not a straightforward thing.

[WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?]

Talked to K after the service and a number of young women/girls. K is involved in PMC and is clearly ‘family’ and a leader. She was my way into the conversation – which was mainly about the new Star Wars film. We did chat about the ‘faith in the fog’ (or ‘fog in the mist’ as she called it) event coming up that week – but they didn’t really know what it was about – except that it was to be led by Geoff Lucas, not to be confused with George Lucas!! Found out later from vicar and curate that this was an event which they had landed up hosting for Nottingham by Geoff Lucas – Spring Harvest guy, ‘Adrian Plass with theology’!



I want to go to home group leaders' meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November. I think I need to work out how to connect so I know what's going on. Was planning to write something for their notices on Monday, but just too busy; I will try to do it today for their notices on 29<sup>th</sup>; there is going to be an awful lot of juggling of my time and my commitments. It occurs to me that I am very intentional about entering this community, but there is nothing very obvious about how to get in. I have had a significant amount of the vicar's time and I know him personally – and the curate – but access is a mystery at the moment.

[FINDING THE WAY IN]

Met L again who spoke at the huddle about whether I would speak to people who were negative about PMC – used to be church warden, I think. He was the one who said that you could sum up St X's attitude by: 'tell us what you want to do and we'll do it – if we want to!' (11/11/15).

I was struck by how small the congregation was; slightly lower than the lower end that A said on 11/11/15. I notice that they don't open their Bibles in the service – don't feel like evangelicals.

### **26.06.16 – Sunday services, focus group and chat with A (part-way through; reflection and one-to-one conversations)**

I want to start with some reflection on the experience of interviewing; the actual interview has been recorded and transcribed and will be analysed elsewhere than in these field notes.

The process of getting organised for a focus group with the 8.00am service has been particularly difficult. I had problems administratively getting it communicated. I did advertise it before the service some weeks ago – twice. A and B spoke personally to the congregation last Sunday and what transpired was their reluctance to meet as a group after the service. Practically speaking, a number said that they shared lifts and therefore it would be awkward for some to stay behind. I recognise this as genuine but also I recognise how it demonstrate reluctance to reorganise their lives even briefly to communicate as a group to me as a researcher.

What also transpired was that some said that they would have nothing to say or that what they said might be negative and reveal some of their own ambivalence in respect of church. What this shows me is the potential difficulty of hearing critical narratives or of encouraging those don't feel they have a voice to offer – this is interestingly a maturity mark of the organisation in my view. Apparently, there are one or two who will see me outside the service – so we will see.

However, it has also led me to reflect how this relates to discomfort with me as an external observer/critic. Anecdotally, I have heard how some have reported a level of anxiety about 'what I might say about them.' So rather than an act of co-creation, this is still seen as a report by a critical outsider. I am the dominant voice who might play fast and loose with their story.

I am recognising that starting interviewing changes my relationship with the congregation. I am no longer the friendly stranger but perhaps a threatening presence that may be wanting to peddle a particular line (PMC) or may be unkind about them? Some of this is me piecing it together, though I did have one conversation today which may fill this out.

There is perhaps a new kind of access that needs negotiating and I am not quite sure how to do this

I am also finding that arranging my interviewing where people are basically willing is still very difficult. It has been slow arranging focus groups and I haven't even started individual interviews yet. People are willing but there are other things in their lives.

I was tentatively booked to go to K's home group on 28.06.16, but she texted me on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> to say that they had to finish their SMART plan work for a big church meeting next Tuesday (05.07.16) and so they would need to postpone.

[DEVELOPING AS A RESEARCHER – NEGOTIATING ACCESS] – P94-95 (NICK)

Something that confirmed some of this to me today was a conversation with RR after the service. He talked about people who don't feel confident about speaking to me or that the thing that they might want to say might be negative and that they are not at ease about that. So there is a big question for me as I get further into this about whether my presence is intimidating or their fear of not wanting to speak negatively. Is this about me or is it about my presence revealing something that is normally hidden or at least under the service. The leadership know all the struggles but is that the same as them having voice?

RR said, 'this is a habit, maybe an English one. We go out for a meal and the waiter asks if we enjoyed it and we say "yes, very nice" and then go outside and say to each other, "oh, that was a terrible meal."' We have a difficulty speaking the truth, he said, but that this is about telling the whole story.

So it opens up the question for me about how I get into the darker side of this. I am wondering if I have to do that by one-to-one interviews and whether people won't do that in groups?

Also, I have discovered that sending out the consent form rather than reassuring people about my professionalism is actually intimidating some and so I have resolved just to bring it to the groups/interviews. The middle class professionals cope fine, but they aren't all middle class professionals – they are a more varied group than one might realise. (Confirmed by A later: many are foremen; Y1 is like a step up from the Meadows). Question about how we liberate and listen to the voices. This could be seen as a mark of maturity: can they be a congregation that facilitate that, can I be a researcher that facilitates that? – discuss with supervisor

How much interviewing do I do? I am trying to narrate the story of a church and I don't really know what it is. It is not that I have particular theories to test. So the question of quantity is something I would like to discuss with my supervisor

The other question is the interplay between asking about the PMC journey, asking about maturity and exploring the culture of the church and how these three interrelate. I feel the need for sharper questions to open this up. I did that today with more specific questions about conflict and growth – generated some interesting things – another question for Stephen.

1. Question of voices and whether my persona is encouraging this or not
2. Question of how much interviewing
3. Question of balance between maturity/growth, PMC and culture.

My own personal reflection about getting the 8.00am congregation to join in an interview. I expected that it wouldn't be straightforward getting them to meet as a group but I really thought it would work. And so I was quite surprised how I wasn't able to get it to happen. I think I thought that me being around for a while, trying to encourage something to happen, explaining to them clearly, I thought they would join in, but clearly they weren't going to. Why should I expect they were going to, but I did. And I think I am quite shocked that I couldn't get four or five people to meet for ½ hour after the service; I want to note my shock and surprise and a bit of disappointment. How far is that a reflection on the way they do church life and how much is it about me as an intimidating researcher. My reflection is that having access granted by the key gatekeeper(s) is too simplistic a picture. What if there is tension and ambivalence about the activity of the gatekeeper(s) – why shouldn't they resist? And am I perceived as being 'with' the leadership – especially on the question of PMC as I have a relationship with A through students and I was involved in delivering PMC to them as a church.

[ACCESSING THE DIFFICULT STUFF] – PP95-96 (NICK)

### **14.03.17 – Congregational Discernment Evening (towards the end of my time)**

Arrived at 7.30 to see three tables set out in different parts of the church. Why in the church? It seemed an odd and uncomfortable environment for something that would normally happen in the halls. Coffee was available; sat in one of the pews and chatted with CC and DD who were sitting in front of me – found out lots about their family; they are a really warm and welcoming couple. They alerted me to the fact that BBB and DDDD were there and were relatively new to St X – about two years. BBB might be an interesting person for a one-to-one interview. We spent ½ hour chatting whilst no further people turned up; there was music playing. No explanation about why we'd hung around for ½ hour without any guidance. Maybe A was just wanting it to be a social space with no instructions. It made me realise how much church is somewhere where we expect to get instructions about what is happening and that we feel unnerved, confused or maybe angry when we don't get it. Aren't all organisations like this? It didn't particularly phase me and I just used the time to chat to a couple of people, but all the time I was wondering when this was going to 'start' and feeling an undercurrent of annoyance; I could have come 30 minutes later; I didn't want to be too late home. There 13 people + A, B and me.

A went through the background to how they got to sharing life what the focus is for year 2. I have heard this so many times now, I know it inside out. Why does he feel the need to keep repeating it? Some interesting stuff about how long the South Africans say it takes to discern and embody – 3yrs and 3yrs or 6yrs and 6yrs. He thinks it took them 4yrs to discern, so 4 more to embody? He gave some encouragement about how the practice of discernment is developing and how he feels the church is developing – pinpointing a greater number of groups doing SMART plans, linking of groups, partnering beyond the church, home groups opening up to new things. He also explained the purpose of this kind of meeting: slowing down to pay attention – becoming detectives of divinity [got a laugh]

What are we learning? Where is God moving? Can we notice where there is energy in the System (Spirit)? Even a bit of anxiety when God calls you out of your comfort zone?

The question for the night: ‘What in our experience is God up to in calling us to share life?’ That he is calling us outwards we now take as read. Where else do we see God stirring to pot and getting us excited? (RJ3, pp35-37)

We then moved to two tables (not enough people to fill all three) we dwelt in Phil 1.27, 2.5-11.

NN: mind-set of Christ; service – you’re not better than others; John 17 – being one as God is one; praying for this. Not A B C D E list of instructions; have to work it like v6-8; whole thing has been working it out – going round the circle

BBB and DDDD: If everyone did one item of good every week, every day... saying hello to someone who hasn’t seen anyone; may not be as small as we think.

NN: Every Sunday, there’s someone who’s not been before; everyone is in their groups and if no-one speaks to them it’s cliquy. Sides-persons are welcoming, VV was my model.

BBB: GG for me and Joe Turner (whose funeral had been that day and most of them had been at.) When you walk into church, there’s a church spirit, you can feel it in what people are saying, a happy spirit, learning; circle of learning and the circle’s growing – that’s the work of God.

Someone: Open to meeting other people, we’re all reticent – but we actually open yourself up to God when we do that. (Ripples of agreement)

B then explained the ground rules for addressing tonight’s question:

Way of doing it – The Box

What we are doing – The Triangle – Scripture/tradition, community and culture, our lived experience. [Actually, I think this is really hard]

Each group wrote stuff down on large pieces of paper; I scribed for our group so I didn’t write any notes.

There was one point that grabbed me.

Someone introduced a discussion on the character of a church.

BBB: Do churches have profiles, cultures, personalities? What does the world need from the church? What sort of church speaks? So different to how it used to be – approachable.

EEEE: it's a different place since we used to come, more open, more communicating; we're not preached at, but talked to. Some of the younger people at the Baptism last Sunday, you could see them thinking, 'what is this?' it's not what they expected.

There then followed a 'floated conversation'. In the previous bit we basically brain storm and write it all down – no discussion. In this part we follow a thread together and see where it leads. Here's what was said:

Providing opportunities: to grow, develop, meet new people.

NN? Opened the church for cup of tea – we need more of this;

email from BBB – history society, tea and cakes, ukuleles. Partnering – not just us – community orchard, play group, football teams and things no-one knows

Teaching us about what he wants:

EEEE: reflecting the character of Christ in the community

A: so are we learning? Are we becoming learners?

B: Are we learning from the community – from AAA and FFFF – learning from what people are doing.

VV: I think we are because I think we are looking for it. "God is working his purpose out.

FF: Discernment runs through it all. Counter-cultural taking time for people with no reward and not selling; when it's not your family, why would you do that?

C: In looking for partners, we are looking to spend time, not clubbing them over the head; orchard, walks, Quizzes; so someone like FFFF doesn't feel he can't join you even though you're a faith group because you joined him.

DDDD: I told my neighbours about the Quiz and the Christmas service and they came – even though it was in church. They're coming to the quiz and bringing their neighbours. Spent time – slow, but it's happening.

NN: Events that are relaxed with lots of people – you recognise faces and then they're not coming as strangers to church.

DDDD: I didn't think we could have knocked on their door and asked them to church.

EEEE: You created your own small group outside church

B: There was a vision about people who didn't come to church inviting their friends

BBB: These are the prime targets because they're mobile; people behind doors who are lonely – that's a lot more difficult to do, harder work.

NN: I would find that much more difficult to do. Delivering Christmas leaflets – not just giving leaflets but having conversations, not everyone, but a lot liked to talk and traditional events – not just posting an invite but an opportunity to speak to people.

H: Ukuleles are a big draw; come to church and hopefully encourage to come to other things.

C: We explored how we could find lonely people, but they wouldn't come to an event. We need to go to them, look for them and make a small group with our neighbours. Where do people gather in [REDACTED]? We've been looking for it since the PCC away day 6 years ago. Where is that space?

H: Luncheon Club; people come from [REDACTED] because [REDACTED] people recruited from there.

C: Buggies and Babes takes off because it can be lonely when you're new to the community or new to being at home and you don't know people. Toddler groups can be overwhelming.

B: Elderly have a place to gather, young mums have a place to gather, what about the middle people, who are working?

C: Shift work

DDDD: And retired, because they are much younger; men who suffer difficulty and have nowhere to go

C: Getting men to do handy work

VV: teaching us to know people

EE: Showing us huge gaps – middle age group. There's been huge turnover in the village – where are these people? I can't put my finger on it.

NN: God is developing us individually. People said, 'a lot of talking, not much action.' But talking leads to individual action.

FF: Mustard tree – how many things are there? Mustard tree of growth – not filled every branch yet.

A: Smallest seed grows and makes space for all.

J: There is a danger of trying too much. Obvious gathering places and we are linked to them and they provide us with plenty to do. A lot of middle people don't gather in X.

X is the place they sleep; their community is elsewhere. We need to discern who has linkage worth our while reaching.

BBB: People at work don't need gathering places so much – they're gathering 8 hours at a time.

B: When we did our statement, we said sharing life with our 'communities'; main community maybe elsewhere.

EEEE: What about reaching out to people who come to shops?

BBB: Communication – list with community groups

B: Who is God drawing to us and who are we being drawn to? At any one time, thrust may be elderly or young families or workers. Maybe we need to decide what is the church's focus for now.

### Key Themes

- Different groups in community
- Recognising what others do
- Service of thanksgiving
- Newly retired – vast differences between the young retired and much older; vast difference of interests from Luncheon Club many of whom are in their 90s. Think about how we might share life – volunteer group for practical things; doing things for people
- Us learning – sense of growth at odds with gaps; places where it is happening and maybe invitation
- So much to do, so many people willing; starting it off; paying attention to what is happening – place where things opened up

### Invitation to complete the sentence God is...

- Looking to Team X
- Igniting
- Helping us look outwards
- Asking us to notice where the Holy Spirit is at work
- Encouraging us by showing us places where he is at work and challenging us about where we might be working
- Opening our eyes to other opportunities
- With us now
- Here
- Showing us the way if we dare to look
- Changing us
- Faithful to what he promised
- Visions of 3 or 4 years ago coming to pass

I notice a couple of things:

There were people here tonight making a significant contribution who I have hardly come across previously; where are they and how do I meet them?

There was a real contrast tonight with the only other CSD I have been to, back in November 2015. I think there may have been two or three offers of God is... sentences at that meeting; tonight was very different both in terms of contribution and tone.

## Appendix 9a – Indicative focus group guide – home groups

Researching personal and communal change and development through PMC

Introduction (5 minutes)

I will seek to help the group be at ease and will cover background information about:

- Protection: Confidentiality, freedom not to answer particular questions, withdrawal
- Process: shape of focus group, recording, data management
- Feedback: transcript, focus group for reviewing finding
- Establish group contract
- Any questions they may have

Background Questions (5 minutes)

How long has this group been in existence?

How did it come about?

How long has each of you been involved in the group?

Interview Questions (40 minutes)

**(i) What has been your experience of Partnership for Missional Church at St X (PMC)?**

**(ii) What contribution do you feel that the PMC journey has made to:**

- You personally?
- The church?
- The life of this group?
- **Added in question about spiritual practices for FG3**

**(iii) What has been your group's journey with the SMART plan this year?\***

- What do you think it has been about?
- How have you got on with it?
- How has it contributed to your life as a group?



**(iv) How far has PMC involved conflict or struggle?**

- What has this been about?
- What was the outcome?

**(v) When you think about growth – either personal or congregational – what sort of examples or experiences come to your mind?**

- How has the PMC journey encouraged this?

**(vi) Is there anything else anyone would like to say before we finish?**

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Any final questions from the group and opportunity for me to express my thanks

*\*Each group has been asked to work on and implement a SMART plan focusing around the vision for the year of 'deepening relationships.' PMC has a very particular structure to SMART plans which facilitates ownership of the process of cultural change. The leadership decided to use this process to enable groups to take responsibility for their own development.*

(iv) and (v) added for FG3

## **Appendix 9b – Focus group questions: 8.00am service**

1. Scene setting – how long have you been coming to this service?

2. What has been your experience of PMC?

3. What contribution do you feel it has made to:

- (i) You personally?
- (ii) The church?
- (iii) The life of this group?

[Spiritual practices esp. DitW]

4. How far has PMC involved conflict or struggle?

- (i) What has this been about?
- (ii) What was the outcome?

5. When you think about growth – either personal or congregational – what sort of examples or experiences come to your mind?  
How has the PMC journey encouraged this?

**2<sup>nd</sup> draft after Focus Group 1 – added q4 under the influence of Hopewell**

## Appendix 9c – Indicative focus group guide – home groups

Guide for FG4

### Introduction (10 minutes)

I'm interested in how churches and church members change, grow and develop and how church congregations help this or hinder it from happening.

Church leadership felt that together you have been on a journey of change and were interested in exploring and telling the story. So they invited me to come and be a part of the church as much as I can since last November and then once I'd been around for a bit the plan was to do some group and individual interviewing, so that's how I've got to today and thank you so much for giving me time this evening.

I will seek to help the group be at ease and will cover background information about:

- Protection: Confidentiality, freedom not to answer particular questions, withdrawal
- Process: shape of focus group, recording, data management
- Feedback: transcript, focus group for reviewing finding
- Establish group contract
- Any questions they may have

### Introductory Activity (15 minutes)

If you'll humour me, I want to start with a group activity – 25 cards with words or phrases that might be associated with Christian growth. I would like you discuss as a group and to choose the ten that represent what you think have been the most important contributors to your personal growth and change as a Christian. As you do that can you try to think of a personal story or an experience that explains why you would choose that word for your own journey of development and growth?

There are no right answers – I am just interested in what you come up with together as a group.

Knowledge, Wisdom, Service, Commitment, Building relationships\*, Discernment\*, Fellowship, Investment in others, Evangelism, Character\*, Behaviour, Community involvement, mission\*, Giving, Attendance, Belonging, Worship on Sundays, Praying, Bible reading, Tithing, Partnership\*, Hospitality\*, Taking responsibility\*, Listening\*, Awareness of God\*

Discuss and choose your top ten – think of a personal story that goes with the word or phrase

1. Stories that illustrate your choice of words

2. In the light of your discussion and the stories you have shared – would you like to exchange any of the words or add different ones? (Which stories prompt this?)
  
3. Might you have made a different list a few years ago?
  
4. What has been your experience with PMC:  
Personally?  
Church?  
House Group?
  
5. Are there ways in which the journey has changed you:  
Personally?  
Church?  
House Group?
  
6. Are there ways that life in [REDACTED] Church hinders or helps your growth?  
Spiritual Practices?  
Conflict and Struggle?  
SMART Plan and House Group?

In the course of the evening remember:

Clarification – Is that accurate?  
Does that mean?  
Tell me more  
Examples and Stories

Transition – Other views?  
Anything to add?  
Now we are going to move on to...

Summary and Closing – What I've heard  
Anything to add?  
Anything I have missed? Anything I haven't asked?

## Appendix 9d – Indicative focus group guide – home groups

### Guide for FG5

#### Introduction (10 minutes)

I'm interested in how churches and church members change, grow and develop and how church congregations help this or hinder it from happening.

Church leadership felt that together you have been on a journey of change and were interested in exploring and telling the story. So they invited me to come and be a part of the church as much as I can since last November and then once I'd been around for a bit the plan was to do some group and individual interviewing, so that's how I've got to today and thank you so much for giving me time this evening.

I will seek to help the group be at ease and will cover background information about:

- Protection: Confidentiality, freedom not to answer particular questions, withdrawal
- Process: shape of focus group, recording, data management
- Feedback: transcript, focus group for reviewing finding
- Establish group contract
- Any questions they may have

#### *Completing consent form*

#### Introductory Activity (20 minutes)

If you'll humour me, I want to start with a group activity – 25 cards with words or phrases that might be associated with Christian growth. I would like you discuss as a group and to choose the ten that represent what you think have been the most important contributors to your personal growth and change as a Christian. As you do that can you try to think of a personal story or an experience that explains why you would choose that word for your own journey of development and growth? There are no right answers – I am just interested in what you come up with together as a group.

Knowledge, Wisdom, Service, Commitment, Building relationships\*, Discernment\*, Fellowship, Investment in others\*, Evangelism, Suffering<sup>1</sup>, Behaviour, Community involvement, mission\*, Giving, Attendance, Belonging, Worship on Sundays, Praying, Bible reading, Tithing, Partnership\*, Hospitality\*, Taking responsibility\*, Listening\*, Awareness of God\*

Discuss and choose your top ten – think of a personal story that goes with the word or phrase

1. Stories that illustrate your choice of words

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<sup>1</sup> Added 'suffering' to the list after it was raised in previous home group

2. In the light of your discussion and the stories you have shared – would you like to exchange any of the words or add different ones? (Which stories prompt this?)

### PMC Journey (40 minutes)

3. What has been your experience with PMC:  
Personally?  
Church?  
House Group?
4. Are there ways in which the journey has changed you:  
Personally?  
Church?  
House Group?
5. Are there ways that life in [REDACTED] Church hinders or helps your growth?  
Spiritual Practices?  
Conflict and Struggle?  
SMART Plan and House Group?

In the course of the evening remember:

Clarification – Is that accurate?  
Does that mean?  
Tell me more  
Examples and Stories

Transition – Other views?  
Anything to add?  
Now we are going to move on to...

### Conclusion

6. In the light of our discussion tonight, are there any changes you would like to make to your choice of words?  
Why? (stories and experiences)

Summary and Closing – What I've heard  
Anything to add?  
Anything I have missed? Anything I haven't asked?

Thanks

## Appendix 10 – Information sheet for focus groups

### Researching personal and communal change and development through PMC

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the research project on personal and communal change through PMC. I have been joining in with and observing the church since November 2015 to try to understand the practices and relationships of the congregation in relation to its life with God, with each other and with the wider community. As part of this process, I am running several focus groups to explore people's stories of their personal faith journey in relation to the church's journey with PMC. I will need to record our conversation for accuracy and I will then transcribe it.

You are free to decide not to take part or to withdraw at any point before, during or up to 4 weeks after the interview. There are no significant risks associated with this research, but if the interview raises any issues for you that you would like to explore further, I have arranged confidential support should you wish to take it up. If you were to withdraw part way through, I will ask your permission to include material that has already been shared.

All contributions will be treated with respect and I will maintain complete confidentiality throughout the research and writing. I will ensure that all contributions are anonymous in transcripts, in writing up the research and in any future use of the material. It will also be important that you undertake not to share outside the meeting what other members of the group have said. Electronic recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and password protected on computer. I will need to share data with my supervisor for my ongoing learning and assessment. In accordance with the University of Birmingham Guidelines, all notes and transcripts will be destroyed and audio files deleted ten years after the end of the research. If you have any concerns at any point during the research process, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Stephen Pattison at Birmingham University ([REDACTED]). If you have further questions of clarification please contact me at [REDACTED] or by phone on [REDACTED].

I hope that the focus group will enable you to reflect together on your own journey with God on PMC as well as contribute to the church's understanding of its identity and calling. I believe that deepening the church's reflection on its journey will strengthen its life and mission and I would like to write a report for the church and offer an evening to discuss its findings for any who are interested. PMC is new to the Church of England and [REDACTED] is amongst one of the first to engage with the process. Your experience and learning would be a gift to the wider church as it seeks to find ways to connect with different communities in a changing culture.

If you willing to go ahead, I will need you to indicate your formal agreement by completing a consent form when we meet.

With thanks,

Nick Ladd – Director of Ministry and Formation, St John's College, Nottingham

## Appendix 11 – Consent form for focus groups

Researching personal and communal change and development through PMC

Researcher: Nick Ladd

Please read and complete this form and return to Nick Ladd at:

████████████████████ or:

St John’s College, Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DS

	Yes	No
I have read the information sheet and had opportunities to ask questions about this research and feel informed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in this research is my own choice and I am aware that I can withdraw at any point before, during or up to 4 weeks after the interview without any questions being asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once the interview is complete, I understand that I am giving my consent for it to be used for analysis within the research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the interview being recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that confidentiality will be respected and at no time will my name be used in the writing up of the research or in any further work arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I undertake not to disclose other people’s contributions outside the focus group meeting without their permission	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the research explained in the information sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to anonymised material from the interview being used in the thesis and in any further published material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to data being shared with the researcher’s supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Name of Participant:**    **Signed:**    **Date:**

**Name of Researcher:**    **Signed:**    **Date:**

If you have any further questions, please contact me (see above for details).



## Appendix 12 – Interview guide for one-to-one interviews

Researching personal and communal change and development through PMC

Introduction (5 minutes)

I will seek to help the interviewee be at ease and will cover background information about:

- Protection: Confidentiality, freedom not to answer particular questions, withdrawal
- Process: shape of interview, recording, data management
- Feedback: read back, transcript, focus group
- Any questions they may have

As this is a semi-structured interview, I will encourage people to digress as necessary

Background Questions (5 minutes)

Age: 18-30  31-45  46-65  66+  Gender:  Ethnicity

How long have you been associated with St X?

How would you describe that association?

Have you taken on any specific roles in the church?

- What?
- When?
- How long?

Have you laid any down or taken up any roles up since PMC began?

Have you fulfilled any roles in the PMC process?

## Interview Questions (50 minutes)

### **Introduction: What is maturity?**

- Tell me about a Christian you know who is mature in their faith
- Are there things that have happened to them that strike chords with your own journey?

### **(A) Talk to me about how you see your own journey of faith towards maturity**

Could guide the conversation with the following themes:

- Experience of the presence of God; Experience of discernment
- Experience of engagement with the 'other' – the renegotiation of community
- Experience with reading and responding to Scripture
- Experience with conflict
- Experience of 'bearing witness' – faith in the public space

### **Introduction: How do churches help people to grow?**

What sort of church do you think enables such a journey to happen?

### **(B) How far do you think the church's journey with these experiences has formed you personally?**

What has been the role of PMC in all this?

### **(C) How far would you talk about the church growing in its communal life?**

What have you noticed?

## Conclusion (2 minutes)

Anything else they would like to say?

Opportunity for me to express my thanks

## Appendix 13 – Information sheet for one-to-one interviews

### Researching personal and communal change and development through PMC

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the research project on personal and communal change through PMC. I have been joining in with and observing the church since November 2015 to try to understand the practices and relationships of the congregation in relation to its life with God, with each other and with the wider community. As part of this process, I am running a number of interviews to explore people's stories of their and the church's journey of faith and its relationship to the PMC process. I will need to record our conversation for accuracy and I will then transcribe it. There will be a focus group at some point to test my findings and I hope that at the end of my time with the church I will have an opportunity make a presentation to a larger group.

You are free to decide not to take part or to withdraw at any point in the process. There are no significant risks associated with this research, but if the interview raises any issues for you that you would like to explore further, I have arranged confidential support should you wish to take it up. If you were to withdraw part way through, I will ask your permission to include material that has already been shared.

All contributions will be treated with respect and I will maintain complete confidentiality throughout the research and writing. I will ensure that all contributions are anonymous in writing up the research and in any future use of the material. Electronic recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and password protected on computer. I will need your permission to share recordings with my supervisor. In accordance with the University of Birmingham Guidelines, all notes and transcripts will be destroyed and audio files deleted ten years after the end of the research. If you have any concerns at any point during the research process, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Stephen Pattison at Birmingham University ( [REDACTED] ). If you have further questions of clarification please contact me at [REDACTED] or by phone on [REDACTED]

I hope that the interview will enable you to reflect on your own journey with God in relation to PMC as well as contribute to the church's understanding of its identity and calling. I believe that deepening the church's reflection on its journey will strengthen its life and mission. PMC is new to the Church of England and [REDACTED] is amongst one of the first to engage with the process. Your experience and learning would be a gift to the wider church as it seeks to find ways to connect with different communities in a changing culture.

If you wish to go ahead, I will need you to indicate your formal agreement by completing a consent form when we meet.

With thanks,

Nick Ladd – Director of Ministry and Formation, St John's College, Nottingham

## Appendix 14 – Consent form for one-to-one interviews

Researching personal and communal change and development through PMC

**Researcher: Nick Ladd**

**Please read and complete this form and return to Nick Ladd at:**

**[REDACTED] or:**

**St John's College, Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DS**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
I have read the information sheet and had opportunities to ask questions about this research and feel informed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in this research is my own choice and I am aware that I can withdraw at any point before or during the Interview without any questions being asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once the interview is complete, I understand that I am giving my consent for it to be used for analysis within the research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the interview being recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that confidentiality will be respected and at no time will my name be used in the writing up of the research or in any further work arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the research explained in the information sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to anonymised material from the interviews being used in the thesis and in any further published material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Name of Participant:**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Name of Researcher:**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

If you have any further questions, please contact me (see above for details).

## Appendix 15 – Community survey – information sheet

### Researching personal and communal change and development

Over the last three years, St X has been involved in a supported journey in which they have been seeking to deepen and widen their participation with people in the local community.

They have decided to sponsor a piece of research to explore how the congregation has developed during that time and I will be sharing in their life as a 'participant observer' for the next eighteen months as part of my doctoral programme with the University of Birmingham.

As part of the research, I would like to listen to people in the wider community about their experience of St X. Some of these interviews will be arranged with people who are believed to have had some shared experience with the church during the last three years. Some of the interviews will be randomly chosen as a way of comparing experience.

Thank you for your interest in taking part. The interview will be in survey form and last for no more than 15 minutes. You are free to decide not to take part or to withdraw at any point before, during or up to 4 weeks after the survey.

All contributions will be treated with respect and I will maintain complete confidentiality throughout the research and writing. I will ensure that all contributions are anonymous in transcripts, in writing up the research and in any future use of the material. Electronic data will be securely stored and password protected on computer. Written data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. In accordance with the University of Birmingham Guidelines, all notes and transcripts will be destroyed and deleted ten years after the end of the research. If you have any concerns at any point with the research process, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Stephen Pattison at Birmingham University ( ) with whom I will need to share my data for learning and assessment purposes. If you have further questions of clarification please contact me at .

This process that St X is engaged with is new to the Church of England and they are one of the first churches to participate. I would like to write a report for the church and community and offer an evening next year to discuss my findings for any who are interested. If you would like to attend, please send me your contact details.

If you wish to go ahead, I will need you to indicate your formal agreement by completing the attached consent form and returning it to me.

With thanks,

Nick Ladd – Director of Ministry and Formation, St John's College, Nottingham

## Appendix 16 – Consent form for community survey

Researching personal and communal change and development

**Researcher: Nick Ladd**

**Please read and complete this form and return to Nick Ladd at:**

**\_\_\_\_\_ or:**

**St John’s College, Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DS**

	Yes	No
I have read the information sheet and had opportunities to ask questions about this research and feel informed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in this research is my own choice and I am aware that I can withdraw at any point before or during or up to 4 weeks after the survey without any questions being asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once the interview is complete, I understand that I am giving my consent for it to be used for analysis within the research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that confidentiality will be respected and at no time will my name be used in the writing up of the research or in any further work arising from this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the research explained in the information sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to anonymised material from the survey being used in the thesis and in any further published material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to data being shared with the researcher’s supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Name of Participant:**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Name of Researcher:**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

## Appendix 17 – Community survey questions

The purpose of these interviews is to sample the impact of PMC within the community, so I will be looking for key informants to make introductions to people in the community. I will also conduct some random interviews for comparison. I will briefly explain what I am doing and provide an information sheet before I begin the interview. I will offer an online survey option, prefaced with the same explanation.

Age: 18-30  31-45  46-65  66+  Gender:  Ethnicity

Q1: Do you live in:

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

Other

Q2: For how long have you lived here?

Q3: Are you aware of St X?

Q4: Do you know where it is?

Q5: What contact have you had with the church over the years?

Q6: Can you think of examples of anything that the church has done in or with the community in the last three to four years?

Q7: How would you describe the church's relationship with this community?

Q8: Has this changed in any way over the last three to four years? (examples)

Q9: Recent experience of St X has made more likely to come to the church.

Strongly Agree 1  2  3  4  5  6  Strongly Disagree

Comment:

Q10: Recent experience of St X has made me think more about questions of faith.

Strongly Agree 1  2  3  4  5  6  Strongly Disagree

Comment:

## Appendix 18 – Excerpt from interview with E, 8-15: 31.05.17

- Interviewer: So, it's really, so it's really about, it's a difficult question to answer really, I suppose, about, you know, what, what growing faith, developing, maturing, whatever, we mean by that.
- Respondent: Hmm.
- Interviewer: You know, how you would, how you would see that, what do you think about your own life or maybe it's sometimes helpful to look at other people and say, you know, "That's what I mean when I think about somebody who's growing in the faith. Is that happening for me? Am I like that?"
- Respondent: Hmm, yeah.
- Interviewer: It's just, sort of, getting a bit of a picture of how you feel.
- Respondent: Hmm.
- Interviewer: Sort of, it's sort of a subjective picture about-
- Respondent: Yeah, I mean, to start with, erm, we, I felt drawn in and welcomed and, very much, erm, valued as a new member and people were very friendly and lots of people, erm, you know, there's always people to talk to after church on Sat- on Sunday, and there's always people to talk to, you always had, erm, you know, we were invited to all the things and so on, and we connected in very quickly.
- Interviewer: Aha.
- Respondent: And through going to the courses and so on and so forth we, erm, both got to the point where D was actually baptised, 'cos he was non-conformist, so he hadn't been baptised. Erm, and I did my reaffirmation.
- Interviewer: Hmm.
- Respondent: Erm, and then, it was then the sort of PMC stuff started cranking up, or whatever, and it felt as though there was less of the feeding the members of the church going on, less of the, erm... I felt there was less of the, sort of, warmth and welcome and that and that it, the PMC



process seemed to take a lot of energy and focus away from the inward focus on people who were there already.

Interviewer: Yeah, hmm.

Respondent: And there was, kind of, they, they were left to just get on with it whilst the new things were being sorted out. And, erm, several people, and I've told you this before, but several people who we were connected with made the choice to leave.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And some of that was to do with being put off by the PMC stuff as- I mean, they all had other reasons as well, but part of it was that they did, weren't taken with the PMC model and the way it was working and then, and then other reasons as well made it that they, the balance was tipped and they went.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Respondent: And different things, I mean, [the curate] left because she got offered a new church, and so on, and so there were other things happened. But, erm, we, I felt, erm, kind of, left in a less, erm, what's the word, I don't know, a less relatable church than I'd been in before.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Respondent: That there were fewer points of reference where I could try and develop my, sort of, quite young, newly developing, faith.

Interviewer: Yeah, hmmmhm.

Respondent: Erm, and so that, I think that was quite difficult. Erm, and, erm... I still feel less connected.

Interviewer: And that's partly because so- some people have left or partly because some of the points where you felt connected don't seem there in the same way, or...?

Respondent: Yes, and... Yes, and it, it just seemed, yeah, it seems to be, it seemed to be, erm, that the language and, erm, direction, mission, whatever, that was being spoken about was less comprehensible or, or didn't relate to me. I didn't, I didn't get it in the same way as previously I felt I got what was being said.

Interviewer: Hmm, hmm.

Respondent: It, it seemed to have gone into a place where the, the, the direction of, of everything that was being said and the leadership and the spiritual lesson- teaching and everything, all seemed to be less focused on things that would, that would draw me in-

Interviewer: Hmm.

Respondent: And more focused in things that were, erm, alienating me or push- You know, the, the talk about, erm, trying to connect with other people and get them involved and all that kind of thing, the sort of active, erm, the active, erm, movement to look outward... Obviously, I understand why that was there on the intellectual basis but, er, at the place I was in it was quite a daunting thing-

Interviewer: Hmm, okay.

Respondent: Because I didn't feel I was, really, settled and secure enough in my faith and belief to go out there and do what they were aspiring to.

Interviewer: Okay, right. Yeah.

Respondent: Because I was, very much, erm, I felt myself very much to be a beginner in this new found...

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Yeah, erm, faith and still quite, erm, unsure and feeling my way, tentative, baby steps in, in it.

Interviewer: Yeah, hmm.

Respondent: You know, even though I, sort of, I'd done my reaffirmation of the baptismal vows-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: There was the, there was a commitment to, erm, try to, well yeah, I suppose try is the only word I can use, to become Christian in every way, and to try and live out a Christian life and to, erm, develop my, a stronger faith and, and, erm, try to get to a position where I was, felt secure to, secure in my faith to, you know, sort of be able to pray and wait for guidance and those kind of things.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Respondent: Erm, but I felt I was still in a really shaky place with all that.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Respondent: I didn't feel that I was... And you speak to people who were quite inspirational, still, the people like V around-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Who's, who's obviously a very inspirational person-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But then she was alienated from the group.

Interviewer: Hmm, hmm.

Respondent: Or, she was pushed out of the centre focus and she became a more peripheral person, erm, at, for a, for a period of time.

Interviewer: Hmm, hmm.

Respondent: And so, because she was one of the people that I related to that also, I think, added to the sense that I didn't understand what was going on.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: Because she had been, not necessarily a role model but she'd been an inspirational leader, she'd been my table leader in these small groups I'd done and I'd been part of the [beginners] group that went to the [pub].

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And then to find that she had been told she couldn't lead worship, and those kind of things, erm, because of various- It, it just didn't make sense to me.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Couldn't understand, couldn't- And that, so then it, and just everything felt much shakier.

Interviewer: Okay.

## Appendix 19 – Excerpt from focus group 4, 59-78: 23.11.16

- MMM (Female): Within the church now. I know, certainly, by this time, ■■■ was hoping, for an example, Dwelling in the Word, would become part of the service on a regular basis. I think we've had it perhaps twice? To my knowledge.
- JJJ (Female): Something like that. Certainly, not very often, I think we can say.
- J (Male): Yes.
- EEEEEE (Female): No.
- MMM: That said, I don't think Dwelling in the Word went down well really, with a lot, did it really?
- H (Female): No.
- J: No.
- RRR (Female): I mean,-
- FF (Male): It was almost a black and white situation.
- JJJ: Yes.
- H: Yes.
- FF: There were a lot of people that loved it and liked it straightaway, and a lot of people that didn't like it at all.
- H: Yes.
- MMM: Yes. People that really didn't.
- JJJ: Really didn't. Yes. Very extreme.
- RRR: Uncomfortable with it. Yes.
- J: They didn't want to do it.
- GGGGG (Female): Yes.
- FF: Yes, it was interesting that was.
- Moderator: Does that create tension in the church?
- MMM: Yes.

JJJ: Yes, it does.

RRR: Yes.

FF: Creates tension in this group. *(lots of laughter)*

JJJ: Yes.

Moderator: How do you-

MMM: I think, when you say 'tension', and I think, personally, whenever we suggest that we're having a meeting for all the church members to come, that's the thing that stops people from coming.

RRR: People from coming. Yes.

JJJ: Yes.

RRR: They will know they're going to be-

Moderator: They think that's going to happen?

Female: Yes.

Female: Yes.

MMM: Doing Dwelling in the Word. They know, because we always do it.

Moderator: If it was a tension or a conflict here, what did you do with that?

MMM: I think we agreed to disagree, really, didn't we?

JJJ: I think we discussed, we tried to get underneath what it was that people didn't care for or felt uncomfortable with it for? I think we explored it, we didn't come to any sense of resolution.

Female: No.

JJJ: I think we got to a point where, those that didn't like it accepted that we would be doing it but then we wouldn't be doing it absolutely every time and on all occasions.

FF: Right. That's right, yes.

Female: Yes.

FF: We tried to meet in the middle a bit, yes.

JJJ: Yes. We just got ourselves to a point of understanding that we would never completely agree on where we stand on it.

Female: Yes.

Female: Yes, yes. Certain-

RRR: I still don't want to do it.

JJJ: No.

Female: No.

Female: No.

Moderator: Do you sometimes do it in this group or not?

MMM: We've done it occasionally.

JJJ: Not very often.

Female: Occasionally.

Female: Not very often.

MMM: Twice, haven't we?

Female: Yes.

Female: Probably.

Female: I think-

RRR: I think it's the fact that I don't like that I haven't got the option to opt out. I feel like I don't have the option to opt out.

Female: Yes.

Moderator: Oh, that's interesting. If you did have that, would it make a difference?

RRR: Yes.

Female: I think-

RRR: Yes, it would because it would ease my anxiety from the minute somebody says, "We're doing Dwelling in the Word, it's like, okay."

JJJ: It's been quite interesting with the fact-

RRR: Fight the fog. I can't see any further than that.

JJJ: That we're trying to raise this issue with mental health awareness, that it has caused a lot of people-

Female: Yes.

JJJ: Anxiety. I actually am for it. I do enjoy it.

FF: I'm for it. Yes

Moderator: It's interesting.

RRR: You guys are really, really confident in it

Female: Yes. Yes.

RRR: You're very confident at speaking out as well. Not everybody feels that way.

JJJ: It's got that. No. I understand that.

RRR: I felt with Dwelling in the Word, as well, even though I'm saying, it's like I'm banging my head against a brick wall here. I'm saying, "I don't want to do it. I don't want to do it." And I feel uncomfortable-

Female: Yes. You feel as if you're not being listened to.

RRR: If I try to opt out from doing it, as much as I feel uncomfortable for staying and doing it. You or the guys will say, "Yes, but we're going to do it." Well, did you not listen to what I said? I don't want to do it.

FF: However, we've not brought it into this meeting, probably for those reasons.

JJJ: Yes. For that, yes.

FF: We don't want anybody to feel uncomfortable. We also felt, although it wasn't the exact chosen scripture that we were reviewing over and over and over and over, this group has been incredibly structured around its study of scripture over the last seven years.

Female: Yes.

FF: We have always had, normally, well, a study book to work from, asking us questions in depth, analysing and looking at, specific pieces of text and passages from the Bible. It's strange really-

Female: Yes.

FF: Dwelling in the Word is absolutely part of what we do, but not those same scripture meetings over and over and over and over-

JJJ: Not in that same idea. No.

FF: In that format.

MMM: You do it for so long, like the PCC do one for a whole year.

JJJ: Yes. Particular passage.

MMM: Sometimes I've sat there and I thought-

JJJ: Doesn't speak to me today.

MMM: Nothing is jumping out at me at all today. Nothing.

JJJ: Actually, you know, you are at liberty to say that. People still feel uncomfortable, and I think that's RRR's point.

Female: Yes.

J: Yes.

Female: Yes. That's right.

JJJ: Even if you're saying, "It doesn't speak to me today."

RRR: I think probably one of the reasons why I felt uncomfortable as well, as you guys all know. I don't always see a positive in maybe that bit of scripture, I want an answer to something.

Female: Yes, yes.

RRR: There is a question I want to answer and because I feel that it is a question that maybe you might think, "She doesn't believe." or something.

Female: Yes.

RRR: You know, there is that-

FF: I notice [the vicar] now, when [the vicar] introduces it now, he always says-

Female: He does.



FF: "Oh, is there something in here there is a question you want to ask."

JJJ: He always says, "Is there a question you want to ask?"

FF: I think he's developed it from you guys, really, saying that you are uncomfortable with it.

Female: Yes, he has.

Female: Yes.

JJJ: That's as valid a use of Dwelling in the Word.

FF: Yes.

RRR: That never used to be.

FF: No, that wasn't in the very beginning part of his introduction, but it is now.

MMM: Or if anything strikes you, you want to know.

J: I think perhaps the weakness of Dwelling in the Word, is that whilst maybe if it's done that way it encourages the articulation of questions, it doesn't necessarily provide any answers.

MMM: No.

J: You know, the questions still hang in the air.

Female: Yes.

J: Then we move on and they're never answered.

Female: Yes. Yes.

Female: Yes.

Moderator: Do you think the struggle over it, the disagreement over it, has had an impact on the church as a whole? Do you think it's changed trying to do this, has it changed the church? What sort of impact has it had?

J: I think the struggle has not been an orchestrated campaign.

Moderator: No, no.

J: It's just been the experience of a lot of different groups, coming up against a problem in this area. I don't think there has ever been a strategic approach to tackling it.

Female: No.

J: The church has never really sat down and said, "Dwelling in the Word is throwing up a problem. How do we address the problem?"

Female: Yes.

Female: Yes.

Female: Yes, probably.

Moderator: Oh that's interesting.

FF: Yes. It's interesting because that probably means that this problem is underlying with different people, at different times and is having an impact but it's not really an acted upon, or-

JJJ: It's not out there.

FF: Recognised impact that anybody is looking at.

JJJ: I think it's definitely having an impact, because it's like we were saying, that some people will not- and I know other people, that will not turn up for things that are happening in the church because they know that's about the Word.

FF: Or turn up a little bit late.

JJJ: Yes.

FF: Miss the first-

JJJ: By 20 minutes.

GGGGG: Or if I know RRR is going, I say, "RRR, can I partner up with you?" and that's what we do.

FF: Yes, yes.

JJJ: See that's the other thing as well, isn't it, really

Female: Find a-

FF: Find a stranger.

Female: Yes.

RRR: Oh my word, some people aren't that confident that they can go and find a friendly looking-

MMM: A friendly looking stranger. Yes.

RRR: Stranger, and how do you know they're friendly, anyway? Just because they're in the church, don't make them friendly, does it.

FF: If you think about it though, to be fair though, I do think that [the vicar's] initiative of looking at introverted and extroverted people came out of that.

Female: Yes.

JJJ: Yes, that came out of that, yes.

FFF: Listening to people say that there has been an issue over-

MMM: Yes. Yes. I think that was a response but it's not a direct.

FF: It was. Yes.

J: It was a response.

Moderator: What do you do, as a whole, in the church with conflict?

Female: We- *(laughter)*

Moderator: That feels like a reasonable conflict.

MMM: Yes.

FF: Yes.

Moderator: It's got a-

Female: Well-

Female: Well-

J: We're good at avoiding it. Good at keeping it low key.

JJJ: Yes. Yes. I think your point was probably valid on that, in that obviously we've recognised there is an issue with this, and actually we've not strategically or at that level put it out there to sort it.

Female: Address it head on.

RRR: I feel that the ones that don't like doing Dwelling in the Word, are not actually listened to. They're not listened to.

GGGGG: That's not totally true, because when they first did it on the PCC, I absolutely freaked out over it. [The vicar] said it was going to be at every PCC, I actually said, "I don't want to be in this anymore."

Female: Yes. That's what- yes.

GGGGG: I actually contacted [the vicar] and I told him, and I said, "This Dwelling in the Word. I don't like it." and he asked me why, and I said, "It makes me feel very uncomfortable, it makes me feel like I felt when I was an infant at school and I always remember the teacher going round, everyone is going to answer."

RRR: Picking on.

GGGGG: I used to literally sit there and go, "Right. I've got to answer first. Get this out the way." I used to do that and in effect, that's the feelings it brings out in me.

JJJ: It brings back.

Female: Yes.

J: Brings back.

FF: You said similar things, haven't you?

RRR: Yes.

GGGGG: Yes. I said to him, "I feel so uncomfortable." and he really apologised to me for it, and then he said to me, "Right. I'm going to suggest something. Take it away, work through it yourself, write bits and bobs down." That's what I did.

FF: He does that know. He actually did that before PCC this time. Sorry, Huddle, he gave it out and said, "By all means have a look at it and come to some thoughts. Rather than it being at that time." He's-

GGGGG: Yes. Yes. I wrote it all down in a file, he's taken my file though. Then he just said, "Oh, yes. That's what that is meant to be."

FF: I think it's been dealt with probably on a one on one, individual basis.

JJJ: Yes. Yes. At a low-key level.

FF: Yes.

Moderator: As a whole?

RRR: I think as a Dwelling in the Word though, as a person that doesn't like doing it. I feel I'm not listened to, because you guys still do it.

Female: Yes.

RRR: You still do it and I still don't feel I've got the option to opt out if I want to.

Female: I don't think-

GGGGG: That's true. You don't feel you can opt out.

RRR: No. You don't. Or you feel that you-

GGGGG: Or if you do opt out then you're a failure.

RRR: I think you're very self-conscious anyway, trying to do the Dwelling in the Word, that to get up and walk out from it you feel just as self-conscious. It's which one do you go with. You stay with the Dwelling in the Word but you don't feel-

## Appendix 20 – Thematic analysis of field notes [Research Log: 5-6, 8-11, 12-14]

### 09.01.16 – Some analytical reading

#### Possible themes/categories based on reading of pp1-38 of Field Notes

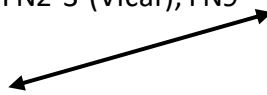
[DISUNITY TO VISION THROUGH CONFLICT] – FN1

[OWNING THE JOURNEY – REFLECTIVE LAY PARTICIPATION] – FN1-2

[OUTWARD JOURNEY] – FN1-2

[NARRATING THE JOURNEY – RESPONSIBILITY] FN6 (Vicar)

[NARRATING THE JOURNEY] FN2-3 (Vicar), FN9

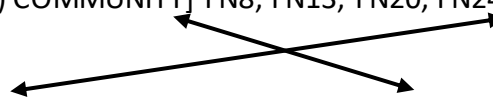


[AHEAD OF THE CURVE] FN9, FN11

[PROVIDER TO PARTICIPATION] FN3 (Vicar)

[PARTICIPATION PROBLEMATISED] FN5

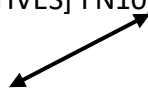
[RENEGOTIATING (THE IDEA OF) COMMUNITY] FN8, FN13, FN20, FN24 (Vicar)



[TAKING RESPONSIBILITY] FN20, FN25    [PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY] FN26

[DISCOVERING THE WIDER COMMUNITY] FN8

[OPENNESS TO ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES] FN10, FN33-38



[COMMUNITY ON THE MARGINS] FN21-23, FN32-33, FN33-38



[ROOM FOR DISSENT – A MARK OF MATURITY] FN25-26, FN 33-38

[TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP TO ENABLE CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT] FN11

[MY THOUGHTS ABOUT MATURITY] FN14

[MIDDLE-CLASS DISTANCE FROM LIFE] FN15

[WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?] FN15, FN16

[FINDING THE WAY IN] FN17, FN30-31

[PRIVATISATION AND MATURITY] FN22

[ENGAGING THE OTHERNESS OF SCRIPTURE] FN27

[HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY] FN28-30

### **12.03.16 – Some analytical reading**

#### **Possible themes/categories based on reading of pp38-74 of Field Notes – Correlated with pp1-38**

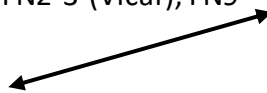
##### **JOURNEY**

[OWNING THE JOURNEY – REFLECTIVE LAY PARTICIPATION] – FN1-2

[OUTWARD JOURNEY] – FN1-2

[NARRATING THE JOURNEY – RESPONSIBILITY] FN6 (Vicar)

[NARRATING THE JOURNEY] FN2-3 (Vicar), FN9



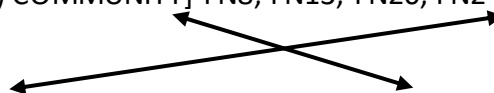
[AHEAD OF THE CURVE] FN9, FN11

##### **PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY**

[PROVIDER TO PARTICIPATION] FN3 (Vicar)

[PARTICIPATION PROBLEMATISED] FN5

[RENEGOTIATING (THE IDEA OF) COMMUNITY] FN8, FN13, FN20, FN24 (Vicar)



[TAKING RESPONSIBILITY] FN20, FN25      [PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY] FN26

[MATURITY AND RESPONSIBILITY] – FN39-41

[VICAR PASSES RESPONSIBILITY] – FN52

[VICAR SAYS – ‘YOU HAVE TAKEN RESPONSIBILITY AND YOU HAVE GROWN’] – FN60

[ATTENTIVENESS AS A MARK OF TAKING RESPONSIBILITY?] – FN61

## RE-NEGOTIATING COMMUNITY

- [DISCOVERING THE WIDER COMMUNITY] FN8
- [PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY] – FN60
- [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY] – FN65
- [COMMUNITY PARTNERS WITH CHURCH] – FN70-72
- [CHURCH NEEDS TO GET OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY] – FN72
- [CHURCH HAS CHANGED IN RESPECT OF COMMUNITY] – FN72-73
- [[HOW DO YOU ENABLE SOCIALITY?]] – FN61
- [CREATING SOCIAL SPACE IN THE COMMUNITY] FN70
- MY ENERGY AROUND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT] – FN73-74

## COUNTER-STORY

- [OPENNESS TO ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES] FN10, FN33-38
  - [COMMUNITY ON THE MARGINS] FN21-23, FN32-33, FN33-38
  - [ROOM FOR DISSENT – A MARK OF MATURITY] FN25-26, FN 33-38
  - [LOSS OF HOLIDAY CLUB] – FN52
- 
- ```
graph TD; A["[OPENNESS TO ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES] FN10, FN33-38"] --> B["[COMMUNITY ON THE MARGINS] FN21-23, FN32-33, FN33-38"]; B --> C["[ROOM FOR DISSENT – A MARK OF MATURITY] FN25-26, FN 33-38"];
```

## RE-SHAPING LEADERSHIP

- [TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP TO ENABLE CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT] FN11
- [LEADERSHIP CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY] – FN39-41
- [HOW DOES OVERSIGHT WORK WITHOUT CONTROLLING PEOPLE?] – FN53-57
- [HOW DO WE ASSESS THE PLANS – ARE PEOPLE ‘GETTING IT’?] – FN57-60

## MY EXPERIENCE OF BEING A RESEARCHER

- [WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?] FN15, FN16
- [FINDING THE WAY IN] FN17, FN30-31



[THE STRAIN OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION] – FN41-42

[DATA QUANTITY AND READING RITUAL] – FN41-42

### **PRIVATISATION AND MATURITY**

[PRIVATISATION AND MATURITY] FN22

[CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE IN A BUSY WORKING LIFE – PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPLIT – NO TIME FOR RELATIONSHIP] – FN61-62

[SERMON ON SACRED/SECULAR DIVIDE – BUT THE STORY WORKED BEST!] – FN67-68 & 69

[SERMONS AND MATURITY] – FN38-39

[PREACHING AND MATURITY – DOES IT HELP?] – FN63-64

[MY THOUGHTS ABOUT MATURITY] FN14

### **READING SCRIPTURE**

[ENGAGING THE OTHERNESS OF SCRIPTURE] FN27

[DWELLING IN THE WORD – AS LAY-DRIVEN AND SUBSTANTIALLY EXEGETICAL – MATURITY?] – FN63

[RESISTANCE TO DiTW] – FN65

[MORE PMC PUSHBACK?] – FN66

### **HOSPITALITY**

[HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY] FN28-30

[EVIDENCE OF NEWCOMERS] – FN41-42

[VICAR DIRECTS GENERALISED CONVERSATION TO PRESENT ENGAGEMENT – LEADS THEM TO REFLECT ON WELCOME AND OTHERS] – FN42-44

[WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY TO THE OUTSIDER WAS IMPORTANT TO HER] – FN 50-51

[HOW SUNDAY WORSHIP WORKS AGAINST THE INTENTION TO WELCOME] – FN51-52

[WHO IS THE CHURCH COMMUNITY ON SUNDAY AT 10.30?] – FN66

### **EXPERIMENTS WITH ‘THE PEACE’**

[RITUAL WELCOME AND THE PEACE] – FN38-39

[DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS ON SUNDAY – CREATIVE AND REFLECTIVE USE OF PEACE] - FN44-50

[PEACE AND DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS? – HUDDLE PLAN] - FN66

[PEACE AND DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS – IS IT WORKING?] – FN68

## **DWELLING IN THE WORLD**

[NO PUSH BACK ON DitWorld – WHY?] – FN65

[DitWorld – NO PUSHBACK BECAUSE WE DO IT ON OUR OWN?] – FN67

[DitWorld –IMAGINATION AND INITIATIVE TO ENTER ANOTHER’S WORLD] FN69-70

[IMPACT OF THE SCHOOL] – FN66

[TRANSFORMATION AND PMC] – FN50-51

[WHAT DOES THE 8.00AM DO?] – FN68

[MIDDLE-CLASS DISTANCE FROM LIFE] FN15

[DISUNITY TO VISION THROUGH CONFLICT] – FN1

## **18.09.16 – Some analytical reading**

**Possible themes/categories based on reading of pp74-108 of Field Notes – Correlated with pp1-74**

**Church and ‘otherness’ – does PMC challenge ‘Sunday culture’?**

[SHARING THE PEACE – ENGAGING WITH THE OTHER] – p74 (HUDDLE)

[ENGAGING WITH THE OTHER IN CHURCH, COMMUNITY AND EVERYDAY LIFE] – p74 (HUDDLE)

[CHALLENGE TO ENGAGE WITH THE OTHER TO CHURCH AND COMMUNITY] – P75 (CONGREGATION MEMBER)

[THE PEACE] – P78 (HUDDLE)  
[HOW DOES PMC INFLUENCE SUNDAYS?] – P92 (10.30 SERVICE)  
[IMPACT ON CHURCH LIFE AND SERVICES] – P93 (AGM)  
[PARTNERSHIP] – P99 (AGM PART 2)  
[STRUGGLE TO FIND WAY INTO CHURCH] – P99 (AGM PART 2)  
[ATTENDING TO THE OTHER] – P104 (FOCUS GROUP 4)

### Renegotiating community

[LOTS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY] – PP75-77 (HUDDLE)  
[DOING WITH] – P76 (HUDDLE)  
[PEOPLE OF PEACE] – P79 (HUDDLE)  
[TALE OF TWO MEETINGS – DEMONSTRATING CONNECTION WITH COMMUNITY] – PP84-88  
(COMMUNITY GROUP)  
[COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT] – P93 (AGM – VICAR)  
[COMMUNITY JOINING WITH CHURCH] – P100 (AGM PART 2)

### Responsibility, personal vocation and maturity

[TAKING RESPONSIBILITY] – P76-77 (HUDDLE)  
[CONSUMERISM OF NEWCOMERS – P75, BUT NEW BAPTISMS – P77] – (HUDDLE)  
[TAKING RESPONSIBILITY VS WAITING TO BE TOLD/SELF-INTEREST – HOLIDAY CLUB] – P78-79 (HUDDLE)  
[EQUIPPING] – P79 (HUDDLE)  
[REFLECTION AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY] – P93 (AGM – VICAR)  
[SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY] – P97 (VICAR)  
[REFLECTION AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY] – P98 (AGM PART 2 – VICAR)  
[REFLECTION] – P99 (AGM PART 2)  
[CHANGING PERCEPTION OF LAY ROLES] – P99 (AGM PART 2)

### *Sub-set: programmes and passivity*

[DOING FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE BECAUSE OF CONSUMERIST EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS?] – PP81-84 – (YOUTH LEADERS' MEETING) – how does this relate to lack of DitW at youth leaders' meeting

[PROBLEM WITH PROGRAMMES] – P97 (VICAR)

[NO LONGER LED BY EVENTS] – P99 (AGM PART 2)

[CHALLENGE TO HOLIDAY CLUB] – P99 – (AGM PART 2)

### *Impact of spiritual practices*

[PICKING UP SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES] – P77-78 (HUDDLE)

[NO DitW] – P81 (YOUTH LEADERS' MEETING) – how does this relate to 'doing for young people' in 'responsibility' section?

[MIXED REACTION TO DitW AND SMART PLANS] – P100 (AGM PART 2)

[GETTING DISCERNMENT] – P100 (AGM PART 2)

[WELCOME] – P101 (AGM PART 2)

[AWARENESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE] – P101 (AGM PART 2)

### *Conflict and anxiety*

[ANXIETY OVER NUMBERS – TELLING THE STORY] – PP96-97 (VICAR)

[CONFLICT WITH DEMANDS OF PMC – 'FAMILY' LEAVES] – PP97-98 (VICAR)

[ENGAGING WITH CHALLENGING ISSUES] – PP100-101 (AGM PART 2)

### *The Spiritual Leader*

[VICAR SETS SCENE FOR THE NEXT YEAR AND ENCOURAGES] PP101-103 (AGM PART 2 – VICAR)

[EXHORTATION FOR NEW YEAR] – P105 (SUNDAY – VICAR)

### *My Reflections*

[ANALYSIS – 4 THEMES] – P79-80 (NICK)

[LISTENING TO WOMEN] – P99 (AGM PART 2 – NICK)

[ORGANISATIONAL AND PERSONAL JOURNEYS] – P103 (FOCUS GROUP 3 – NICK)

[ETHOS AND SONGS] – P105 (SUNDAY – NICK)

[WHEN DOES EXHORTATION BECOME COERCION – THE GRAIN OF THE CULTURE] – PP105-106 (SUNDAY – NICK)

### **My Research Journey**

[WALKING THE PATCH] – PP88-90 (NICK)

[ME – A TOLERATED PRESENCE] – P91 (8.00AM SERVICE)

[DEVELOPING AS A RESEARCHER – NEGOTIATING ACCESS] – P94-95 (NICK)

[ACCESSING THE DIFFICULT STUFF] – PP95-96 (NICK)

[ACCESSING THE DOCUMENTS] – P96 (VICAR AND NICK)

## **Appendix 21 – Analytic notes and memos [Research Log, 2, 6-7, 20]**

### **25.09.15 – Analytic Note**

Two (or one?) interesting themes arose for me in the meeting with the leadership on 13.09.15. The idea that the word community starts to mean something different – no longer the church community and the wider/other/outside community but them beginning to overlap or be interchangeable?

Is this the renegotiation of community or the discovery of (the wider) community?<sup>1</sup>

Another possible theme: leadership as enabling corporate spiritual discernment. This, of course, lies at the heart of the PMC process; so is it language or practice – or both?

How does practice happen when you find a language? Or how far is language re-shaped by practice?

### **10.01.16 – Analytic Memo**

#### **Renegotiating (the idea of) community**

In terms of the number and interrelationship of themes, it seems that community – and in particular seeing community in a different way is a highly significant part of their journey. They speak a number of times about a new relationship with their community.<sup>2</sup> In fact, I wonder whether this lies behind their sense of something to offer the wider church: ‘if you had asked us at the beginning to find someone to talk to in the community we would have found it really difficult, but now we are falling over them’.<sup>3</sup>

Those at the heart of the PMC process see a changing relationship with the community as a key marker of their development. They are doing more ‘with’ than ‘to or for’ and they appreciate the reputation they are developing. ‘This whole business of building community the Community Group have caught and want to do it as well and want to invite the church into it because they are seen as a group that is good at building community’.<sup>4</sup>

I notice a real sense of energy around this issue amongst the leadership of the church – this is central to the story that they want to tell, that they are telling to me. It will be interesting to see how this is borne out by community interviews and surveys when I come to do them.

At the same time, there is a sense of loss of community reported by the home group that I have spent time with. There is nothing that we do now (since the cutting of the Holiday

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<sup>1</sup> FN:2 – 06.06.15

<sup>2</sup> FN:8 – 14.09.15. FN:13 – 11.11.15. FN:20, 24 – 23.11.15.

<sup>3</sup> FN:8 – 14.09.15

<sup>4</sup> FN:24 – 23.11.15

Club) that draws the whole church together; we are in our silos. The Holiday Club also drew lots in from the community – so that’s a big loss. We don’t seem to do anything anymore – only talk about things.<sup>5</sup>

So I am wondering if this idea of partnership with community is a key question around community development and maturity and whether this points somehow to the issue of ‘attending to the other?’

But how do I interpret the different readings around the formation of community?

### **20.06.17 - Analytic Memo (1)**

It just occurred to me that I have not come across any genuine bridge communities that are working together on anything ‘kingdom shaped.’ I think it is reasonable to say that there is an element of bridge community with the community group – but my sense is that the community group might not want to describe itself that way – at least not all of them. The collaboration here tends to be one-off events. I suspect that the Halls Committee is a Bridge Community and maybe the Fabric team? There are elements of this too with the toddler group – but more the church mentoring people into church work.

I don’t see anything that is quite like the Wrestling at St Ann’s where two distinct communities have come together and it’s hard to see who is enabling whom; it is very clearly two-way and synergistic. I guess St X may have this with the Community Group.

I assume that they ran some bridge communities with their early experimentation and I understand that a couple tried to DitW – one reasonably successfully with an Easter-focused and more church-based activity, and one with disastrous effects. But it seems that ‘bridging’ is now being practised or at least proposed more as an individual act (for example in the new small groups).

Is this a mark of a more middle-class culture where people are less inclined to see life in communal terms except in the sense of enhancing community life as with the community groups?

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<sup>5</sup> FN:33-38 – 03.12.15

## Appendix 22 – Coding and categories for interviews and focus groups

The data was distributed across the following main categories:

1. Personal Maturity
2. Communal Maturity
3. PMC – personal
4. PMC – communal
5. Spiritual practices

In the first two categories, sub-categories were created according to the data, each of which had their own range of codes. This allowed me to stay close to their narrative and language and also reveal proportionately the things that they felt contributed the most to personal and communal growth.

In the next three categories, I used sub-categories of positive, negative and neutral as well as others. I made this decision because PMC was a contested experience at St X and I wanted to make room for the full range of responses in the narrative, but also I wanted to explore whether people's emotional reactions gave any hints about processes of growth and maturation.

I then formed codes that reflected the data appropriate to the sub-categories. Once again the codes in the sub-categories stayed close to their narrative and experience.

The separate category for spiritual practices was important because these are unique to the PMC process and therefore people commented on them and upon the impact of them on personal and communal life and development. I found that I needed the positive/negative/neutral sub-categories for the first practice – Dwelling in the Word – but not for the others. This was because it was both the practice that had diffused the most and for the same reason the one that was the most passionately contested.

Using this structure meant that I could correlate and contrast between what people said generally about personal and communal maturity (this was a question in all focus groups and interviews) and how what they said here related to what they said about their experience of the PMC process and the spiritual practices. It allowed me to see the values and experiences that contributed to maintaining the status quo and those that promoted change and development.

Another advantage of coding is that it allows you to see the ideas that predominate in people's interpretation of their experience. This is not to say that quantity alone is a



measure of significance, but it does give pointers to what people may consider to be the most significant formative experiences.

There were two further categories;

6. Power – which contributed significantly to the interpretation.
7. The vicar's leadership. Whilst, there are points where this is significant in answering the research question, generally the material here would be the subject for further research, which is why it is referenced more in chapter 5.

## Appendix 23 – Attending to narrative, relationships and tone [Research Log, 21-38]

### Observations and Interpretations during Focus Group analysis

#### a. Focus Group 1 – home group

VV, AAAAA and DDDDD – 10-20 years

H and J – 7 years

PP and VVV – 4 years

BBBBB – 2 months

3 very involved in PMC

2 quite involved in PMC

2 not involved in PMC (1 is a newcomer)

#### *Thematic*

We started by exploring the story of the home group, which they said went back 30 years. By implication, the group has a sense of identity/history that is bigger than the individual membership. This is an interesting observation from the point-of-view of “communal vehicles.” The group has an existence that is more than the sum of its members. Not very much change in the group; settled not growing. (pp5-7)

In this early focus group, we went straight to PMC and its impact on the church. What followed was a basically positive conversation. A positive church had begun to be aspirational. A ‘failed’ experiment with young mums had taught them about the importance of partnership. They had seen the impact of missional experimenting in helping them to slow down, take time and notice God. It had moved them out (from the castle) to the community – though mainly with the Community group. There was some comment about frustration with the terminology. BBBB’s first comment was about the welcome she had received in a church very different from what she was used to. (pp7-12)

When we spoke about personal impact, their comments were almost entirely about belonging and receiving pastoral care – especially in times of suffering and struggle. One person talked about the impact of PMC on their ministry to older people where learning to do things ‘with’ instead of ‘for’ had led a greater taking of responsibility by the members of the luncheon club. (pp12-15)

A question about struggles with the PMC process led to an extended exchange about DitW, where people talked about its mixed reception and the scaling down of its use on a Sunday. Issues were raised about doing the same passage endlessly and about finding strangers to share with on a Sunday. (pp15-18)

We talked about the home group and the impact of 1<sup>st</sup> year plan about 'deepening relationships.' They shared ideas about supporting a charity or running a film night. Some felt that using the SMART plan had given more focus to their life as a home group, whereas others had found it over professionalised and contrived – loss of spontaneity. BBBB made her second contribution to the effect that something must be working because she had felt welcomed in!

### *Performative*

The group was very welcoming to me and keen to be of help. It was one of the warmer receptions that I had. The group appeared to have a positive outlook on the church and the vicar, wanting to give PMC a chance. The early conversation about PMC was broadly positive; PP and VVV had some reservations, AAAAA, DDDDD and BBBB don't really know much about it, but the story they told was of change and progress in the church and they were upbeat about it.

I notice that I introduced the question of struggle with PMC that I had noticed in a couple of comments which led to an extended, polite but gently conflictual discussion of Dwelling in the Word – which raised key questions of learning, knowledge and encounter with God – a connection here to educational experience? When PP (a highly educated man) talked about getting the passage after a month and then wondering about the point of it, the comment came back, with humour, 'but you're clever.' PP reacted very strongly to this and defended his comment quite forcefully. I wonder whether some of the struggle with expertise (and also perhaps pace and decisiveness) reveals cultural marks about the way in which education empowers?

I wonder if I would have discovered this level of difference if I had not prompted with the question? I can't believe they weren't aware of a level of conflict/difference – but nothing was acknowledged openly: do they know how to do this kind of naming of difference?

In the discussion of the SMART plan, the distinction between structure and spontaneity was framed as the intrusion of work on the church world. Is this an intrusion of the public in the private, which, to some, did not seem appropriate?

This group is able to discuss difference of perception – if not to be entirely comfortable with expressing difference and that in principle could be a maturing and developing practice.

I am wondering whether communal maturity is partly shaped by the freedom and willingness to articulate difference and disagreement and whether focusing on this might be a growth point for the church?

I am also wondering whether the embracing of a change process as a community actually invites this kind of developmental learning. So, would any change process do or only one which addresses cultural assumptions and practices?

#### b. Focus Group 2 – 8.00am service

Only two people from the 8.00am service participated in this 'group', despite a fairly thorough invitation and advertising process. Maybe, after the service was not a good choice

of time, though I thought trying to get them together at another time was an even more unlikely strategy. Maybe they just didn't want to do it? Or they hadn't really connected to PMC? Or they just weren't brought up to have or offer opinions?

NNNN was a man in his 80s. He said he had been associated with St X for over 40 years since moving to X1, but had been coming to this service for 6 years. I am not sure what his involvement was previously, but now it was only the 8.00am. He had no awareness of PMC

TTTT was a former Church warden. As well as intending this service and 10.30am, she went to a monthly service in another part of the parish – Z1. She'd been coming for about 20 years. She did not live in the parish. (pp1-3)

### *Thematic*

NNNN knew nothing about PMC. TTTT had not been involved deeply but was aware of things. She spoke positively about DitW in terms of listening to other people and of DitWorld as connecting with the community; she felt there was much more participating by church in community stuff and vice versa. NNNN had memories of much more community interaction decades ago, something also mentioned in FG1. NNNN had not experienced DitW; TTTT thought it had only been done once at 8.00am. (pp3-8)

When I introduced the question of struggles, TTTT focused on understanding the process, especially the language. She felt older people got it less than younger ones. (pp8-10)

When we talked about growth – NNNN talked about 'spreading the word', something he did more years ago when he was still out and about and at work. Now he felt very isolated; maybe only three people, apart from his family, that he would see. This touches on an observation I had made about talking about a relational missional process at the 8.00am service, where many people are experiencing increasing isolation. NNNN talked about growth in terms of younger families coming and changing the style of the 10.30 service. Personally, NNNN felt that her faith had come alive and that she had learnt from the spiritual practices and come out of her shell. TTTT went on a long excursus about changing life patterns on Sundays and how it had detracted from church. NNNN talked about the fact that the church was hidden away down a lane and people did not know where it was, something that others mentioned while I was at St X. TTTT disputed this. Community interviews at a later stage indicated that TTTT was correct about this. (pp10-15)

### *Performative*

This was a strange FG because for much of the time it felt more like a one-to-one interview. NNNN's disconnection from PMC, and from church life in general, helped me to understand why it was so hard to gather a group from the 8.00am service; they are not really connected with the mission of the church. One of the reasons for this is that the church mission process was not entering with imagination into their world – which was a world of decreasing human relationship.

At times the contributions of NNNN seemed somewhat unreal. It felt like she was saying what I wanted to hear and her interpretation of growth in terms of numbers did not quite

connect with the heart of PMC. She had very little concrete experience to share of her journey with PMC. However, there was some real stuff there too. It raises a question again for me about educational and social background – particularly her comments about the intelligibility of the process.

c. Focus Group 3 – home group

The groups began as a post-Alpha group 3-4 years previous and one or two had joined since then. V had been the leader of that group. It started socially, started adding an epilogue and then developed into a more full-on study group. Its social roots can still be seen in the fact that it still meets in the local pub.

2 are quite involved in church; 1 had been a leader in the church who felt pushed out and is more sporadic in her attendance on Sunday. The other 2 rarely came to church on a Sunday. Two other members were not present that night. (pp2-4)

*Thematic*

They saw the group as a comfortable safe space in which they could share and be open by contrast to larger church meetings. A place to belong and not be intimidated, which is how some of them saw the wider church. They talked about the value of learning and preparing for the session and that one great sign of progress was the fact that they were all taking a share in leading the sessions. (pp4-7)

The two who went rarely to church had no experience of PMC and did not offer much to this stage of the conversation, except in one case to talk extensively about why she found it hard to go to church. One person who had been very involved, talked extensively and passionately about how much he had come to hate it. He had warmed to it at first, especially intellectually, but had found the process confusing and troubling and it had had a negative effect on his mental health. He had also been very disappointed by the American originator of PMC when he had spoken at the church; he had not 'sold' it to them. V who had been a member and leader for many years picked up from them and talked about what she felt had been the tremendous losses to the church during this time in terms of people – a theme picked up in FG6. She also spoke about her feeling of growing distance from the leadership. (pp7-15)

V went on to talk extensively about the losses in terms of youth work (pp15-17)

For the church, they talked about the missional experimenting being very constricting in terms of having to follow what had been decided and then putting on hold everything else, even when people had good ideas. (pp17-22)

They talked about feeling that the process closed down conflict as there was nowhere to raise it. They talked about finding the practices increasingly confusing and unmemorable. They raised problems with DitW, especially looking at one passage for ages, which they felt almost cultish and lacking in perspective and a discomfort with focusing on strangers (pp22-26).

In respect of the SMART plan for deepening relationships. They did not do much with it. They weren't against it, they just felt that their group was doing fine. (pp26-27).

On the question of personal growth, they returned to the value of the home group and the importance to them of discussion and learning and sharing responsibility for the group. They own it in a way they feel PMC is not owned by the church. They felt that despite the commitment to deepening relationships, the church does not do much to help it happen. V offered another example of a women's group that flourished, but was just stopped. (pp27-30)

Talking about the AGM, which they had not attended, they felt there was no forum to raise questions or to challenge. They gave another example of a woman who wanted to do something in partnership with a local school and the church would not support – so she just went off and did it. They mentioned other things like the Holiday Club (of which they had spoken a lot previously when I first met them in the pub) and an inter-church Christmas musical. (pp31-32)

### *Performative*

There was an interesting interplay in this FG between an extended complaint about the church and an appreciation of the home group. The complaint was led by D who had been very hurt by his involvement in the PMC process and by V who felt excluded as a leader and was feeling the loss of much from the past. E supported this as D's wife and was clearly concerned for his health. As U and SSSS had little involvement in the church, they had nothing to say about PMC, but were supportive of what the others had to say.

V was clearly the leader and they deferred a lot to her views whilst she praised their increasing involvement and responsibility in the group (a pattern that was also noticeable in FG6). Her reading of the church's history was accepted by the group, both here and previously when I had met them in the pub.

There was anger in this meeting, some of it under the surface, but not as strong as when I had met D one-to-one. Perhaps it is harder to express the full force of feeling in a group – even when you know they agree with you? Sometimes the reasons were vague and sometimes more clear.

There was a single story here, which they all bought into. The group is where the life is; the church is an unsafe space. This meant they were protective about their interpretation and unlikely to reflect upon it. So for example, nobody questioned SSSS rationale for not coming to church. There was a point towards the end where they began to acknowledge this. 'We are not an anti-PMC group!' (Really?) They went onto talk about their relationship with the church as the 'subversive group.' This felt like a rationalisation of what had been a fairly unremitting attack.

I was struck by the long pause when I asked them the question about personal and communal growth. In fact D commented on the length of the pause and I clearly felt that I needed to give them permission. Now, was this because this was changing gear? Or was it

that they did not think about this question as a rule or that reflecting did not come easily to them?

d. Focus Group 4 – home group

J – 4 years

MMM – 7 years

RRR – 7 years

EEEE – 3 years

H – several years (4?)

FF – 7 years

JJJ – 7 years

FFFF – come once before

GGGG – 7 years

The group has been going for 7 years. (pp1-4)

*This was the first group in which I included the exercise about the words. I also changed the transcribers at this point. This is why the page numbers go higher because the text is more spread out.*

Words they chose: Bible Reading, Praying, Awareness of God, Worship on Sundays, Giving, Listening, Belonging, Hospitality, Building Relationships, Fellowship,

Reviewing their choices they added:

Knowledge – because you need this to progress

Building relationships contains fellowship

Commitment was pressed strongly and effectively by one person

One person talked about the importance of ‘taking responsibility’ (p4-28)

They really got the whole idea of telling stories to illustrate their choice of words and there are fascinating stories about learning leadership through the PMC process (pp28-37), persevering in the face of doubt (pp37-38), the importance of knowledge, but also the importance of question and doubt – something that was allowed in this group, unlike others (pp38-41), being welcomed in a new place after bereavement (pp41-43) and three or four stories about finding faith and hope and receiving help at a time of deep suffering (pp43-53)

When we turned to PMC, the first responses were positive: looking beyond the church and connecting with the community, partnering with people, rather than doing it for them (pp53-56), becoming more aware of God already at work in the community (pp56-57). But it’s taken a long time to seep into the church (pp57-58). There was a long discussion about the experience of DitW and the positives and negatives: I invited them to reflect on the

tension. They talked about people avoiding it, learning to agree to differ and how they had not done it much in their group. One person talked about the impossibility of opting out and feeling forced to do it and not being listened to about it. Similar points were raised about not having anything to say, doing the same passage, and the struggle with approaching strangers. They also articulated a concern that questions about the passage are never addressed. The church doesn't have a strategy for addressing differences; people just turn up late to avoid it or find ways of ameliorating the practice. They rely on the vicar to deal pastorally with people's discomfort. (pp59-80)

But DitWorld 'is fine'. It's DitW that's the problem. (p82) Hospitality – not much impact, not like DitW – back to another excursus on DitW (pp82-89)

Conversation about how the church has changed – people from community joining, changing the financing of the church, people taking responsibility, more baptisms. God is working in church and community – more connections with individuals and groups. But still returned to question of DitW. (pp89-104)

Final comments? Overall positive about PMC – comments from most of the people in the group – again focusing on the community connection. And feeling that they have been changed for the better by it; one person talked about the surprise of leadership. (pp104-118)

### *Performative*

Dynamics of group was interesting. FF took the lead in the group discussion, but not in a dominating way. He guided it, made sure people had the opportunity to speak who were quiet and moved them on from choosing words to telling stories about their choices – so I didn't have to do that.

They were very participative and discursive about the discipleship words and drew out and commented extensively on each other's contributions.

H was very tenacious in getting 'commitment' into their choices.

Despite FF's attempts, only 5 of the 9 contributed substantially to discussion – FF, H, JJJ, J and MMM. Others had moments where they told their story almost as a one off.

Interesting response to questioning when FF spoke about knowledge. Interesting narrative journey in the group when H spoke about dealing with questions and doubt. Did they really address RRR's questions? Fascinating narrative around questions of doubt as they use humour to position RRR as their 'Thomas.'

FF guided again to draw in FFFFF who had only spoken once.

Interesting interplay of relationships, prayer and Scripture in coping with times of trouble.

Their discussion of personal growth is very moving but it has all been about the sustaining of their lives with God and each other. It is very much about emotional sustenance and therapeutic care from God. I wonder if they can integrate their personal journey with the community's missional journey?



Fascinating discussion of DitW and their tension in their group over this practice. JJJ and FF present it as something that they have come to a compromise on. Then RRR breaks in with a different interpretation, saying that she doesn't like it but it is imposed on her anyway – with no opt out. JJJ and FF have facility with words and she doesn't; she doesn't feel listened to. FF says - but that's why we haven't brought it into the group. RRR also talks about not feeling positive about every Scripture and having questions, which relates back to the earlier 'domestication of doubt.' Does DitW surface this and is the problem more with the communal habits of the group/church? i.e. the avoidance of struggle and disagreement.

People who are supporters of DitW seem to be the stronger group institutionally and are perceived as such by those who don't like it – and yet the practice of DitW is not common outside leadership groups (convened by the vicar) and newer groups or groups led by a supporter of the practice.

There was further fascinating discussion of DitW in terms of 'strangers' and the pressure to do it. Trying to move it on to discuss other practices led quickly to return to DitW. Other practices are 'fine' – but is this because they haven't really engaged with them at depth?

In conversation about change in the church, 2 themes emerged:

Is it the vicar or is it us?

Is it recent or going on for a long time?

These were points of debate.

In the group the positive voice for PMC dominates, though other voices are heard.

For me, this was probably the easiest group to lead and the one in which my presence is the least evident. I felt I just needed to steer it at a few points and then on it went.

e. Focus Group 5 – home group

I forgot to ask how long they had been in their group, but it felt like a long established one. GG who leads their group is a strong PMC supporter and participant, but he wasn't present at this meeting, which I suspect allowed room for more voices and more honesty than would otherwise have been the case. 7 people present. (p1)

*Thematic*

Unlike, FG4, they chose almost entirely words associated with a more traditional approach to what it means to grow. (pp2-12). It is interesting, though, that RR misread the card discernment for discontentment. This word then became the first thing that was discussed in respect of DitW and change. (pp12-13)

Their initial discussion of their chosen words revolved round the inner life of the church and particularly the mutual support they had received within the home group. (pp13-16) Then RR moved the discussion to community involvement which led to a discussion of the outward movement and community partnerships that had developed with PMC. Interestingly, the comment about the hidden church building came up again. (pp16-18)

Discontentment returned with a discussion of worship – especially around music. (pp19-21)

I then turned the question to PMC, which had not really figured up to that point. They felt that you got it if you went to meetings, but for most people it had passed them by. There then followed an extensive discussion about the fact that they thought it related to the village part of the parish where none of them lived. (pp21-28).

When invited further, they were able to note some changes in terms of connections with the community, people from the community coming and partnership in running the church halls. (pp28-32) Further invitation to talk about PMC and change led to comments about how much RR does in the community. (pp28-33) Further invitation to talk about change led us back to more conversation about discontent with the worship at 10.30 – especially the music. Basically, all agreed (pp33-38). This was followed by a positive discussion of the clergy and the sense of unity they have developed in the congregation. (pp38-42)

Further invitations to talk about change led to more comments on worship, followed by them raising the issue of the SMART plan: ‘wasn’t it about building relationships? ...we didn’t do it.’ They went on to say that they felt they were already doing enough and talked about all the things they were involved with at St X – particularly with the elderly and the Luncheon Club. (pp42-53).

We moved on to what helps or hinders growth. RR talked about helping people and representing Jesus. But then we returned to problems with worship – the music and the words of modern songs. Then they complained about all age services through the summer and doing activities. (pp53-59)

We talked about conflict and they said we avoid it and grumble. One said, we should tell the vicar and let him sort it out, but people won’t tell him. But then they switched to talking about how caring people are and how much they do without anyone else knowing. (pp59-64)

We then touched on DitW. Two people talked about feeling they did not know enough to do this and one that he should read his Bible more. They also struggled with a lot of the language – especially ‘reasonably friendly stranger’ (sic). You have to have a DBS to pass round the plate but you can be a stranger and be grabbed first time! And what do we tell our children? They hadn’t done it in the group and they spoke about the repetitiveness of the practice. They struggled with finding something new in the passage and sharing what their partner said. Self-defeating – get nothing from it and just worry. (pp64-71)

Asked whether they had experienced any of the other practices – they said, no. They went back to talking about DitW on Sunday as upsetting the congregation because they wanted to listen, not talk. Basically they agreed that this was not what they came to church for. They want to hear not say things. Felt like being in school. Talked about other churches who were doing it and didn’t like it. When asked what might help, they said, more explanation and different language. (pp71-78)

They then talked about some people being more gifted and better at it and they talked about their leader, GG, who wasn't there that night. He was brought up with the Bible and he is very intelligent. (pp78-82)

Towards the end, we reviewed the words they had chosen originally for changes: they stressed awareness of God, behaviour and wisdom (in relation to what they had talked about), commitment, contentment/discontentment, hospitality. (pp82-87)

Invitation to any final comments, led to a long conversation about communication. They don't tell us what's going on enough – but then we don't want too much stuff!! (pp87-93)

### *Performative*

The group discussion about growth was not as animated as in FG4; they came up with words and phrases that I hadn't chosen like: prayer in groups, prayer partners, music, encouragement. They interpreted partnership as prayer partners. They spoke very little personally about themselves and when they did it was very generalised. 'Do we hold them ourselves' suggested individualistic assumptions by KKKKK. They focused on the inner life of the church and the group

RRs misreading of discernment for discontentment was really interesting – because I would say that discontentment was the theme of this FG. It seemed that whenever they felt the force of their negativity, they would move to something positive, like affirming the clergy or talking about the way people care. But overall, the tenor of the group was 'discontentment' – particularly with Sunday worship. Their discomfort with their negativity might also have been marked by mentioning other churches that were struggling with PMC and asking me if I had come across these problems elsewhere. I didn't want to turn it into an interview of me.

I note a sense of frustration in my leadership as I keep coming back to the same questions – especially about PMC – trying to rephrase them. In the end, I notice how I give up: 'So if we were to stop worrying about whether we can discern PMC...!!!! (p33)

The Bible as 'manual for life' lies behind choice of Bible reading – but later they reveal anxiety about their lack of knowledge and grasp of the Bible. Again we find the same issues around education and expertise that appeared in FG1. It almost seems like the very thing the practice is trying to overcome – expert culture – is being reinforced for them.

Getting stories from them was very difficult and substance about growth was thin on the ground. They became very stuck on worship and music on Sundays.

RR is their default person for all questions about looking outwards because he is naturally very drawn to community. He is the only one who is at all positive about PMC, but he does not press it in the group. It was this group that helped me towards the idea of PMC happening 'somewhere else' as far as the home groups were concerned.

I see how much I press the question of growth and in the end, I think they used humour to sign off. (pp82-84)

f. Focus Group 6 – home group

RRRR – 12 years; LLLLL – 8 years – came through holiday club, doesn't attend church regularly on Sundays now; MMMMM from beginning; TTT – 12 years; NNNNN – 10 years. (pp1-3)

*Thematic*

Words: wisdom, awareness of God, Bible, investing in others connected with teaching, belonging, praying together, suffering (2) – linked to bereavement. As well as teaching, they added love and peace – from being in the group and support from God. After further thought, TTT added Mission and connected this with running the Holiday Club and Alpha courses. They connected their words with stories straight away. I invited them to tell more stories if they wished and they talked about learning together and from each other in the group and sharing responsibility for leading – things they felt were not possible in the large group. (Connection here with FG3). They have 'alumni' – people who have left the church that they still keep in touch with. (pp3-19)

Moved on to question about how the wider church helps or hinders. Small group builds confidence for the larger setting. In the larger setting, we can welcome new people. Group members pray for me on Sunday. Their involvement in church on Sundays was as a group (e.g. serving coffee – though critical of the quality of coffee and biscuits!) Don't belong on Sunday – this is my church. (Connection with FG3). It's changed a lot first with the vacancy and then the new vicar. (pp19-25).

Started on a question about mission in the past that they had mentioned earlier and that led first to a discussion about people who had left. This had led to a reduced sense of connection to the church. On mission, we don't do big events like we used to and we join in with the community rather than running it ourselves. We don't do Holiday Club. We have things like May Day event and other community events like the orchard that we can join in with. Yes, says TTT, sarcastically, and two did. (He made this comment about the orchard planting to me previously). Others talked about the Holiday Club and what it had meant to them. We've lost the older children and the youth events. They mention Zone for 11-14s (which is a church/community partnership) but cannot see how it is linked with church. TTT said he had started Explorers for the young children cos they were all looking bored at the back with their parents. And TTT had encouraged the parents to come out with the children because he thought they were bored in church as well. They also talked about the loss of youth work and the youth worker. (Connection again with FG3). (pp25-36)

Experience of PMC: frustration, annoyance, jargon, I don't understand. If you fed back your criticisms that was just good because you were engaging with it! It felt managed and controlled. Other churches have given up. (Connection with FG3). Any opinion about the Bible is acceptable – it's letting the church wander. Supposed to be doing all this with the community, but you don't feel a part. TTT makes the comment again that at many of these things, there is just him and the clergy from church. Historically, we did a lot of this anyway. (pp36-41).

NNNNN talked about 'having a break' from St X and put this down to PMC. But it's also the worship. This would have been a chosen word in the past but not now. Troubled by being 'talked at' and the lack of liturgy with lots of random things like videos or colouring thrown in. (Connection with FG5). Last minute changes and last minute planning means people doing the music can't plan properly. Unpredictable extra bits added to the service. Baptism families not necessarily impressed – 'they're just trying to be a social club.' (Note: not everyone hears the experience of baptism families like this). (pp41-46)

A lot of people not there anymore (touched on earlier). Don't trust the figures on Sunday. Numbers used to be much higher, 200, 300, with 70 children. (This is not born out by the statistics from 2006 onwards). Worship is better elsewhere but we have this sense of connection. That's why we serve the coffee as a group and we're going to repair the path that they keep talking about. I'm torn about where I go, but I don't get what is being talked about. Worship at Vineyard has more unity, but I grieve for what I've lost at St X. They talk again about the people who have left and the different churches that they all go to. TTT says this is his community and talked about meeting people at the Gym (pp46-56)

They return to the loss of children and the fact that there are no new generations coming up. They connect it with the loss of the Holiday Club and the youth worker – lack of finance. (pp56-58). So where has this missional church thing come from, how long is it going to run, when does it stop – 20 years? They feel there is no forum to discuss these things (Connection with FG3). Feeling that the whole thing is running down – curate going, no more students from St John's, youth worker gone and administrator going and the vicar can't organise, no money. Feels like it is going to die. (pp58-61).

### *Performative*

I'm struck by how TTT takes my role very early on, managing the group process around choosing the words. Even when I encourage someone to speak, he has to reiterate this. Rather than let it unfold as a group discussion he gives each the chance to choose one. He uses diminutives for some of the members in a slightly patronising way, but they don't show any offence outwardly. The whole evening is led by him and he provides an interpretative commentary most of the time. Most of the articulated criticisms of St X and PMC come from him – and it felt that they took their lead from him.

It was a very quietly spoken, measured group meeting – perhaps self-conscious in my presence? There were a lot of silences, some were thinking time, but not all. Despite my endeavour to be even-handed, is the fact that I am a tutor at St John's with at least a working relationship with the vicar making it hard for them to perceive me as impartial? Here I am thinking particularly of TTT. They have a number of former members that they are still in touch with, but nobody has joined the group in the last eight years.

They see mission as something that the church sets up, runs and has in its control. They cannot see mission in partnership with the community. Community engagement is something that TTT has always done as an individual resident, not I think in the name of the church and he cannot see the meaning in the church having a public identity in the community. So for him, mission just does not happen anymore. The loss of Holiday Club is

an important feature of their critique. The critique of PMC shows affinity with FG3. The critique of worship shows affinity with FG5.

I am also struck by my manner in this group; I am cautious and uncertain – wanting to show that I am making no assumptions. This level of effort suggests that I am. The fact that it only runs to 60 pages (as opposed to 90 or more in others) suggests that this was more of a struggle. I remember feeling that I needed to wrap this up earlier than with other groups.

I notice how TTT likes to joke, keeps control, keeps it light?

They tell a story of a group with a strong identity within themselves and within the church – very bounded – they function as a group in the church when they do tasks and serve (e.g. coffee, Alpha and the plan for the repair of the path).

This is another group that grieve the past – specifically the Holiday Club – and I suspect the departure of the previous vicar. Also, I think they are angry – more deeply than Focus Group 3 – but are they irreconcilable?

g. Focus Group – 18s-30s

PPP (30); QQQQQ (30); EEE (30); P PPPP (17)

This is not a functioning group, though they all know each other well and were part of groups together when they were younger. I didn't come across them very much in my time at St X, hence my getting them together towards the end. It was hard work gathering them and the person who helped me to bring them together, RRRRR (20s) wasn't able to make it on the day. (pp1-2)

### *Thematic*

They started with worship on Sunday as the starting point for everything. But then they moved on to hospitality, community involvement (in the church) and building relationships from the perspective of church as these things keep you there when you don't feel like worship. They spoke about prayer and fellowship in the church family carrying you through suffering. Belonging to the church was also important. When I gave them the opportunity to add anything, QQQQQ suggested partnership and connected it to community involvement – wider community this time? EEE added awareness of God. They also added accountability, which EEE associated with the new "Connect Groups". P PPPP said she didn't think attendance was important, EEE agreed. It's the quality that mattered. They felt the small group was more important; it's a better place for support. QQQQQ added wisdom, which she connected with learning and understanding the Bible which would make you wiser. Learning happens with different perspectives, not in isolation. P PPPP added mission, but in a very generalised way. (pp2-17)

I invite them to reflect more deeply on the words that they have chosen. PPP starts with belonging and talks about leaving church behind on going to Uni but how she discovered that belonging to church was really important to her – related to accountability. In the course of this, she introduces herself (to me) as the daughter of vicar 2. P PPPP makes same point about choosing to belong. They reflect on how for three of them growing up in St X

has been their formative experience. QQQQ talked about watching her parents come to faith and her mother's subsequent death and the support she and her father received. Their belonging grew through increasing participation in the church as they got older. As they were invested in, so they have in turn invested in others. (pp17-35).

They are all involved at some level with children and young people. PPP now has her own children. PPP tells the same story about Toddler church that TTT did in FG6; she runs it with him. Like TTT she stresses what the adults gain from coming with their children – rather than staying in church. She reflects on how hard it is as a parent of young children to really participate in a church service. They talked again about what they gain from explaining things to young children. (pp35-45)

Raising the question of PMC, leads immediately to a discussion of how few younger people (their age) there are and how when they were younger, there were lots their age. (parallels with FG3 and FG6). Many have gone to university and not returned. They felt that a lack of work with the young means the older generation of young people has not been replaced when they move on. Young people prefer other (large) churches locally. But when young people who've left come back it's like a reunion – and part of that is about the older people who they all grew up with. Christmas was given as an example. [*I observed this on the Christmas Day service I attended in 2016*] PPP reflects again on the lack of children and what that means for her children. EEE talks about what they are trying to do for young people – e.g. Zone. (pp45-63)

This leads to an expansive discussion of the Holiday Club. They talked about people's commitment to running it, how it was communicated in the local schools. PPP mentions her dad again and how this is tricky for her. [Holiday Club was his creation and the heart of his ministry at St X]. They talk about the massive investment of time and energy and about it getting too much. But they felt closing it lacked consultation. [Parallel to FG3 and FG6] PPP expresses her hurt but also understanding of the situation. They talk about its impact on them in terms of drawing them into the church's ministry. (pp63-74)

They talk again about their sense of belonging being created by the people they grew up with (who aren't there any more) and the adults who mentored them. With the more recent adult membership, they have no connection. (pp74-80)

Explored their involvement in the wider church. PPP talked about home groups being an older generation, EEE agreed. But both she and EEE noted that the new groups ("*Connect Groups*") were drawing younger people. EEE has a sense of belonging with the new group. Talks about the building work in T's garden that T mentions in her interview. Like T, this energises EEE. The thing that's been good about church in the last few years. PPP agrees for her husband – NNN (who is part of a new group). PPP is critical of the process for developing the groups, whereas EEE is very positive. Sunday does not bring them much: 'It's a place where you serve', says PPP. EEE talks about the new group being her lifeline in St X. PPP comments that present home groups are cliquy and how she created her own with some friends, once again commenting on how you can't get all you need on a Sunday. (pp80-94)

I suggest that what they're talking about in terms of new groups and 'sharing life' is a fruit of PMC. EEE is quick to acknowledge this, but once again PPP is critical talking about it being 'forced' and the church doing a lot of talking and not much doing. (Connection here with FG3 and FG6). EEE defends the process saying it has changed things for her from when she joined 10 years ago; and PPP acknowledges this. PPP invites QQQQQ to talk about 'Bibles and Buggies.' QQQQQ has a young baby and the curate set this group up for parents who come to Toddlers on Sunday to have something that is a bit more for them. Baptism mums are invited too, so that it is a way of widening relationships with church folk. (pp94-104)

I ask if this is a way that the church is engaging more with its wider community. PPPPP agrees. PPP is again quick to close this down and say we had this before – referencing the Holiday Club; so we're slowly going back to it. EEE talks about 'partnershiping' with the Community Group. People are coming to church and we're relating to adults and not just children as with Holiday Club; we're doing both. PPP pushes back on this, saying it's only really adults now and very small children. No investment in young people – PPPPP agrees. It's all 30s and 40s, not a place I can bring my friends. *[She is 17]*. PPP acknowledges what is genuinely happening with the wider community with adults but aches for the lack of young people. QQQQQ agrees. It's a place for adults. PPP is worried about the curate leaving soon, cos she drives a lot of the toddler stuff. PPPPP says that she has a daughter her age, but who now goes to another church. As we close they say it's been helpful to talk, but that we don't do it cos we don't want to offend, says PPP. PPPPP says how much it has changed since PPP's dad was the vicar and how different is the vicar we have now. *[He has been vicar for 8 years at this point]*. They talk about the inevitable nature and the difficulty of change.

### *Performative*

I had already met PPP on a Sunday and EEE at a youth leaders' meeting. I realise that I had seen PPPPP leading worship, but had never met her. QQQQQ I had never met.

RRRRR (who couldn't make it), PPPPP and QQQQQ are all children of parents in the church who are disaffected with the present situation – vicar or PMC or both (TTT, V and U respectively are their parents). PPP is the daughter of the former vicar and married to NNN who appears to be a serious supporter of PMC. EEE has the least family connections and is the most open to the new direction of all of them. PPP and PPPPP talks about how upsetting it is to see the lack of young people and the loss of the Holiday Club.

They defined worship on Sunday as the essence of church – but they are very irregular in attendance -though some of this is work and family circumstances.

There was reference to the new small groups from EEE who valued the accountability. QQQQQ talks about learning things in the past. PPP butts in a lot and acts as interpreter for the others, often closing them down in the process. I counted 9 examples of PPP jumping in to explain when the others had just started talking. I had a sense of how much she talked. When I did a count, her name appears 300 times and the others: EEE – 160, QQQQQ – 141, PPPPP – 133. At times PPP and EEE held the floor entirely. There is a point where there is a long exchange between EEE and PPP which is basically a polite disagreement about the present direction of the church.



They talk about the process of being served and learning to serve, of being invested in and then investing in others, but I notice that what they are mentored in and mentor others in is very church activity focussed. They are reliant on the clientele for this being drawn in by another way – they don't do it. Presumably this would have been done through the Holiday Club.

The role they see for themselves now seems to revolve around education. There was a lot of energy around the Little Explorers discussion. Little Explorers is interesting because it is the place where the disaffected can carry on the model of church they were grounded in.

Here's how it works: a group come (for baptism, school application) and we teach them – like Holiday Club. We have been invested in, so we invest and then help others to invest in others – and so on.

They feel themselves to be a minority – and cling to each other. There were lots of teenagers. They appreciate a long-term web of relationships between them as young people and the older generation who mentored them.

They understand leadership as 'from the front' in the manner of the previous vicar.

PPP shuts down QQQQ from expressing her anger about the closing of the Holiday Club.

Their church is frozen in time – relationships with older folk who mentored them in their youth but not with the newer older adults. There seemed an unwillingness to engage with the new 'others.'

They are doing the only thing they know how – trying to start the flow of children again from the bottom.

I notice that towards the end I cut across PPP twice to stop her from shutting down EEE.

PPP tends to want to find a problem in everything new – even if it's good. Perhaps anything else would be disloyal to her father? She is in a difficult position and at times she also tries to limit negative comment.

I notice how at one point I tried to initiate discussion about PMC but I had to come back to it on the hour because I hadn't got anywhere previously. Even then, they had very little to say directly about the PMC journey – perhaps because they had not been a part of it.

They comment on the value of being able to articulate their thoughts.

Seeing the connections here with FG3 and FG6 around themes like young people, Holiday Club and imposed processes has generated the idea of the 'counter-story', which, if not entirely conscious, nevertheless demonstrates patterns of connection between those who are sceptical about the PMC journey.

## Appendix 24 – Further excerpts from chapter 3: Telling the story

(i) They talked about the picture they had had in the Reading Team report about them being like a fort or a castle. They talked about how it struck them because of the way the church is in relation to the river and if you look from across the river it looks like a castle with a moat and they were struck by how the analysts said this without knowing the area. More significantly, to them it was a picture of how they were. And it's interesting because I was thinking about that picture – though I didn't mention it – when they were speaking earlier on. I'm glad I didn't mention it as they brought it up themselves. I think it is symbolic of a lot of what PMC has been about – people as it were moving out from the safe place of the church and recognising the 'other' in their midst. FN:104 – 15.09.16 [Focus Group 4].

(ii) We will become a people who are actively looking for God at work in the lives of those around us and our prayers will be shaped as a result of our interaction with others. [VE:1 – June 2014]

People inside the church would be well known by those outside the church saying "I know those people even if I don't go there often." More people will know more people in more places. Recognising more people in the street, or the Co-op, or at the pub, and being recognised by more people. As a result, the boundary between "inside" and "outside" the church will become increasingly blurred. The Community would see "us" as part of "them" as opposed to "them and us". People imagined the church spreading out and integrating with a much larger group of people, with the line between church and community blurring due to collaboration in different areas, to the point where anyone looking in wouldn't be able to identify who were the 'church' people. [VE:2 – June 2014]

(iii) T and CCC talked about the halls. They seem to more or less be the committee. Again their aspiration is that it should become a shared place of meeting for the community a shared space for sociality. They commented on how hard it is to enter the church building and feel at ease with the confusing rituals. 'The guy at the front says something and then we say something back. You get up and start shaking hands with people.' They were very aware of the strangeness of this and people's need of a friendly face – for relationship – as they enter the building. There was a real sense of energy as they spoke; they want to 'welcome people in, trying to find people and cast the net wide.' 'We want to bring people with us; we are getting more focused on our end goal – community use.' [FN:111 – 14.11.16]

(iv) I wanted to find out whether locals knew of the church and its location; whether they had had contact or relationship with the church over the years; whether

they had seen any change in the church's relationship with the community in the last three or four years and if so whether this had had any impact on their own views of church and faith. First, I did a piece of random surveying (24 face-to-face surveys) on a Saturday in September 2016 around the shops and pubs in the four areas of the parish and the results were perhaps unsurprising. Apart from newcomers to the area, everyone knew of St X and where it was. 50% had had some contact with the church in the past – school, children's groups, weddings and festivals. 40% had some awareness of the church's activity in the community; 25% thought the relationship with the community was good, some had negative experiences; only one person had any sense that the relationship had changed. None were drawn to church through St X, none had been drawn to explore their faith by their contact with St X.

Then I surveyed those who were supposed to have had developing contact with the church. The Community Group committee gave me permission to post my survey on their Facebook page, which I did in May 2017. I received 71 responses – over 50 responding in the first couple of days.<sup>1</sup> I was not looking for a statistical sample, rather seeking some opinions and impressions from people who might have a growing connection with the church, to see how their views might supplement or enrich those of the church. Compared to the random survey, there was better awareness of the church with typical points of contacts over the years. But when it came to present experience there was a fulsome response to the church's new involvement in the community and a sense that the church was growing in relationship, collaboration and partnership.

*Do you know of St X and where it is? (all 71)*

Nearly all respondents knew of the church and where it is. There is an anxiety in the church about people being unaware of them because they are hidden away down a side road; clearly not the case.

*What contact have you had with St X over the years? (all 71)*

Generated the responses you might expect: connections through children's groups and schools; worship at festivals, occasional offices, social events, some members and ex-members; 12 said little or none.

*Can you give examples of anything the church has done in or with the community over the last four or five years? (65/71)*

Very full picture from 49 respondents of the range of things that the church either sponsors or partners in the community; noticeable emphasis on the church working with other groups; 16 said they could think of nothing.

*How would you describe the church's relationship with the community? (68/71)*

50 responses were extremely positive with many offering a sense that the relationship was growing and becoming more collaborative and desiring to see it

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<sup>1</sup> There is more nuanced research that could be applied to the questionnaire that might yield interesting data. But this analysis was enough to answer the question I had about perceptions of the church's impact on the community.

go further; 8 felt the relationship was poor – using words like cliquey or disconnected; 10 did not know.

*Can you think of any way that the church's relationship with the community has changed over the last four or five years? (61/71)*

A few people offered no answer for this; among those who did, opinion was divided: 25 said yes and were positive, mentioning greater informality, welcome and the church coming to the community; some spoke about how they appreciated the vicar; 28 said no, sometimes because they did not approve of the approach to the wider community; 8 did not know.

- (v) There was some indication that their views of church and faith were being positively shaped by the church's growing relationship with the community.

*Recent experience of St X has made me more likely to come to church (scale: 67/71; comment: 57/71)*

There was a 40/60 split on coming to church (taking 1-3 as positive and 4-6 as negative). This was backed up by those who gave written comments. Those who disagreed tended to offer more generic answers – 'I don't do church'. Those who agreed appreciated the community engagement of the church and some spoke of how this had awakened their interest in attending the church.

*Recent experience of St X has made me think more about questions of faith (scale: 67/71; comment: 40/71)*

There was a 35/65 split on the question of impact on faith. A number did not offer a comment, though judging from those who did, once again the reasons were broadly generic – 'I'm an atheist' or their sense of faith does not require a church. Those who expressed positive responses spoke of the community engagement of the church, services that had helped and conversations with the vicar; one or two had come into the church recently.

- (vi) I go occasionally – I was there last Sunday. Churches used to be for weddings and funerals; now a lot of my friends go to church... I've accepted faith more – it's become another facet of my life, not the dominant. I've also become a Freemason – which also has a belief in a higher being. I look at my life in a compartmentalised way. 60-70 hours at work – pays my bills; time in the evening with my wife after 8.00pm; weekends with the children and taking the dog for a walk; getting fit; I want to make the most of work, getting fit and family. I now have another piece of the pie chart – faith; it didn't exist before; I want to have that spiritual exercise. If I spend 3-4 hours running, why not spend 1½ hours at church for spiritual experience? (Community Interview with AAA: 24.01.17)
- (vii) PPPP: Brilliant, excellent; I don't think I've ever come across anywhere where the link is so close. Because [the vicar] is such a warm, open, jovial guy and he doesn't push it in your face; he teases and we have a good laugh. He is supportive and helpful, open to anyone – non-judgemental. They do a lot to encourage and they're inclusive. It's a good church that does a huge amount for

the community and it's a huge benefit for the community. I appreciate the openness of approach of [the vicar and his wife] – very caring and very funny. [Community Interview with PPPP – 16.03.17]

- (viii) Despite this growing passion for partnership, [the vicar] talked about how difficult they found to do one-to-ones: 'the risk of going out to somebody and having a conversation; why would they want to talk to us? And then wanting to have the conversation scripted and, of course, that's impossible because they have the other half of the script!' For [the vicar] that's the easy thing – getting out and relating to the community; finding partners in the community is what he does best, his greatest fear is with the church. 'I don't fear that they will attack me, they're too polite for that; but they'll vote with their feet and not come.' [FN:26 – 23.11.15]
  
- (ix) TTT asked me what my research was about and I spoke about community and personal formation and how it was interesting to do this in a church which has taken on an intentional journey like PMC. He was quick to interrupt and say 'some of the church.' He said that he had never understood it and it seemed that 'we withdrew from community engagement for three years in order to do community engagement – it makes no sense to me.' I asked him if the church had been engaged with the community and he said yes. He cited the 200 kids queueing up to come into the Holiday Club and the relationship with the [local primary] School which used to involve a lot of church – but now just basically [the vicar] and [the curate]. He talked about V trying to revive the prayer meeting at the school. The school, he says, is a good context for involvement as parents tend to be more involved with their kids in primary schools. 'We used to get a lot of young parents coming to church – but not now.' He doesn't feel that X1 is well represented in the church any longer. 'Lots have left, finding other churches initially and then stopping all together.' He wasn't expecting any X1-dwelling church people at the Orchard day – so he wasn't disappointed when they didn't come. [FN:140-141 – 26.02.17]
  
- (x) V. gave a long history of the Holiday Club, 'it involved so many people; people could get involved and offer their gifts at whatever level, there was a sense of community, there was spiritual input – worship and teaching for the team before the day started.' They used to take it in turns to sleep in the marquees to guard the equipment. V. remembered doing it one night when some young lads stole the lead off the church roof. They had heard something in the night and met the lads who said they had lost their dog! They suggested various places where it might have gone! 'Many people in the community valued this; our children and young people's work diminished after it stopped.' V. told a story of the church: 'there were several years when we grew – in depth and in numbers. It was a very special time that we look back to.' Holiday Club seems to have been an important part of that. However, they did recognise that there were not the people to carry on running it. [FN:33-34 – 03.12.15]

(xi) H: Yes, really. I don't mean to say that he didn't work with other people, of course he did, and obviously it was a good crowd that worked with him, but, erm, there was, we didn't feel that you could have something that you were particularly interested in, like, for example, working with elderly people. We couldn't have done any of the things that we do now with older people 'cos he just wasn't into it. If you don't get the backing of the vicar, it just wouldn't have been encouraged. People, usually tend to like to work along with what the vicar wants and they just want to be told what to do... and tend not to come up with ideas... [Interview with H:29-30 – 10.07.17]

Int: So Holiday Club was his baby?

FF: His idea. He launched it in about 2001. If we go back a step before [the present vicar], Vicar 2 [immediately before the present vicar] actually led everything; he made the final decision on absolutely everything. There was really nothing in the church, or any of its groups that could move forward until Vicar 2 had ticked it as okay. There were two or three core people who had probably won his trust over in a certain way. [Interview with FF:69, 98-99 – 27.06.17]

(xii) Something that did not go unnoticed by the clergy: B started the service by saying 'when two or three are gathered, he is with us.' This is classic clergy-speak when they are anxious or disappointed by small numbers. [FN:104 – 18.09.16]

(xiii) I gave the peace twice to an elderly gentleman. Afterwards, he became the first (and only) person at this service to make a move towards me. [FN:39 – 10.01.16]

(xiv) In the peace, we at the back stayed where we were and everyone cycled round greeting everyone. It's very inclusive and clearly meaningful for them – but how does it translate, especially in their welcome of a newcomer? I have come three times now and no-one has made any effort to talk to me – with one exception. [FN:39 – 10.01.16]

(xv) E: There was a commitment to try is the only word I can use, to become Christian in every way and live out a Christian life, develop a stronger faith and try to get to a position where I felt secure in my faith to be able to pray and wait for guidance and those kind of things. [Interview with E:13 – 31.05.17]

(xvi) FF: We might not always do DitW, for instance. But, the things that we've learned from DitW and other practices that we've put into place. DitWorld. I think is ingrained with us now, for those of us that have been at the forefront of it anyway. [Interview with FF:44 – 27.06.17]

(xvii) FF: I've got a couple of new friends now, people from the community group who weren't coming to church, and are doing so a little bit more often now. One or two that I've seen at other groups, that weren't anything to do with church. Then, I know that some of our church members have joined that committee as

well and have got onto that. I know that some non-church people and some church people have now joined together in the Hall Management Group. They are managing the hall and generating more income and funds for that. Because it was draining finances on the church. [FG4:91-92 – 15.09.16]

(xviii) T and CCC talked about the halls... Their aspiration is that it should become a shared place of meeting for the community – a shared space for sociality. They commented on how hard it is to enter the church building and feel at ease with the confusing rituals. 'The guy at the front says something and then they say something back. You get up and start shaking hands with people.' They were very aware of the strangeness of this and people's need of a friendly face – for relationship – as they enter the building. There was a real sense of energy as they spoke; they want to 'welcome people in, trying to find people and cast the net wide.' 'We want to bring people with us; we are getting more focused on our end goal – community use.' [FN:111-112 – 14.11.16]

(xix) I was surprised to see the baptism family (maybe both families?) going into coffee after the service. It's in the church hall, which is a separate building, so you have to make an effort to go and cross the threshold. This confirmed the sense I had of them being at home in the service and the sense of welcome – though I realise this is something that has been built with them over successive baptisms. One of the dad's is in the army and he comes and does things in the Remembrance service every year. [FN:32 – 29.11.15]

(xx) TT: I sent her a text message to say that she can take it how she wishes but I'm going to be praying for her for this meeting on Monday, 'cos she was anxious about it. And she sent text message back along the lines of, "Well, that's really thoughtful," you know? (Laughter) that's fine. Not, "You're completely cuckoo." But, "it was very thoughtful." And it ended up she went to this HR meeting and, and they gave her an apology for their conduct and they're not going to recoup any money from her apart from the cost of- they've invested in that year's practicing certificate. [Interview with TT:46 -28.05.17]

(xxi) K: It was also the people we met. Bizarrely, when he had further surgery, he'd come back from the theatre and this Asian lady drew her curtain back and went, "Oh, hello." I said, "Oh, hi, how are you?" She said, "My son's in here, he's got a bowel disease." I said, "What's he got?" and she said, "Hirschsprung's," and I went, "That's what my son's got", and we are in contact now.

Int: Are you still in contact?

K: Yeah, yeah, and she was praying. She's a Muslim. She was praying for, and pray for her son. She ran a marathon because her dad died of cancer when she was nine, and I sponsored her. It's those moments; you don't usually meet Hirschsprung children and, so you hold onto those moments. I would say those are your rainbows in the midst of a darkness.

Int: Hmm, hmm.

K: It may hit you when you get home but in that process you see rainbows rather than just dark. And I think that's what PMC calls you to, because God has gone before you. You know it's like in the Luke passage isn't it, Luke 10. It's emblazoned in my mind. Every passage I can just relate to something that's happened in my life which is good, but not so good at times.  
(Laughter) Too painful. [Interview with K:28-29 – 09.07.17]

(xxii) I sat down with one of the smaller groups who only had three people on the table. I thought I recognised them and then I clicked that it was D and E who I'd met on my first Sunday and M – who I should have known because he is B's wife and I knew them both previously. I scored some points by remembering E's name! E's first comment, with which D concurred, was that they were confused by the term 'small groups'. They are a home group (though I later discovered that they meet in a pub! – not in a separate room, just gathered around a table, having some drinks and opening the Bible.) And they said that at first they hadn't realised that this was a meeting for them because they did not recognise the phrase 'small group'. This was partly an explanation for why less than ½ of their group was present – though I was interested/surprised that they felt the need to explain this to me. My impression at the time which I have reflected on further is that part of me thought it was disingenuous to say that they didn't understand that they were included in the category of small group but then I also wondered whether there was a communication problem here and whether A. was assuming a sense of identity amongst church small groups that does not actually exist – except in his mind/aspiration/assumption; that would be a very understandable church leader perspective. (FN:21 – 23.11.15)

(xxiii) They talked about me coming along to their group some time. I was a bit taken aback and caught unprepared. My first reaction was a bit non-committal. Then I became conscious of my response and tried to recover saying, 'Oh yes I would like to do that.' I hope that didn't put them off because it occurred to me that attending home groups could be a good way of getting to know people, seeing how they act out the faith and learning what makes them tick. 7 or 8 people per home group with 6 or 7 groups, that's most of the adult population of the church; I must be on the look-out for these invitations. I felt they were interested in growing, they were interested in what deep relationships were about, but struggled to see where to go with this process. [FN:24 – 23.11.15] I think my reticence about responding to their invitation was that when I first met them, I felt they wanted to interrogate me quite closely about what I was there for. I also recognised their critical agenda and I think that early on I was a bit over sensitive about being manipulated. [FN:15-16]

(xxiv) Group 3 felt a real sense of responsibility to support B whilst A. is on study leave, picking up B's request for help with the new Pilgrim course (which they did). U



had the idea that they plan to talk to people on Sunday. I thought that was a radical and disruptive challenge! U also talked about putting up a plan in church of where all the home groups meet. That led them to try to work out how many groups there were and who led them. They build up quite a picture, mainly through V.'s knowledge, but they weren't sure they had got them all (Neither of these things happened). [FN:35 – 03.12.15].

(xxv) GGGGG: I've been through some really tough times. And if it wasn't for these guys, I probably wouldn't be here today. It was so tough and if it wasn't for when I found friends within this group, and they've supported me and they've helped me. Even at one point I just couldn't deal with Bible study at all. I just thought, "No. This does not feel right. It just doesn't." and my sister actually got involved because she is a vicar and she started just to do gentle coursework, the Pilgrim coursework with me. By doing that with her, I came back and I felt I could cope with it. As I say, with these guys, all these years they've been there for me and it's- some of the time it's been so tough, really tough and I got through it. It's only just little chinks but I get set back, then I come forward, I get set back and then I come forward. Now, I know what faith means. It's just little bits and he keeps going, "Yes you can." And then I'm going, "No you can't, no you can't" to God and he says, "Yes you can." And he's just pushing me forward, every little bit. [FG4:44 – 15.09.16]

(xxvi) L: And I also put it in my resignation letter [from the PCC] about how it was difficult within our church to get into the small groups, and there was a lot of cliques. [Interview with L:35 – 29.06.17]

SSSS: I really like it because we've been doing it so long, I feel really comfortable with everybody. So it's easy to share in a smaller group with people that you feel you can be open and talk to. That's why; I like being part of this group, and in fact we went to look at a course at the church hall with a few of us. It made me realize how much I really do like our group, because I didn't feel I could be as open with everybody else as I can with our group. And I think that just develops with time... It gives you that confidence when you meet in the small group, not 20, to talk about things. Not being intimidated by lots of people that you don't know that well. [FG3:4-5 – 07.07.16]

(xxvii) I was tentatively booked to go to K's home group on 28.06.16, but she texted me on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> to say that they had to finish their SMART plan work for a big church meeting next Tuesday (05.07.16) and so they would need to postpone. [FN:95 – 26.06.16]

(xxviii) Int: So, I mean, in terms of PMC, the sorts of things you are talking about sound like the practices around DitWorld and discernment? And you see your place in the world differently that way?

K: Yes, yes, yes, because of that. [Interview with K:29 – 09.07.17]

(xxix) K: ...and I think that's been remarkable because the cluster of the group all met here and everyone put their name in and we [went] "one, two and three" and then turn them over.

Int: So you just went with who you went with?

K: And that's quite unnerving for some people [Interview with K:32 – 09.07.17]

(xxx) Int: Hospitality would be the other one that kind of links with DitWorld?

FF: Yes, of hospitality. And, and again, we've worked on that one.  
[Interview with FF:108 – 27.06.17]

(xxxi) We have also seen how the church learnt to share hospitality space, particularly with the Community Group

Vicar: Working with community group; they are taking the lead in putting together a summer event; part of me says, 'great' and part of me says, 'they've asked to use our paddock; we moved out of the paddock and now they're wanting to move in. Bit of me is churlish, but them wanting to move in is an opportunity for hospitality, an opportunity to serve and join in to bless the community. We are marked out by community who want us; so it's an opportunity to connect and to ask how we can help. B. has a lot on her plate so it would be good to see others involved. [FN:60 – 26.01.16]

(xxxii) It's 8.00am on Sunday morning at St X. There are Bibles in the pews – but no-one opens them and this has caused no comment and there has been no encouragement to do so in the two weeks I have been here. Historically, this is an evangelical church – but no habit of opening up the Bible on Sunday.  
[FN:28 – 29.11.15]

(xxxiii) In his talk, the vicar said that when God revealed Christ he used human agency and so we are called to share the life of Christ with others. So far so good, but it reveals the problem I have with sermons here. On the one hand there is no real attempt to open up the passage except in the most surface way; on the other hand there is no real attempt to enter the imaginative world of the congregation and ask what the 'sharing of life' might look like for them. For example when was the last time any of them invited someone to come to church with them?  
[FN:123 – 15.01.17]

(xxxiv) TTT was preaching and he used both passages but started by talking basically about hermeneutics and what we bring to the text, the different kinds of texts and the unique context that the texts come from. He then proceeded to elicit from the congregation the historical background of Ezekiel (rewarding correct answers with sweets). He then explored chapter 37. He then went through the same process with John's gospel and explored John 11. He encouraged people to follow in the Bible and about 7 or 8 did (normally I would say almost none open

their Bible at any service – maybe 2 or 3. I have never seen an attempt to open up the Bible in this way at St X and I have to say it was quite good and kept my attention. For all the stuff he did on background, he didn't really shows us why it was important for understanding the passages nor did he show us how our own perspectives and prejudices might be shaping our reading. However, he grounded his sermon very well in Scripture and came up with two applications which were worth hearing and helpful if people do something with them. But all this took 40 minutes. [FN:161 – 02.04.17]

(xxxv) V: We started having a little epilogue in it, and then it developed into a study, and then it developed into a fortnightly programme of studies.

[FG3:3 – 07.07.16]

(xxxvi) MMMMM: I think knowledge, as well, because, for me, I mean, I constantly look to you all when I'm stuck with something, and I've learned a lot. I've learned that I've got strength, to be confident about what I know now.

[FG6:11 – 04.05.17]

(xxxvii) There is an emphasis at St. X on the sermon and initiation courses as the main learning opportunities as perceived by our respondents. This is quite a load to bear, and it raised a question for us about the value and effectiveness of the house groups which are mentioned but without that much enthusiasm. What is the vision and purpose for them? Where does discipleship and growth happen beyond receiving instruction in the faith through initiation courses? Where can people ask some of the tougher questions of faith?

[Reading Team Report:13 – 10.09.12]

(xxxviii) TT: It gives people renewed confidence in looking at Scripture, rather than have it presented to them – I think that's really good.

[Interview with TT:19 – 28.05.17]

(xxxix) After DitW on a passage from Philippians, The vicar then introduced the next stage of the process – the box (Attend, Assert, Decide, Act) and the triangle (Bible and tradition, culture, and experience of the faithful); five minutes on each apex of the triangle – brainstorming ready for a 'floated conversation' – which means taking a thread and following it through in conversation trying to focus on what God is saying rather than what I think. 'God is...' demands a response, he said. Then they had to try to make a SMART plan to do something with what they had discerned. [FN:21-22 – 23.11.15]

(xl) Each group wrote stuff down on large pieces of paper; I scribed for our group so I didn't write any notes. (FN:157 – 14.03.17)

(xli) There were people here tonight making a significant contribution who I have hardly come across previously; where are they and how do I meet them? There was a real contrast tonight with the only other CSD I have been to, back in November 2015. I think there may have been two or three offers of God is...

sentences at that meeting; tonight was very different both in terms of contribution and tone. [FN:160 – 14.03.17]

(xlii) RRRR: Discernment of...

NNNN: I would have thrown that at them. (FG6:43 – 04.05.17)

(xliii) TTT: I'm sorry, this is the way we've got to do stuff.

NNNNN: I just can't see the point of it. [FG6:59 – 04.05.17]

(xliv) VVV: If you've got two people that, that completely disagree about something, that's always a tricky one, because I think, "Well, how do you know...?" How do you know what God's saying, you've got these two people that are convinced they're right, but they're, they've got completely conflicting opinions?" [Interview with VVV:86-87 – 13.06.17]

(xliv) Int: So you used the word discernment just now.

NN Yeah.

Int: Is that a word that you would have used in your Christian life before PMC, or was it something that...?

NN: Maybe subconsciously.

Int: Subconsciously?

NN: But, er, yeah.

Int: But it's made it more explicit, has it?

NN: Yeah, I think so. I mean, [the vicar] labours the word quite a lot, and when the penny dropped with me I thought, "Yes, actually, this is what [it's about]." (Interview with NN:18-19 – 25.05.17)

Int: Awareness of God in the community. Do others see that as well?

MMM: I think it's only been a recent thing though. [FG4:56-57 – 23.11.16]

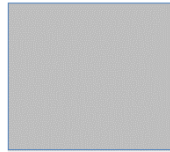
(xlvi) K: Everything's different because you view in a different way. And how's that helped me? I think... I think reflection is good. I think you're never gonna have the answer straight away so it's working through.

Int: So that would be more of a typical practice in your life now?

- K: Yes, yes. Definitely; what can we see, and where is God, and what is God saying? [Interview with K:67 – 09.07.17]
- (xlvii) NN I've been involved in the congregational events. There's been other isolated meetings with PMC focus that I've been involved in, but my own take on it, from a missional sense is, just this idea of finding people of peace, and staying with them. I think this has been my focus in all of this, and that's what I see the whole thing's about from my perspective, because I think everybody has their own interpretation of the whole thing. And I think discerning's probably the word, but I think just looking out with people, and sticking with them and encouraging them. Whether it becomes church or developing faith, or even if they're not Christians, they're people of peace; people to stick with. [Interview with NN:8-9 – 25.05.17]
- (xlviii) T: When [the vicar] asked me to be involved in the halls [management], my initial reaction was, "No", because I can't deal with the confrontation from the, "We have been here forever" people. Whereas now, I'm glad I have, and actually if something else came up, I'd be like, "Actually yes, let's crack on and let's do it". So, I definitely think I'm a bit braver. [Interview with T:82 – 30.06.17]
- (xlix) HHHHH: We are fortunate that we have got some good leaders and we do have good worship, but unfortunately it is also a bit divisive, because there's people that like the old-fashioned hymns [and] people that like the modern ones and you get conflict.
- Int: How do you deal with that?
- HH: Well, we don't. (Laughter) [FG5:19 – 15.11.16]
- Int: There are always differences in communities of people. So how do you think as a church you handle conflict and differences?
- JJJJ: We don't say much about it do we? We might grumble between ourselves...
- HHHHH: We have a good moan. (Laughter) [FG5:60-61 – 15.11.16]

## Appendix 25 – Integrative complexity<sup>1</sup>

IC level 0



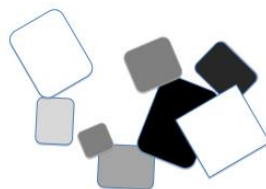
I see the world and my faith as I always have been taught to see it. I don't question it – it works for me, and I feel safe.

IC level 1



My precious view no longer works. Some crisis – large or small – has highlighted evil or injustice. And now I see the world in black-and-white categories – good versus bad. Perhaps I am a new convert, and now my life is a story of 'before' or 'after.' While this can be a moral advance, IC level 1 underpins conflict between groups

IC level 3



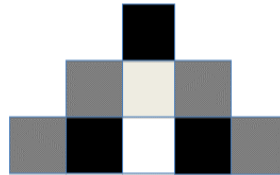
My previous world view doesn't work anymore. Life is more complex than I thought. Now I see many shades of grey, as well as black and white. I can see some value in viewpoints

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<sup>1</sup> Savage, *Joseph*, 132.

different from mine. I see more of the world, and more of my faith, but it feels confusing and uncertain, and I am tempted to go back for a time. But if I go forward...

### IC level 5



I have found a way of weaving together the disparate parts that makes good sense. I integrate them according to my own deep values. My view of the world and of my faith is now complex, and I can understand many points of view within an overarching framework, but without letting go of my deep values. I can find win-win solutions. This works well, but there may be times when a crisis requires me to go back to IC level 1 in order to take a stand for a time.

Note: Level 2 shows movement part way towards Level 3; Level 4 shows movement part way towards Level 5.

## Appendix 26 – Story and counter-story at St X

### Introduction: A Tale of Two Stories

On a cold night in December 2017, I presented my findings to a good cross-section of adults from St X. As part of the presentation, I decided to follow Hopewell in offering them their story as a ‘mythos’ in which I tried to encapsulate their ‘ethos’. Eschewing his favoured Greek and Roman myths, I chose more accessible folk tales.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Hopewell, I did not feel that one story encapsulated the journey of St X; what I observed was story and counter-story.<sup>2</sup> It may be that an instinctive modernist aspiration for a single story shaped Hopewell’s reading in the way that a multi-storied approach reflects my postmodern context. Or perhaps a time of greater cultural and organisational change is more likely to throw up multiple stories. Though I find it hard to see how the negotiation of meaning in a group of people would not generate difference and conflict. The story and counter-story were based respectively on ‘The Sleeping Beauty’ and ‘Hansel and Gretel.’ At the event, they were responsive to the content of the stories and intrigued by the articulation of conflictual stories in their journey.

### Story: Journey Outwards – Sleeping Beauty

We had the trappings of life but we didn’t really know our community. We were busy with the Holiday Club, but truthfully we weren’t seeing people come long-term to church through it and we were worn out and in retreat from it in our hearts. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, we had gone to sleep. We were a church locked away in slumber – in a castle behind a moat. When we began PMC, it was as if we were being awakened to a new reality.

First, we recognised ourselves as a ‘filling station on Sunday for the week’ and as a church that ‘ran programmes for mission’.<sup>3</sup> Then, PMC helped us to slow down and see where we are now and learn to listen to God and try to notice what he is doing in us and in our communities.

In steps of new life, we began to listen to our community and form relationships, just at the time when the Community Group was looking outward to others as well – we see God in this. We have learnt that there are people of peace in our communities who value some of things we do and that some want to partner with us to do things to bless our communities.

Through the PMC process we have come to understand our missional vocation in terms of relationships rather than programmes – sharing life with Jesus, one another and our communities – and increasingly we try to make our decisions based on discerning how

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<sup>1</sup> Hopewell, *Congregation*, 103-118 and 146.

<sup>2</sup> This may be because Hopewell’s instinctive modernist aspiration for a single story shaped his reading in the way that a multi-storied approach reflects my postmodern context. Or perhaps a time of greater cultural and organisational change as today is more likely to throw up multiple stories. Though I find it hard to see how the negotiation of meaning in a group of people would not generate difference and conflict.

<sup>3</sup> These quotes come from an exercise that churches do in the first year of PMC to explore the kind of church they are. PMC-UK, *Listening 1*, 7.



what we do might fulfil this vocation. We have a long way to go, but we feel that we have been awakened to seeing and entering into our world in a new way.

The kiss that brought us life was from a God who takes action in our lives and in our community; it was an imagination renewed by God's voice through Scripture. We have left the castle, put a drawbridge over the moat and are being transformed into a community – which like the mustard tree can become a place where all sorts and types of people may find a home.

### **Counter-Story: Staying faithful – Hansel and Gretel**

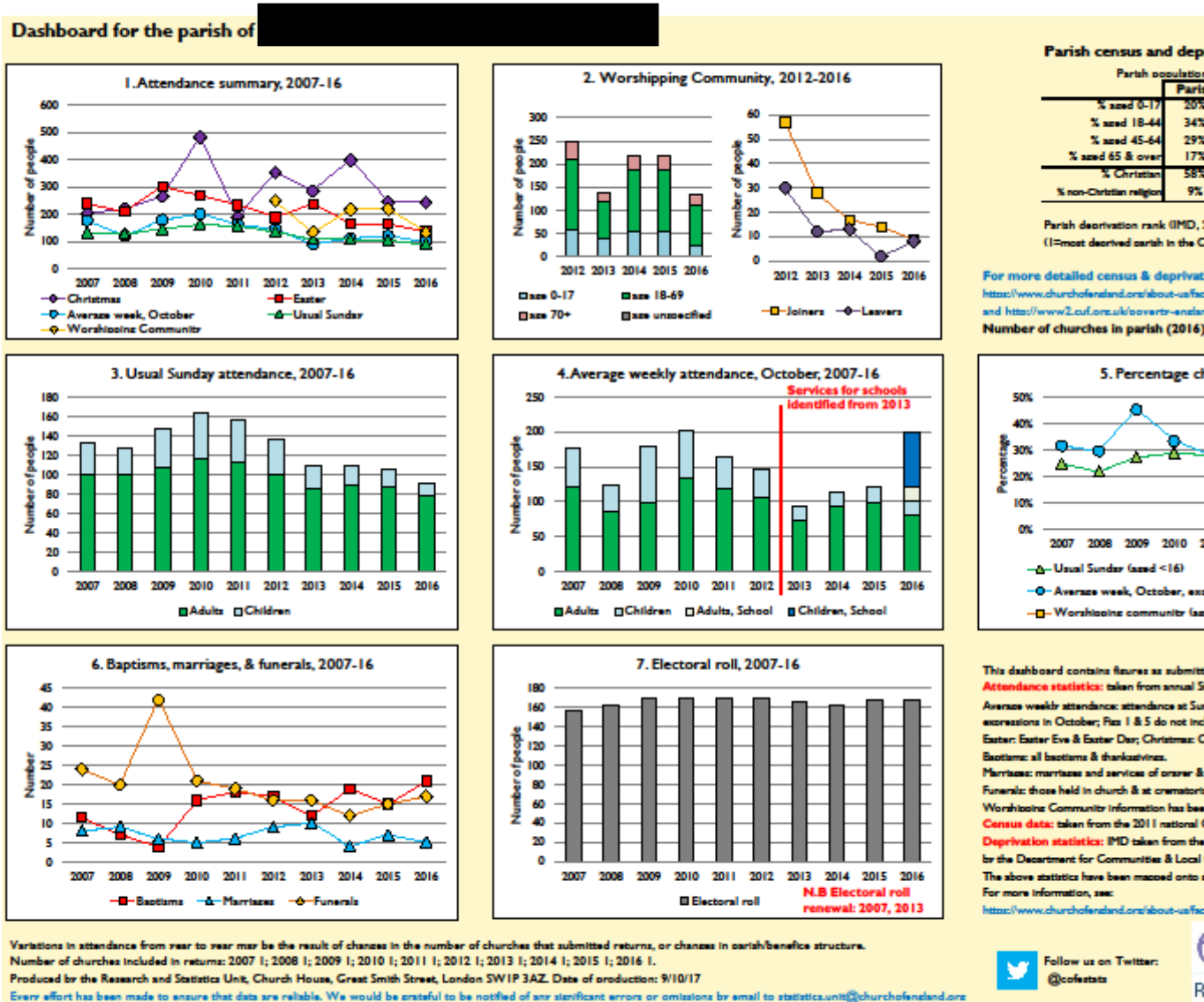
Once-upon-time, our church was thriving with lots of children and young people. We invested heavily in preparing and running our annual Holiday Club, which drew hundreds of children. It was a great communal event in which people used their gifts in teaching, drama, worship, organisation, practical skills and we bonded together – putting up marquees, standing guard, developing our ministries. Children came in the day time and the young people had their time in the evenings. Young people were mentored and in turn became the mentors. This was the engine room through the year for our ministry to children and young people and we had many families – some of whom have now left.

We have been distracted and lured away onto a path to a dark place, which is more prison than new freedom. We don't understand why we gave up all that and have put very little in its place. We are a shadow of our former glory. PMC does a lot of talking, but what are we actually doing now? It is as if we have been tempted and drawn away from who we were and trapped in a false reality – a dangerous place in a dark wood. We can only hope we have left enough clues to find our way back.

### **Observation**

These are contested stories about the life of St X and how they articulate identity and growth through shared narrative. The second story looks back to more individualised perspectives, whilst the first looks on to more communal expressions. Theories that talk about maturity in individual terms alone will miss this dimension. But people are still agents within community life, so their personal formation is important also in understanding how communal maturation happens.

# Appendix 27 – Parish Dashboard 2007-2016<sup>1</sup>



Graph 3 shows a rise to a high point in 2010 and thereafter a steady decline with a sharp drop in 2013. Close examination reveals that adult attendance dropped in the first couple of years after vicar 2 left. A further drop in 2013 might reasonably be argued to have something to do with reactions to PMC; after this it has remained fairly even, with some decline. The sharp fall has been in the attendance of children – something that is accurately observed by the congregation.<sup>2</sup> Most of the growth and decline over the ten year period was in the attendance of children. Adult attendance figures are overall lower in 2016 compared to 2007 but have stabilised. Baptisms have increased from a low point of four in 2007 to 21 in 2016 (see graph 6).

<sup>1</sup> Church of England. Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. (2017). *Parish Dashboard*

<sup>2</sup> This might be connected to changes in the age profile of children in the congregation and therefore to opportunities for schooling in the local area.

## **Appendix 28 – 09 20966: Practical theology: context, practice and performance – DPT, Year 1**

### **‘...each part working properly’ – How does Christian Community Foster or Inhibit Growth in Maturity?**

#### **Introduction**

Practical theology (PT) stands or falls by its connection to people’s lived experience. Theology that does not help people explore and enter a shared life with God seems a pale reflection of Jesus’ intention (John 7.17). The danger is that in this quest everything is sacrificed at the altar of relevance. This piece is a critical review of the history of PT exploring how the relationship of theology and practice is configured and in particular whether it holds authenticity of Christian witness in the passion to contextualise; an Evangelical PT has a contribution to make to this question. I have chosen Fowler as my practical theologian because his work focuses what is at stake in the loss of Scriptural imagination in PT. This is not detached theorising; we owe the world and the church theological practice that is transformational – an academy that lives for God’s mission in the world and a church that is equipped for theological reflection in that mission. In the literature review, critique of PT will be contextualised in the question of the nature of maturity – a question that stands at heart of integrity of life and witness.

My working life straddles these two professional contexts. For twenty-seven years I served as an ordained Anglican minister, leading congregations in diverse settings. The New

Testament vision for maturity through community in Christ has been the foundation for that ministry (Romans 5-8, 1 Corinthians 11-14, Ephesians 4, Colossians 1-3). Elsewhere we see a vision of maturity as integrity of relationship worked out in a communal context (cf. Letter of James; Bauckham, 1999).

Unacquainted with concepts of 'theological reflection' and 'reflective practitioner', I nevertheless practised communal spiritual discernment with each congregation as we sought to grow to maturity in Christ – listening inside and outside the church, listening to God through Scripture and in prayer, seeking to discern the energy of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.4-6). This, I suggest, is theological reflection in the context of ministry.

My new professional context, theological education, has led me to examine my practice and directs the unfolding research context for this doctorate. What approach, values, practices should inform ministry oriented towards encouraging growth in character and maturity in a church community? How might this shape patterns of training? To be able to articulate this for others requires movement from 'reflection-in-action' to 'reflection on reflection-in-action' (Schon 1991, 49-69, 126-7). My desire is not to invite students to emulate my practice, but to develop the awareness, character, knowledge and skills that will enable them to form communities that foster healthy maturity through relationship. This has led me to pursue a research project that takes me beyond my own anecdotal experience to a critical and theological reflection on the formation of Christian community in my own tradition.

There are problems in proposing a project that engages with ministry practice and the training institution. Academic learning does not transfer straightforwardly to the professional context (Scott et al. 2004, 1), particularly as Evangelical Charismatic churches and students are traditionally suspicious of academia. As a practitioner, I am struck by the

power of the academic paradigm in college and how intimidating this can be to ministers-in-training. Managing the mutual relationship of academic and church contexts promises to be complicated. Working with the competing relationships between narratives and their modes of relating will be an important part of the process (e.g. 'colonising' or 'integrating'; Scott et al. 2004, 54).

Over the course of the DPT programme, I hope to develop an Evangelical PT which is academically rigorous and grounded in practice; contextualised in a critique of Evangelical community formation. In proposing this research, two of Miller-McLemore's foci for practical theology will be in the foreground: 'way of life' and 'curriculum'. 'Method' will clearly appear in a later stage of the research, whereas 'discipline' will surface in the ongoing discussion of the positioning of PT in the public arena (2012b, 4-13).

## **Critique of Practical Theology**

### **(A) Introduction**

Whilst not the only model of PT, theological reflection dominates in ministerial training. After briefly situating the move to theological reflection, I work from the pastoral cycle (Green 2009, 17-122, Thompson, 2008, 17-34, Osmer 2008, 1-29, Ballard & Pritchard 2006, 81-95) to raises the four key questions – questions which sit in the historical framework of the journey through modernity into postmodernity.

## **(B) From applied theology to theological reflection**

Schleiermacher created a structure for academic ministerial training in which practical theology is the flowering of a tree whose root is philosophy and trunk is dogmatics, history and biblical study (Crouter 2005, Helmer 2010). It is presented as the crown of theology. In practice, this creates a one-way-street in which matters of theology are settled prior to practice and ministry becomes the application of academically defined theology; hence the term, applied theology (Ballard and Pritchard 2006, 60-63, Graham 2002, 59-61, Woodward and Pattison 2000, 31, Burkhart 1983, 42-57, Farley 1983a, 25-28) – that application being specifically to the clerical task (Farley 1983a, 26). This model dominated ministerial formation for most of the twentieth century.

In 1950s America this was challenged (Hiltner, 2000, 28-32); there is no ‘master discipline’ that controls all, rather different ‘fields’ (logic-centred, operations-centred) interrelate in a dialogue of practice with theology. We now have a two-way street, described as ‘theory-laden practice.’ The methodology of theological reflection embodies this inductive approach.

Theological reflection consists of attending to experience then correlating this with [Christian] tradition out of which flows new insight or action (Kinast 2000, 1, Killen and de Beer 1994, 20-45). Academic versions include a stage before the conversation with theology where anecdotal or impressionistic accounts of experience are grounded in analytical dialogue with secular discourses (Green 2009, 17-122, Thompson, 2008, 17-34, Osmer 2008, 1-29, Ballard & Pritchard 2006, 81-95, Lartey 2000, 128-134, Pattison & Woodward 2000, 13-16). The most recently published overview of PT (Miller-McLemore 2012a) does not

focus on theological reflection as a methodology but fills out the approach with a range of inter-disciplinary and analytical methods; the question of methodology appears settled.

However there is evidence that this method, though apparently simple, is hard to practice. Smith notes ordinands' difficulty with theological reflection; even when experimenting with more enjoyable problem-based approaches, students did not improve in their assessments (2008, 20-32). The challenge for teachers is to convey what seems like a 'mystical' process (Pattison 2000a, 136). These comments resonate with my early experience as a theological educator.

Ordinands are not alone in their struggle with this method. Rooted in liberation theology (Thompson 2008, 22-24, Freire 1970), the methodology expects a transformational outcome (Green 2009, 113-122, Killen & de Beer 2000, 71-75, Thompson 2008, 29-31). Whether it is yielding the same transformation in the Western World as in the Majority World is not obvious. For example, Bentley (2012, 108-118) offers a reflection on enabling ministry which simply re-presents ideas that have been commonplace in many churches for over 30 years. Cross (2012, 45-59) explores experiential learning but the conclusion reiterates present Church of England commitment to learning outcomes.

Is this a problem with the theological competence of practical theologians? After all, who could be an expert in biblical studies, history, philosophy and systematics as well as skilled in social research and cultural studies and all this within a commitment to practice? Or could there be a problem with the methodology of PT itself? I want to suggest that four problems – philosophical, methodological, theological and spiritual/relational – need addressing to create a coherent, understandable and transformative approach.

**(i) How do people learn? – a philosophical problem**

Practical theologians almost universally agree that theological reflection starts with experience (Bevans 2009, Green 2009, Thompson, 2008, Osmer 2008, Ballard & Pritchard 2006, Graham 2002, Lyall 2001, Kinast 2000, Lartey 2000, Pattison & Woodward 2000, Browning 1996, Killen and de Beer 1994). Of the seven models for theological reflection in Graham et al., 2005, six start from experience or practice. There is nothing very controversial about this. If we wish to do practical theology, then practice must be our territory. However, it is grounded in a particular commitment to how people learn, itself rooted in the modern idea of the autonomous individual. Even those who gripped by the social agenda of liberation theology find it hard to maintain in the face of individualising and privatising forces of western culture (Green 2009, 17-18, 27-35, Thompson 2008, 22-24, 35-67, Graham et al. 2005, 182-191, Graham 2002, 142-171).

The pastoral cycle bears a close relationship to Kolb's experiential learning cycle; a relationship acknowledged explicitly by Green (2009, 17) and Thompson (2008, 21). Kolb (1984, 20-38) explains his debt to Lewin, Dewey and particularly Piaget in his understanding that learning, contrary to empiricist or traditionalist models, is not about the accumulation of knowledge but rather what happens '...in the mutual interaction of the process of *accommodation* of concepts or schemas to experience in the world and the process of *assimilation* of events and experiences from the world into existing concepts and schemas' (23). Learning becomes a process of adaptation over time through reflection by the individual subject on their experience. This model is uncomfortable with the concepts that learning arises from grounding in a tradition or narrative or by the imposing of knowledge on a Lockean 'blank slate.' It is firmly in the tradition of autonomous, liberal individualism:



'Piaget and Kohlberg both thought that parents and other authorities were *obstacles* to moral development' (Haight 2012, 9).

Another influence can make this approach impervious to challenge; its grounding in liberation theology (Green 2009, 18, Thompson 2008, 22-24, Ballard & Pritchard 2006, 70-72, Graham et al 2005, 170-199). Freire (1970, 52-67) employed the concept of 'banking' to describe the kind of education which involves the teacher imparting information to the student. He proposed that such an approach to learning was a tool in the hands of oppressors and a means of control and disempowerment. By contrast, a dialogical, egalitarian and reflective approach allowing the poor to become conscious subjects of their own learning would enable them to become actors in their own narrative of freedom (68-105). Whether he conceives this entirely in terms of autonomous subjects as sole arbiters of their own learning is not entirely clear; he does speak of 'investigators and the people' as 'co-investigators' (87). When this enters Western consciousness, however, it is easily reinterpreted individualistically as freedom from the encroachment of the other upon shaping of the self as a 'reflexive project' (Giddens 1991, 75).

My challenge here is not about doing theology from practice, nor to reflection on experience as a key learning element, rather the idea that in some mystical sense learners 'already know', or can learn without reference to outside 'authorities'; this, I believe, is the source of the problem identified by Pattison (2000a, 136). Ordinands can recount experiences relatively easily but to reflect on that experience involves much more help than the classic models of theological reflection would suggest (Scott 2004, 133).

Describing experience is more problematic than usually acknowledged – it is already grounded in narratives, personal and theological: '...experience is frequently not understood as culturally constructed, pre-interpreted and situated.' (Scott 2004, 133) My challenge,

then, is that the way we articulate experience is already shaped by a modernist, individualist, interiorised and autonomous philosophy (Campbell 1989, 72-74, 156-157).

**(ii) Correlation and practical theology – a methodological problem**

The 'two-way street' for PT involves the correlation of experience with the [Christian] tradition (Kinast 2000, Killen and de Beer 1994). Generally this correlation involves engagement with secular discourses – substantially but not exclusively with the human sciences (Green 2009, Thompson 2008, Ballard and Pritchard 2006, Swinton and Mowatt 2006, Browning 1983, Tracy 1983).

To communicate the Christian faith it is necessary to correlate the Christian narrative with contemporary thought; this has been fundamental to Christian apologetics over the centuries (e.g. Irenaeus on transmigration of the soul; 1981, 409-411). However the modern era has seen increasing scepticism towards revelation, what Pattison describes as the 'turn to the human' in Western theology that mirrors the increasingly anthropocentric shape of the western intellectual tradition (2007, 268).

For practical theologians the relationship between the different discourses is construed as a conversation, which initially was rigorously critical but has become less so (Tracy 1983, 62-79, Browning 1996, 44-47). Cameron et al. (2010, 130-137) use their theology in an illustrative way so that the operant theology of the organisation that they discern, which is hard to differentiate from what might be the commitments of a similar secular organisation, goes unchallenged. They claim that their model is 'theological from its first stages' (51) but the evidence for this in practice is not convincing. A brief scan of recent

volumes of 'Practical Theology' reveals that too many examples lack critical engagement between different types of narrative generating a 'glib synthesis' (Pattison 2000b, 41).

This is not lack of rigour alone, but reveals a problem with the way correlation was theologically construed from the outset by Tillich and Tracy. Tillich's theology starts with anthropology; human beings ask questions about their own sense of being and from this point find in God the 'ground of being', correlating 'questions from an analysis of existence with answers from Christian revelation' (Browning 2000, 93). For Tillich the possibility of knowledge of God or 'Ultimate Being' is rooted in a common unity of being; therefore his theology proceeds on the basis of the 'scholastic principle of *analogia entis*. Because of the unity of being, what one knows about man, by analogy, he may know about God' (McKelway 1964, 63). This is the direction that PT characteristically follows. Tillich reaches this point because he does not start from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ but rather his ontological concept of the 'New Being is applied to Jesus and he is called the "Christ" because he conforms to a prior principle of salvation represented by that title' (26).

Tillich argues that the content of the faith is not changed merely the form, however, whenever this correlative approach is used it consistently privileges the hermeneutic of the context over the hermeneutic of the text and the search for the strange message of the gospel is subsumed in the cultural agenda. The distinctive horizons of text and context are not maintained (Husinger 1995, 83-95).

Though this looks like Christianity giving 'answers' to the world's questions, it results in Christian practice being recast according to the agenda of the secular discipline. The evidence for this is two-fold. First, a number of practical theologians from the 1970s to the 1990s raise questions about the captivity of pastoral care to therapeutic individualism (Pattison 1994, 208-220) which had lost its moorings in the traditions and practices of the

church (Oden 1984, 26-42) and in particular in the Judaeo-Christian moral tradition (Browning 1976, 11-37). Second, ministerial practice in the 1980s and 90s was of a commitment to individualist healing paradigms and a tendency to redefine the minister as pastoral counsellor. The controlling metaphor of the pastor as therapist points to the dominance of the psychological discipline in the conversation.

Browning seeks to address this captivity to psychotherapy by proposing a model of PT in which theological ethics becomes the foundation that 'reconnects patterns of care and the governance of the Christian community with ideas of the good, the true and the normative' (Graham 2002, 83). In pursuing this goal he adopts Tracy's revision of Tillich's model which 'critically correlates both questions and answers found in the Christian faith with questions and implied answers in various secular perspectives.' (Browning, 2000, 93) He goes beyond contemporaries in arguing for a role for social science in establishing 'the properly normative interests of practical theology' (1983, 15). Note how he grounds his methodology in developmental psychology rather than 'theological principles' (Graham 2002, 88). Browning demonstrates the rigour of his mutually critical methodology in a case study, but one where theological considerations seem to be entirely absent. This results in a pastoral practice which is extremely conceptual and strangely devoid of both humanity and connection with the Christian narrative (2000, 90-103).

For Browning, there is a clear apologetic intention; only by seeking a shared public language can we communicate in a secular and pluralist context (2000, 95-6). He contrasts his approach with that of Oden whom he says, 'insisted that only symbols formed by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (*Deus pro nobis*) provided this language, whereas I insisted on a correlational method... that correlated our secular intuitions of this ground with the language of revelation' (95).

This is because, for Browning as for Tracy, Christian self-description is subordinated to the academic pursuit of 'formal and universally applicable, context-invariant criteria' in the anthropological and phenomenological method of correlation (Frei 1992, 33). This approach is grounded in a philosophical assumption about the universal nature of religious experience rather than the narrative-shaped and embodied world of a particular religious community. And so, 'the correlation is a matter of subsuming the specifically Christian under the general, experiential religious, as one "regional" aspect' (34).

Those who use this correlative method today are not necessarily committed to this view of universal religious (limit) experience or to the existential philosophy that undergirds it. However, a methodology that assumes an equality of movement between interdisciplinary description and analysis to theological reflection (and even the collapsing of the one into the other) owes its unquestioned assumptions about the unproblematic nature of this project to Tillich's analogy of being and the adoptionist Christology upon which it is based.

A Chalcedonian understanding of the two natures of Christ, offers a different model for interdisciplinary study in general and the problem of correlation in particular by maintaining the three distinctives of 'the "indissoluble differentiation", the "inseparable unity" and the "indestructible order" of two particular terms (often but not always divine and human)' (Hunsinger 1995, 65). This protects the uniqueness of the different discourses whilst at the same time allowing an appropriate interrelation within a specific situation. Moreover, by proposing an asymmetrical ordering of discourses, she is able to give an appropriate level of authority to different descriptions of reality and experience. This differentiation does not preclude a sense of unity as each discourse contributes to and

shapes the other in the context of ministry. But an asymmetric relationship between the discourses needs to be guarded, if one is not simply to be turned into the other (61-104).

The asymmetric relationship also guards the priority of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This is why Oden argues, with Barth against Tillich for '*analogia fidei*' rather than '*analogia entis*' (1978, 114-145); that the analogy must flow from God to human beings and that our knowing is based on God's self-disclosure – the analogy of faith. Anything less will falsify the Christian revelation by making it dependent on human knowing.

Students need strong encouragement and guidance to ensure that their theological reflection is biblically and theologically rigorous. Therefore a model of correlation that can maintain the appropriate integration and differentiation of discourses whilst at the same time privileging the Christian narrative is desperately needed – not simply in Evangelical settings – but in any context where practical theologians want to see the transformational power of Christian metaphor and symbol in action. Swinton and Mowatt (2006, 83-91) is the only source I have found that engages with her model. They are persuaded by the 'basic epistemic priority given to theology within the critical conversation' (88), but have reservations over what they consider to be her over-confident assertions about revelation and the dangers of lack of self-criticism in regard to theological claims. I think that their concerns can be resolved by a fuller consideration of hermeneutics without compromising the strength of her model.

This leads me to the final consideration in this section, which is the development of pastoral hermeneutics. Earlier models of correlation are hermeneutical but from within a particular theological perspective – described by Lindbeck as the 'experiential-expressivist' (Gerkin 1997, 106-107). Those for whom the liberal humanist expression of pastoral care was no longer convincing, yet who could not sign up to Thurneysen's neo-orthodoxy (1962),

found in Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model a way of grounding practical theology not in universal religious experience, nor in propositional statements, but in a hermeneutic engagement with narrative – human stories and Christian tradition (Gerkin 1997, 105-114).

Gerkin recognises the danger of the correlative approach with psychology consistently relegating theology to the affirmation of an already settled direction (1984, 17). At first sight, his correlation of individual experience, Christian tradition, Christian community and cultural context seems reminiscent of earlier approaches (1987, 35) – as is his commitment to a voice in the public arena which, like Browning, he thinks Oden's confessional approach compromises (1987, 76). However he proposes that the Christian narrative holds the vision of life and the grounding for a person's negotiation of the multiple worlds in which they live (1987, 148-149). Like Capps (1984, 37-60), Gerkin turns to philosophy of hermeneutics to bring human stories and the Christian narrative together in a way that is more open to exploration than more prescriptive uses of Scripture, yet opens the door to the possibility of life-transforming disclosures from the engagement with Scripture (Lyall 2001, 52-60). Christian theological language is our 'native language' through which we 'find our bearings.' Other disciplines are 'second languages' that 'can be immensely illuminating of one's view of the world' (Gerkin 1987, 149).

Though Gerkin speaks of pastoral care in a communal context, his model is still strongly individualistic (1987, 122-135). The pastor is no longer a therapist but an interpreter (Gerkin, 1987, 117-123, Capps 1984, 42-60, Osmer 2008, 24-25). Though this approach allows priority to Christian self-description, I am not convinced that they have applied the same hermeneutical rigour in their use of Erikson's life-cycle theory as a way for describing the pastoral context that they have in describing the pastoral engagement (Capps 2002, 17-31, Gerkin 1987, 153-225).

There is some evidence of people seeking to give priority to the theological discourse. Fiddes' work is more akin to applied theology which despite attempts at communal definition remains both individualising and therapeutic (2000, 46-56). More recently, there have been a number of attempts to allow theology the primary voice whilst being rooted in practice or context (Miller-McLemore 2012c, Swinton, 2012, Poling 2011, Ward 2008). None of these authors offer a clear model for double listening to Scripture and context – though Swinton comes closest (2012, 16-26). It is to this question that I now turn.

### **(iii) The question of authority – a theological problem**

Postmodernity has had significant impact on the foci of PT since the 1990s. Postmodern questions about the relationship of texts to reality, the referential nature of knowledge and language, the suspicion of metanarratives and the liberation of minority perspectives have contributed to the ongoing questioning of authority and particularly the authority of a unitary biblical text expressed as 'incredulity towards metanarrative' (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). Graham argues that Gerkin's approach is naive in his view of Scripture, failing to apply properly the hermeneutic of suspicion inherent in his philosophical model. (2002, 119-120). Moreover she is troubled by the narrative approach, both the risk of flattening out the complexities and contradictions of human stories and the potential for a controlling story to be oppressive (Graham et al. 2005, 76, 106-10).

An Evangelical PT that holds Scripture as the authoritative voice in the critical conversation has to offer an answer to these postmodern concerns and demonstrate that it can be part of a critical and contextual conversation that engages with the specificity of experience. Equally it needs to challenge the 'strange silence of the Bible' in PT (Pattison



2000b, 106, also Ballard 2012, 163-165) – because the Bible has been avoided in the search for a universal religious grounding or deconstructed by a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Scripture is problematic in PT because most models try to correlate it with an already given, if ill-defined definition of pastoral care, one to which the Bible, when read on its own terms, is resistant (Ballard 2012, 164-166, Pattison 2000b, 107-129). This weakness is beginning to be recognised but needs to go further than simply finding another way to read the Bible and address the question of the authority of this strange and culturally distant text – something rarely attempted by practical theologians. (Ballard 2012, 168-169, Pattison 2000b, 127-133).

Recent approaches in biblical theology pay attention to the unique voice(s) of the text as PT does to experience and context. Wright (1992, 142) offers his model of the Bible as five-act drama where the church improvises through being steeped in Acts 1-4 as the “‘authority’ for how to stage the fifth’ (Hamley 2012, 1). Wright is committed to the storied nature of human knowledge but not in such a way as to suggest that this bears no relationship to reality. He adopts the idea of ‘critical realism’ as a way of determining knowledge which is real though provisional (1992, 32-46). Wright is aware that his idea of a ‘single overarching story’ lays him open to charges power moves and exploitation (2005, 7) of the kind that Bennett Moore (2002) argues from painful experience. He believes that he can safeguard this through the exercise of a ‘hermeneutic of love’ in which there is a genuine dialogue where each voice pays attention to the other. Wright conceives authority not in terms of a ‘record of revelation’ but as an encounter with God through interpretative listening to the text in community (2005, 28).

Brueggemann is more cautious about metanarrative. He offers a more pliable picture of ‘core testimony’ challenged by ‘counter-testimony’, proposing that God’s people

encounter God through a 'dialectical and dialogical' meeting of conflicting testimonies. The biblical text is polyphonic by nature and resists being closed down by the rendering of a single narrative; there are many but not just any interpretations (1997, 61-89). The encounter with God is a process of re-engagement with the dramatic movement of the text rather than an improvisatory completion of the drama. Drawing on Ricoeur, Brueggemann offers a way of attending to critical and post-critical concerns through the hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval and argues that the text offers 'an open-ended dialogue with some form of core but still in contention' (Hamley 2010, 4). It is possible through the exercise of imagination to encounter God as the other, the subject of the text, which has 'the capacity to generate, evoke and articulate alternative images of reality, images that counter what hegemonic power and knowledge have declared to be impossible' (Brueggemann, 1997, 68).

What these approaches have in common is a determination to allow the distinctive voice(s) of the text the space to be heard and to encourage a genuine dialogue, which takes seriously the text of Scripture either as a place either inhabited by God or through which we encounter God. Both stress the dialogical nature of this encounter; Brueggemann's approach should be attractive to contextual PT as it gives room for 'new partners to join' (Hamley 2010, 4) and for the genuine challenge of alternative voices through his commitment to 'counter-testimony'. Wright's determination to hold onto the real reference of the narrative is important as without it 'imaging the "possible" may become meaningless, and lack the power and ability to be made real' (Hamley, 2010, 11). Drawing on Ricoeur's philosophy, both are able to navigate the 'polar oscillation between objectivism and relativism' (Stiver 2001, 7). Ricoeur's ideas about the 'surplus of meaning' and the function of symbol and metaphor within a narrative explain why a hermeneutical approach to the

authority of Scripture is vital – one which will give back into the hands of communities and their leaders confidence in the transformative power of the biblical narrative (Stiver, 2001, 87-136). Without this, the danger is that Christian congregations will become more and more detached in terms of everyday practice from the core narrative of their faith.

#### **(iv) The question of relationship – a spiritual problem**

Postmodern PT also embodies a turn away from the individual, techno-rational self – whether as client/congregant or counsellor/pastor – towards a focus on mutual care within a community where the goal becomes ‘strategic participation rather than personal insight’ (McClure 2012, 275). The community is understood as the locus of theological reflection (Farley 2000, 122). Farley (1983a, 21-41) argues for a rejection of the ‘technology of practice’ (29) in which theory and practice become separated – in the academy and in the seminary – so that practical theology becomes focused in technique-driven professional practice of ministry<sup>1</sup>. He argues for a reinstatement of the medieval idea of ‘*habitus*’ in which the personal and the theological are integrated in the pursuit of the knowledge of God in community grounded in the development of the habit or disposition of wisdom (Farley 1988, 103-191, 1983b, 3-48, 127-203). Graham also argues for a form of ‘*habitus*’ though she considers that Farley is on a nostalgic quest to re-impose a pre-modern idea of indwelling on a fragmented modern practice (94-95). Her concept of ‘*habitus*’ is a personally and socially constructed communal practice, formed from reflexive conversation with history and experience rather than through conformity to a tradition (2002, 95, 100-104).

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<sup>1</sup> See also Campbell (1985).

Through engagement with critical theory, she recognises that community risks being just as controlling as any totalising narrative so she proposes the concept of 'alterity' – an awareness and responsiveness to the other in 'discursive' and reflexive communal practice (2002, 142-171). Her proposal of openness to the other is remarkably one-dimensional and finally individualising; it contrasts strikingly with Bonhoeffer's Christocentric language when speaking of the other in community which has greater potential for holding together identity and difference in community (1954, 10-11).

The idea of *habitus* could be a rich resource both for theological reflection in community and for the shaping of ministerial training; but it requires a stronger transcendent component. Graham's commitment to theology-in-practice comes both from a commitment to community and scepticism about the referential possibility of language about God: "'God-praxis not 'God-talk'" (2002, 134). This combined with a commitment to be 'interpretative' rather than 'legislative' sums up the temper of postmodern PT (2002, 208-209). The turn to the communal in PT has spawned a vast number of ethnographic and social science research projects (Cameron et al 2010, Astley and Christie 2007, Fulkerson 2007, Swinton and Mowatt, 2006, Cameron et al 2005, Cartledge 2003), which, apart from one or two exceptions (Heard 2009, Steven 2003) stop short at the point of analysis and then offer some interpretations.

Graham champions 'phenomenological' enquiry and the 'contextual nature of *phronesis*' (2002, 209). If this is to be authentic then it needs to encompass those whose religious experience is grounded in the belief that words can say something real about the God they describe and that God uses them as a vehicle of communication and encounter with people. In this descriptive mode, PT is faithfully to portray personal and corporate life with God – allowing that experience to breathe in an environment that is committed to

conveying it as generously and as fully as possible, whilst acknowledging that we are inevitably shaped by our presuppositions and worldview. Sociological description of experience can be critical and insightful but also reductionist in describing people's understanding of their experience of God (Percy 1996, 60-81).

Experience has taught me two things which I hold as central to doing theology. Firstly that faith is born from the initiative of God. Therefore theology that does not take this seriously cannot properly describe my context and experience: 'God reveals himself' (Barth 1975, 296). Following from this, PT has to be concerned with the experience of God and the way in which language can be said to speak about God, rather than simply avoiding the issue by saying that 'theology is thinking about faith' (Ballard and Pritchard 2006, 12). A phenomenological description of such experience has to make room for referential language about God.

PT as a discipline shies away from this question. 'Over the last century and more, Western theology has turned to the human and seen its task increasingly as understanding the creators of the ideas and discourse of theology rather than God in Godself' (Pattison, 2007, 268). This arises from what Helen Cameron et al. describe as the 'problem about talking about God in practice' in a culture which is supposed to find God-talk embarrassing or irrelevant (Cameron et al. 2010, 34). To make theology meaningful or accessible in the public arena, PT must focus its attention on the 'performative speech-acts of faith practice' conceived in terms of a 'text' generated by social science research (Cameron et al. 2010, 13, 49-50). The assumption that in order to gain a hearing in the public square theology must cast itself in the language of secular disciplines has been the dominant voice in practical theology and those who propose a 'confessional approach – like Oden or Hauerwas – are quickly dismissed (Gerkin, 1987, 76, Graham 2002, 115-118). However, I would question

whether, in a postmodern setting, the polarisation of public and ecclesial contexts is either necessary or desirable.

### **(C) Conclusion**

Evangelicals have not been well represented in PT in Britain (Bennett 2012, 478-479). Tidball is uncomfortable with inductive approaches considering them inevitably reductionist and prefers an applied approach which is church- and clergy-centred (1995, 42-48, 1986, 13-28, 223-241). Hurding whose roots are in psychotherapy (1985) has provided a literature overview of pastoral theology and maturity from a broadly individual therapeutic perspective (1998, 2013). Goodliff did something very similar but less rigorous (1998).

There is a clear space for an Evangelical approach which will engage with more recent developments in PT which have challenged both the applied, ecclesial- and clergy-centred models of practice and also the weaknesses of rationalist, individualised and therapeutic approaches to practice.

This would make a contribution to the debate about how people learn – doing justice to the referential nature of religious language and experience; offer a way to develop Scriptural imagination – drawing upon the hermeneutical resources outlined above; resource communities with practices for personal and corporate maturity particularly in modelling attention to the ‘other’; and reposition the debate about public theology in a way that challenges the hangover of the liberal consensus (Miller-McLemore 2012c, 70-99).

## James Fowler

### (A) Introduction

Fowler's work is a 'way of seeing' the life of faith (Dykstra and Parks 1986, 2) which might be interpreted either as a consummate attempt at integrative knowing or a last gasp of modern totalising perspectives. His work after *Stages of Faith* involves 'reinterpretation and grounding' as a 'response to theological critiques' (Streib 2006, 168). Despite substantial criticism faith development (FD) is consistently used in contemporary PT (Astley and Francis 1992, Fowler et al. 1991, Dykstra and Parks 1986). In America, the strongest influence is in education and development, both Roman Catholic and Evangelical (Cully 1984, 131, O'Murchu 2011, 109-118, Regan 2002, 42-70, Wilhoit and Dettoni 1995, 75-90). This includes child and adolescent development, crossing faith boundaries (Goodman 2006, 143-156) and shaping practice (Roehlkepartain et al. 2006, 19-103).

In the UK, FD has influenced pastoral care, leadership, spiritual direction, child development and analysis of church leaving (Whipp 2013, 40-48, Watts et al. 2002, 109-115, Lyall 2001, 108-130, Jacobs 1988, 21-46, Runcorn 2011, 7-9, Parker, 2009, 39-53, Lamont 2007, 56-65, Jamieson 2002, 108-125). The Church of England recommended study of FD influencing ministerial training and diocesan discipleship courses (Church of England 1991).

Fowler's credentials as a practical theologian might be questioned. As theology is settled prior to his study, it lacks the critical conversation. Nevertheless, I chose Fowler because of his influence on PT in human development and because his approach to correlation represents that which I most want to critique.

## (B) Description

Fowler began academic life as a theologian, submitting his PhD on Niebuhr in 1971. From 1977, he worked at Candler School of Theology, a United Methodist Seminary, of which Fowler is a minister. Though they have Evangelical credentials through their union with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968, their courses bear the mark of a liberal approach to public ministry (<http://www.emory.edu/home/academics/programs/theology.html>) on which he presumably had considerable influence as the first director of the *Center for Ethics* from 1994-2005 (<http://ethics.emory.edu/people/Founder.html>). The ethos of ministerial service and relevance fits well with the pragmatic and transformational focus of Fowler's work. Anchored in liberal Protestantism, his lifework has focused on his theory of FD – a correlation of liberal theology and developmental psychology for which he has gained recognition in both fields (Streib 2006, 168).

The origins of FD theory lie in 'American functionalist, pragmatist and symbolic interactionist traditions' (Broughton 1986, 90). Fowler (1986, 15-42) draws on a wide range of thinkers (Selman, Erikson, Kegan, Royce, Buber, Mead, Sullivan) but his key sources are the structuralism of the 'Piaget-Kohlberg paradigm' (23) and the theology of Niebuhr and Tillich (1986, 16, 1995, 3-23).

Faith is the ability to create meaning; prior to any specific religion or belief, it is a universal capacity, a 'way of *seeing* and *knowing*' by which life-worlds are constructed (Fowler 1995, 1-15, 1986, 19). 'Faithing' happens through relationships of trust – with people, but also with '*shared centers of value and power.*' From a Christian perspective this *ultimate environment*' is the Kingdom of God. Fowler follows Niebuhr in proposing 'radical



monotheism' as a way of challenging both 'polytheism' and 'henotheism' in a pluralist context (1995, 16-23, 1986, 16-18). Imagination is the key whereby we attach symbols and metaphors to this quest for the ultimate (1995, 24-31). Fernhout discerns three meanings of faith in this account: trust and loyalty, worldview building and way of life (1986, 69).

The definition of faith as a constructive or constitutive act sits well with the structuralist psychology that shapes his investigative methodology and he spells this out in terms of an imaginary conversation with Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg (1995, 40-116).

Fowler devised six developmental stages, based on 359 interviews; the first three relate to childhood and adolescence (infancy is a pre-conscious stage) and correlate closely to Piaget's last three and Kohlberg's first three stages. Stages 4 and 5 are the adult stages describing a journey from group conformity to combative autonomous individuality to an acceptance or internalisation of previous conflict and an embrace of paradox; here the dependence on Erikson is total, though strongly present in the early stages too (1995, 119-213, 1986, 28-31).

### **(C) Critique**

After thirty years of dominance FD has come under critical scrutiny (Heywood 2008, 1, 27) – mostly addressed to his embrace of the modern paradigm.

Dependence upon developmental structuralism is challenged not simply because it is too cognitive (Hay and Nye 2006, 50, 76, Streib 2001, 144,) but because Piaget's and Kohlberg's conclusions themselves have been substantially challenged (Haight 2012, 3-26, Heywood 2008, 6-11). Writers argue that staged theory is a reflection of modernity which privileges structure over content and fails to offer a theological account of maturity; that it

fosters political conservatism by setting the goal as an inward, integrated privatised self, likely to be conformist towards power structures (Hull 1985, 210-213, Broughton, 1986, 100-108). Progress through stages has not been borne out in subsequent empirical research (Heywood 2008, 6, Clore and Fitzgerald 2002, 104). Fowler has modified his stance in respect of cognition, drawing on the work of Kegan, but not in respect of structuralism and the enlightenment paradigm in general (1986, 20-22, 2004, 12-13, 1992, 15-28).

Criticisms of the research methodology cover interviewer bias, ethnic, religious and gender bias (Philips 2011, 29, Slee 2004, 9, 98, Broughton 1986, 92, Nelson and Aleshire 1986, 182-184). More specifically, 'the theory guided the process of data collection' and Fowler does not claim to be able to generalise from the sample, which suggests circularity to the argument (Nelson and Aleshire 1986, 186). There is a lack of critical awareness about people's narratives, with the assumption that self-perception corresponds to reality. Though Fowler stresses the importance of the relational, structuralism focuses on creating/nurturing an inner 'sense of self' rather than relationship to community and world (Broughton, 1986, 92-93).

FD might be more accurately described as ego formation. Vocation is understood as making conscious our increasing commitment to partnership with God in community. Pastoral care is working with people and communities on the ego formation that will generate concomitant adult maturity (Fowler 1987, 53-98, 2000, 37-61). This is problematic not simply because it ignores other aspects of the human psyche (Ford-Grabowsky 1987) – an issue Fowler tries to address in conversation with psychoanalytical perspectives (1996, 19-53) – but more seriously because it lacks the moral and religious content that would earn the name FD. This derives from the defining faith as meaning-making. Faith is an innate human capacity prior to any religious narrative, which all humans share, what Lindbeck

described as 'experiential-expressivist' seeking universal authorisation from experience prior to narrative embodiment (1984, 21). Fowler requires this definition of faith as the ground for his structural developmental theory (Dykstra 1986, 51-52). It also reflects his uncritical use of Erikson; what impact would a theology of the cross have on ego formation? He never asks.

A small group of scholars are seeking to reframe the theory (Streib 2005, 3-6, Parkes 1986, 137-156, McLean 1986, 161-173). Similarly, educationalists whilst noting the basic weaknesses, still want to use faith development (Whipp 2013, 40-48, O'Murchu 2011, 109-118, Regan 2002, 42-70). This may be because it has a certain resonance with what we instinctively know about ourselves, (Dykstra and Parks 1986, 2) because of the value of articulating life journeys (Fowler 1995, 310) or because it gives teachers and ministers an accessible and progressive structure to work with.

Is Faith Development a descriptive psychology or a philosophy of life? Because of its non-empirical goal at stage 6 (Broughton 1986, 95-97) and the fact that it can slide so easily from description of individual development to cultural epochs (Fowler 1996, 160-178), I suspect the latter. There are alternative proposals (Savage 2011, 131-133, Heywood 2008, 20, Westerhoff 2000, 79-103) and perhaps it is time for a new paradigm (Heywood 2008, 29-31).

## Literature Review

### (A) Introduction

My research question – what fosters or inhibits growth to maturity in Christian community and what should be the priorities in formation and training for ministry – is the outcome of thirty years of Christian ministry, which has been driven by the conviction that this lies at the heart of the ministerial task. In this literature review, I want to explore this question starting with a description of current cultural context, specifically in terms of individualism, and how that has shaped popular Evangelical thinking on discipleship – the word that comes closest to maturity in Evangelical thinking.

With MacIntyre (2007, 204-225), I argue that it is impossible to entertain such a description outside a narrative of meaning. Therefore, I plan to explore whether and how New Testament texts configure a journey to maturity – allowing the narratives to speak on their own terms both on the substance and the process of the journey. I will approach this in two ways; using a conversation between psychology and Evangelical practice as a hermeneutic of suspicion about ways of reading NT texts and exploring whether virtue ethics can help draw out implicit commitments to goal and process in those texts as a hermeneutic of retrieval.

## **(B) Cultural context and evangelical practice**

Taylor charts the journey of the self in western consciousness from Plato's reshaping of the warrior ethic through reason ordering and ruling the appetites (1989, 111-126, also MacIntyre 2007, 121-145) towards a 'unified self' (120) which paved the way for Augustine's development of the idea of 'inwardness' which developed into what we have come to understand as subjectivity and the reflexive self (127-207). MacIntyre argues that until the enlightenment, morality had a clear teleology and it was possible to talk about meaningfully of a 'good man' (2007, 58-59). It was then possible to delineate the character traits, the 'virtues' that encourage such a life. Therefore the task of moral thinking was a practical one: helping people to form the habits of life which are fuelled by the central virtues that support the teleological vision.

The impact of the Reformation led to the hallowing of 'ordinary life' where the teleology of the good life is rooted in the everyday, rather than as a platform for building an exceptional or honourable life (Taylor 1989, 211-233). Modern individualism functioned with a teleology of self-improvement; Covey describes this through the contrast of 'personality and character ethics' (2004, 18-21). The exploration of the self as subject of its own story unfolds through the interplay of rationalism and romanticism (Gillespie 2009, 170-206, 255-287, Martin & Barresi 2006, 142-200, Gaarder 1996, 251-319, Grenz 1996, 57-98, Walker 1996, 47-74, Newbigin 1989, 14-38, Lyon 1994, 19-36, Bernstein 1983, 1-20). Taylor delineates this as a conflict between instrumental reason and romantic expressivism which is the essence of modernity (1989, 234-521). Otherwise expressed, this is the split between fact and value or in popular language the conflict of 'head and heart.' Taylor argues that present North Atlantic civilisation reflects the impact of the romantic reaction to

instrumental reason: “‘expressive’ individualism’ (2007, 473). This is not the triumph or egocentric hedonism as many commentators argue but rather embodies an ‘ethic of authenticity’ in which individuals carries the responsibility to create themselves as an original rather than an imitative work of art (1991, 13-29, 55-69).

If Taylor is right, then an ethic of ‘original creation’ in ‘ordinary life’ will have an impact on teleology in an individualised culture. I have explored a number of ‘popular’ books on discipleship (Platt 2011, Peterson 2010, Ortberg 2010, Bennett 2001, Croucher 1993, Hybels 1990, Wimber and Springer 1990, Tozer 1987, Watson 1981, Henrichsen 1988, Packer 1973 and Sanders 1962). None apart from Peterson (2010, 12) and to an extent Watson (1981, 251-252) have any explicit teleology. It is implicit in the books that are inspired by the Navigators (Henrichsen and Bennett) as a focus on saving people for heaven, but never articulated. More striking is the absence in all the writers (apart from Peterson 2010 and Packer 1973) of the most distinctive aspect of Christian teleology, its eschatological perspective. Increasingly as evangelical teaching changes through time and exposure to individualism, it becomes more confined to a vision of temporal transformation, often inspired by therapeutic psychology. Strangely, this appears to have more in common with Aristotle’s individual subject seeking happiness in this life than it does to the subtle interplay of the now and the not yet of the Kingdom of God (Wright 2010, 30-33, Hauerwas and Pinches 1997, 3-16). When Evangelicals and Charismatics combine this perspective of a therapeutic present with confidence in the power of God they become highly optimistic about the possibilities of transformation – be it physical, psychological or spiritual. The explicit teleology of these writers fit well with Taylor’s understanding of authenticity; it is implicit in Evangelical writing because it has been adopted without critical reflection.

Bauman describes the change in modernity over time through the images of solid and liquid. Solid modernity broke the mould of pre-modern society only to replace them with new moulds. They were 'disembedded' from the old order only to be 're-embedded' in the new. By contrast, liquid modernity melts the moulds. There are no new beds for 're-embeddedment' only: '...musical chairs of various sizes and styles as well as of changing numbers and positions' (2000, 33-34).<sup>2</sup>

Without the structures that give coherence and external bonds, the self becomes a reflexive project in which burden lies upon the individual to create themselves through their choices and decisions (Giddens 1991, 75, Beck 1992, 137). This gives everything in life a temporary and provisional nature where, for example, relationships are only sustained for as long as the 'investment' is productive for the individual's project of self-creation (Bauman 2003, 13-15, Giddens 1993, 58).

This combines with another aspect of late modern culture: the loss of a sense of history and a preference for life in the moment. Bauman writes of the experience of time as 'a collection of instants' (2007, 32); others note the lack of shared history and narrative in which character can be formed over time (MacIntyre 2007, 58-59, Covey 2004, 18-21, Sennett 1999, 21-22). Immediacy and optimism combined at Toronto in claims of psychological transformation; whether this persisted was not candidly explored. Yet, is character formation, when understood in individualistic terms, simply the product of an earlier modernity with its confidence in progress?

In the absence of teleology, Wright argues that modern Christians have two responses to the challenges of Christian behaviour. First, once we are saved by grace we

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<sup>2</sup>See Beck's 'zombie categories/institutions' (2002, 202-213)

should be in the position to obediently follow the requirements or rules of discipleship. Any hint of a journey of transformation appears suspect as an attempt to replace grace with 'justification by works' (2010, 27-30, 39-44). A number of authors offer a vision of total surrender in response to the greatness and generosity of God in Christ. Whether this be radical and unquestioning obedience (Watson 1981, 19-34, Sanders 1962, 101-107), or pursuit of the vision of God (Tozer, 1987, 49-57), rescuing a lost world (Henrichsen 1988, 147-156 and Bennett 2001, 11-32), inspiration through intimacy with God (Wimber 1990, 61-80) or radical adventure (Platt, 2011, 1-21), the implication is that the believer can and will respond to the biblical call; all it needs is for this call to be explained clearly and presented passionately; so much for the 'logos' of discipleship. The 'ethos' is provided by constant examples of radical obedience in the lives of Christians across the globe and the ages (Platt 2011, 53-55, 80-82, 175-181, 207-212); the 'pathos' is generated through (sung) worship in which 'surrender' plays a central role. But behind the rhetoric, the reality in people's lives is a constant sense of failing to live up to the call followed by passionate recommitment until the dissonance becomes too much.

Second, Wright speaks of romantic and existentialist drivers which inspire a quest for authenticity in terms of the spontaneous and 'natural' choosing of the inner self (2010, 44-51). This fits comfortably with the 'expressivist' culture described by Taylor (2007, 473-504 and 1991, 13-23 and MacIntyre's 'emotivism' (2007, 23-34). Not only is this consonant with the prevailing culture, for some evangelicals it represents a reaction against the rule-based legalism which is felt to be inauthentic not just in its lack of transformational power but also in terms of the small church-based world that is represented by many of the books previously referenced. So Hybels and Ortberg focus on expressing an authentic self, in reaction to the lack of integrity in rule-based evangelicalism in terms of both the consistency



of life and the breadth of the life world addressed. Hybels focuses on issues like work, gender and marriage and wealth and in particular 'authentic relationships' (1990, 51-65). Ortberg explores finding one's true self as created by God (2010, 11-32). The broad focus on the goodness of creation is not matched by an attention to the rest of the Christian narrative. So Ortberg is naively optimistic about the ease with which we can find our true selves and Hybels reads like a piece of popular psychological self-help. The use of Scripture is piecemeal and rarely, if ever, grounded in a fuller narrative.

It is not hard to see how an individualised culture gives birth to these two types of instantaneous discipleship. They are 'instantaneous' in different ways; the former in the sense that all that is needed for transformation is already present in the believer, the latter in terms of the experience of transformation in psycho-spiritual terms. They bear witness to both the rationalising and expressivist tendencies of late modern culture and share disconnection from any sense of history and narrative.

Unnervingly very few of these books demonstrate any awareness of or response to cultural specificity. There are a number of authors who rely on reiterating Scripture or doctrine with the assumption that reflecting on the Scriptures is enough to foster transformation (Platt, 2011, Bennett 2001, Wimber and Springer, 1990 Henrichsen 1988, Tozer 1987, Watson, 1981, and Sanders 1962). Ortberg (2010) and Hybels (1990) seem more in tune with contemporary expressive culture but do not really offer any constructive critique. Peterson, alone, seems aware both of the need to critique and to contextualise (2010, 1-6).

Taylor recognises the danger of abandoning community and using relationships as ends in our personal project but considers that it is possible to 'retrieve' a sense of self-transcendence as a means of addressing the excesses of individualism and shaping

authenticity as a meaningful and responsible ethic (1991, 31-108); others are less sanguine. Jones considers that community is a nostalgic idea for under thirties (2008, 2) and Bauman comments that community is created by individual choice and only sustained where there is individual satisfaction (2000, 169-171). Ten of twelve books that I surveyed showed no interest in the role of community in the process of formation. There is a role for 'fellowship' but this is related solely to help required to enable an individual to fulfil the requirements of discipleship – this resonates with instrumental individualism (Taylor 2007, 473). Willow Creek research demonstrated that as Christians in their network 'matured' they grew out of the need for church and some think of leaving. The action proposed from the survey is to place the responsibility for 'their' growth more intentionally in their hands – unsurprising in a culture which sees human personhood as an individual project (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007, 38-56).

The two exceptions are Watson and Peterson. Watson has a strong and vital commitment to the church as community, integral to his vision and practice at St Michael's in York in the 70s (1983, 35-65, 114-126). The experiments in community, though fruitful in York and influential elsewhere, did not outlast his ministry.

Peterson has an even stronger vision of the role of community in formation arising from his striking understanding of the *telos* of the church: 'to be a colony of heaven in the country of death' (2010, 12). His vision takes us further than Watson in that it defines a specific identity within the context of life in the world; Watson's book gives a vision of a much more separate community – something which evangelicalism has always struggled with. Peterson's vision is of long-term communal formation but he is not sanguine about the contemporary church's commitment to this (2010, 7).

## **(C) Evangelical practice and psychology**

### **(i) Setting the scene**

In thirty years of ministry promoting communal maturity, I have also encountered a darker side of Charismatic church life; unconsciously manipulative practices in which people develop certain kinds of learnt behaviours as marks of spiritual openness or maturity; psychological naivety about the way people change resulting in either disappointment over the lack of instantaneous change or condemnation for the same; abusive and controlling leadership where minority voices are silenced, where individuals have nowhere to take their questions and their pain and where congregations are encouraged to remain in childlike dependency to their leaders; assumptions about unmediated knowledge of God played out in dictatorial statements about what 'God is saying' (Howard 1996, 125-146, Percy 1996, 20-39). None of these promote personal or corporate maturity, yet it seems perfectly possible to grow churches numerically without paying attention to the kind of ministry that challenges such patterns and fosters growth in character and maturity.

One thing unites the problems I have highlighted: inattention to the human dimension of the spiritual life – in the ebbs and flows of ordinary life, the psychological aspects of the process of healthy growth, the sociological realities of group relationships, the physiological realities of language and communication. This points to a theological problem perhaps related to Docetism or perhaps more so to a kind of 'Spiritism' that does not comprehend the uniqueness of relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. Smail

proposed this<sup>3</sup> when he criticised his earlier rendering of Edward Irving's doctrine of the Spirit (Smail 1975, 76). Typically in Charismatic circles Jesus' words in John 14.12 are interpreted as a promise of unmediated access to the power of God through the Spirit. But in the wider context of John's gospel, this verse is not proposing a simple replacing of Jesus with the Spirit in the life of the believer but rather a continuation of the ministry of Jesus by the Spirit in and through the disciples. Charismatic theology needs to develop a more nuanced approach to the human dimension of its spirituality. Here, an appropriate exploration of psychology and sociology may have much to contribute which, whilst maintaining commitment to taking seriously a language of encounter and experience of God, gives genuine room to the reality, frailty and provisionality of human experience.

Evangelical writers are silent about the process of change. Response is defined in terms of total self-giving: commitment (Bennett 2001, 14-15), sacrifice (Henrichsen 1988, 21-40), uncompromising obedience based on gratitude (Sanders 1962, 101-107) or surrender (Tozer 1987, 91-99). Wimber does speak of 'habits of righteousness' but nowhere explains how these are formed (Wimber and Springer, 1990, 11). However, I am confident the foundation for this transformation in his mind lies in the section on seeking the Father; emotional engagement triggers transformation (Wimber and Springer 1990, 61-80). This is articulated in other writings within the charismatic tradition; 'passionate love is the key to power' (Deere, 1993, 201-202). When the writers entertain some concept of process it tends to be a cognitive one – understanding leads to new behaviour (Bennett 2001, 33-43). Ortberg gives a twist of 'authenticity' to the cognitive journey – 'let your desires lead you to

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<sup>3</sup> In conversation with the author at Ridley Hall, Cambridge (1996)

God' (2010, 79-88). Packer, alone, gives a refreshingly honest estimation of the central role of struggle in the process of transformation (1973, 273-283).

## **(ii) Psychology – introduction**

Therefore I am interested first in what psychologists says about the process of maturation though this cannot be in isolation from the substance of maturity. Second is the question as to whether and how they relate the issue of maturity to (formative) relationships in general and more specifically to participation in non-familial community life. Thirdly, I will want to assess any interdisciplinary approaches.

There is debate within Christian tradition about the appropriateness of dialogue with psychology. Typically these concerns have to do with reductionism, humanistic worldview and what constitutes healing and health (Johnson, E. L. (ed.) 2010, 22-31; Watts, F., Nye, R., and Savage, S. 2002, 267-284; Watts, F. 2002, 5-6). These concerns aside, the authors note a long history of creative dialogue between psychology and theology, which has had a significant impact on Christian thought and practice. Within contemporary Evangelical thinking, Johnson notes five approaches; the first two separate theology and psychology and the others integrate (2010, 31-38).

The first model claims to be 'biblical' in a way that ignores hermeneutical dialogue, sheltering behind unexamined assumptions about counselling and Scripture as in Adams' approach which overlays a cognitive behavioural approach with uncontextualised Scriptural references (1970, 41-64). The second model must lead to the same unexamined position as it admits no dialogue between the two and reserves psychology for the academy and the research establishment.

In both popular and academic circles, the integrative approach is the most common – and this is the path that is taken by Watts et al. (2002) and Watts (2002) – considering that both discourses are addressing ‘in different ways, the nature of human beings, how they develop, what has gone wrong with them and how they can overcome what has gone wrong’ (Johnson 2010, 34-35). For this reason it is fruitful to engage in some level of critical dialogue. Watts notes there are different ways in which this dialogue can be positioned and is critical of Milbank (1990) and Hunsinger (1995) at exactly the point I want to follow them in recognising hierarchy between discourses (2002, 7-8). With this caveat, I favour the integrative approach, because it makes sense philosophically, epistemologically and experientially. This is also true of position five which is an extension of the integrative approach in a practical and experiential direction and has interesting implications for my study because of its focus on spiritual formation; Evangelicals have been involved in such integrative work (Narramore 1984, 15-77 and Crabb 1977, 19-56). Position four is new to me; but it seems to offer a possible approach to the dialogue and one which might be fruitful for this study. However, they offer Anderson as one of their examples who appears to me a representative of position one: another cognitive behavioural approach with biblical veneer (Anderson et al. 2000, 36-111, 384-411). Payne (1992 & 1990) and Crabb in his later work (2002 & 1999) come closer to a psychology shaped by Christian theology – but still there is the need of a critique of individualist, health-focused problem-solving as a definition of pastoral care. Interestingly both Crabb (1999, 3-58) and Payne (1990, 40-45) in their deeper exploration of Christian narrative and symbol are drawn towards the subject of community.

### **(iii) Psychodynamic approaches**

Over the years in ministry, I have found that in-depth pastoral care with individuals almost inevitably leads to working on formative – usually parental – relationships. My observation has been that the impact of past relationships deeply affects the way in which people perceive and experience God and the way in which they relate to others in community. Rizzuto explores the God-image in human beings from an object relations perspective and offers a number of illustrative case studies (1979, 54-91, 93-173). This presents an integrative challenge in terms relating what Rizzuto conceptualises as ‘God representation’ (87-91) and God as objective referent. Hall et al. note that her work has spawned considerable interest in correlating spiritual maturity with object relations theory (1998, 303-313). They are amongst a number who have explored this hypothesis empirically – a genuine attempt to explore aspects of maturity, albeit with an emphasis on psychological well-being (Hall et al. 2002, 341-357).

Shults and Sandage (2006, 13-36) are interested in growth, wholeness and maturity; they have an interdisciplinary approach which seeks to maintain the distinctiveness of the two disciplines whilst exploring interpenetration and dialogue. They illustrate this with a psychological metaphor: ‘healthy relationships are well differentiated’ (23). This seems analogous to Hunsinger’s theological approach (1995, 61-104).

### **(iv) Developmental Approaches**

Developmental psychology focuses mainly upon the development of children from birth to adolescence with some interest in issues around ageing (Atkinson et al. 1990), apart

from Erikson who extended the idea of psycho-social developmental stages (though not in a rigorously empirical and experimental way) into adulthood (1995, 222-243), since the main focus of his book is on children (19-221). Fowler (1981, 41-88) adopted the idea of development, primarily from Piaget and Kohlberg, though drawing extensively on Erikson in proposing his theory of faith development. It is not immediately obvious why the concept of development can be transferred so smoothly from empirical study of children to a hypothesis about adults. Culliford has serious methodological criticisms of the circularity of Fowler's argument and considers the results scientifically flawed (2011, 99-100). Nevertheless, with some caveats about Fowler's perspectives on childhood (due one suspects to his overdependence on Piaget and Kohlberg) Culliford claims that, as a descriptive explanatory model, Fowler's work is 'extremely useful' (99). Though he notes that the 'stages' are not intended to be construed as achievements, he offers a model of spiritual growth akin to Fowler's in which we 'progress' from the group identity of stage 3 towards the separation of individual identity in stage 4 and on to a vision of integration shaped after his own Buddhist views of detachment. Lyall is taken with Fowler's (1996) development of stages 3-5 of his model to describe three eras of faith corresponding to pre-modern, modern and postmodern and with that three spiritual 'tempers' broadly corresponding to evangelical, liberal and a third postmodern and ill-defined. This is drifting a long way from attempts to describe growth and maturity into broad, speculative generalisations, which appear neat but ultimately unproductive in proposing a landscape of maturity (2001, 111-130).

Jacobs (1980, 1-46) follows a broadly developmental approach. He claims to be aware of the corporate nature of the New Testament language about maturity, but then proceeds to develop an argument that is based firmly in individual psychology. Therefore we



get the same movement away from belonging to individuality. He speaks about being drawn back at a later stage to grasp the need for others, but it is not a strong theme. His integrative approach leads him to reframe Christian doctrines in psychological terms – after the manner of Tillich – and to the detriment of both (18-19, 71-74). Jacobs re-worked this book five years later. In it he pays greater attention to psychoanalysis and is critical of what he considers to have been an overly linear developmental approach in his previous book (1993, v, 59-164).

Savage and Boyd-MacMillan express similar unease to my own. They caution against simplistic attachment of stages to individuals, groups or churches (2007, 198-202). In practice, this is precisely how faith development theory is used – often to explain a movement away from community as a person at ‘level 4’ struggles with a church at ‘level 3’. (Jamieson 2002, 108-125). It would be interesting to subject faith development theorising to an object relations critique. How far is the flight from community indicative of problems in making healthy relationships in which difference cannot simply be tolerated but embraced (Savage and Boyd-MacMillan, 2007, 203-205)?

#### **(v) Social psychological approaches**

Over the last twenty years, social science has paid increasing attention to the subject of spirituality, though this has focused, both theoretically and empirically, on well-being rather than maturity (Majerus and Sandage 2010). More recently, they note a number of studies that have used a variety of social science indexes to assess spiritual maturity. They themselves have employed Differentiation of Self, which uses the twin polarities of ‘emotional fusion’ and ‘emotional cut off’ as ways of exploring the ability to make mature

relationship (41-51). Their approach pays greater attention to a person's place in community, though the focus of this still seems to be upon the healthy functioning of an individual. By contrast, Bion (2011, 11-26) and Read (1978, 11-69) focus upon the function of individuals within groups, though clearly from a psychoanalytical perspective.

There are other social psychological concepts that might be helpful in understanding the processes of maturity in community – for example, social identity theory, conformity, stereotyping and minority influence (Hogg and Vaughan 2008, 54-55, 125-128, 236-237, 259-263, Savage and Macmillan 2007, 3-29).

#### **(vi) Maturity and humanistic psychology**

Few of these approaches give much space to the definition of maturity. Rather their focus is largely upon process, perhaps assuming certain 'givens' about the nature of maturity? The one discipline where space is taken to define maturity is within humanistic psychology. Whether this be self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970, 149-180), intimacy (Berne, 1964, 18, 55, 151-152), individuation (Palmer 1997, 142-165, Franz 1979, 158-229) congruence and organismic valuing (Rogers, 1961, 183-196) or universalising faith (Fowler, 1981, 199-213) they are fundamentally individualistic concepts. This will need critique from the perspective of Christian narrative. Moreover, there is a question in my mind about how helpful these perspectives will be for interpreting the maturity potential of community life. A brief database search for 'Christian community' and 'maturity' yielded next to nothing – indicating a gap in the literature. If this is the case, what models for understanding and interpreting community might I use?

It will be important to explore the work of those who have lived in and theologised about community – Bonhoeffer (1954), Vanier (1989), Nouwen (1980, 1981, 2001) and Williams (2007). Vanier has spent his whole life in community with people with disability and Nouwen laid down his busy, driven academic life to do the same. Bonhoeffer spent time in the Bethel Community with those suffering with epilepsy in 1933, prior to writing *‘Life Together’*. Perhaps western individualism needs to be challenged with a different experience of life in order to re-engage with community as a context for maturity.<sup>4</sup>

The ‘New Monastic Movement’ marks a renewed interest in the church as community in response to perceived shortcomings of an individualised society (Dickau 2011, Duckworth and Duckworth 2011, Wilson 2010), recapturing ancient communal practices (Reed 2013, Pohl 2012 and 1999, Cray et al, 2010), drawing on principles of community organisation in the pursuit of justice (Jacobsen 2001) or simply taking a fresh look at doing church as formational community (Greenwood 2013, Alexander 2012). In some cases the focus is mission, in others justice, still others hospitality; but there is evidence of attention given to growing of character in communal context (Greenwood 2013, 95-131, Wilson 2010, 46-56). Most of these books are written at a popular level, but they provide a starting point for thinking theologically about communal maturity in practice.

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<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Roy McCloughry for this insight

## **(D) Biblical perspectives and virtue ethics**

### **(i) Biblical ethics – content and process**

#### **(a) Content**

In order to understand the contribution of the biblical narrative to the subject of maturity it is necessary to have some idea of how both the content and process of biblical ethics function in the context of formation.<sup>5</sup>

‘The defining feature of NT ethics is its orientation to an event, namely, the event of Jesus... and to the community that resulted’ (Keck 1996, 10). This eschatological event is the central reality that runs through all the NT writing and is both ground and goal for its theological articulation of transformation in the image of Christ (Thompson 2006, 24-27, 31-60, Hays 1994, 16-185). This means that even when writers draw on contemporary sources these are redrawn in the light of the Lordship of Christ (Thompson 2011, 189-194).

Since Kasemann’s critique of Bultmann’s existential individualism, it has become axiomatic amongst biblical scholars that New Testament ethics are communal (Thompson, 2011, 43-62, Dunson 2010, 63-70). There has been an inevitable reaction to this arguing for the formation of individuality in Mediterranean culture (Downing 2000, 52). However the fact that this individualism is more characteristic of pagan sources, makes the communal ethic of Paul more striking (Dunson 2010, 70-72, Meeks 1993, 23-25, Meeks 1987, 40-64). Nevertheless it is also argued that *‘both Judaism and Paul take full account of the individual*

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<sup>5</sup> The scale of this piece requires a narrowing of focus – in this case to New Testament, mainly Pauline texts.

*in the group*' (Sanders 1977, 547) and that post-exilic Judaism evidences greater focus on the individual (Dunson 2010, 73). However, this is still firmly placed within the communal history and identity of Israel (Thompson 2011, 19-41, Meeks 1987, 91-93).

Because of this communal context, moral formation is grounded in conversion as a 'social act' which requires socialisation and resocialisation into a new community (Meeks 1993, 26-32). This community relativises existing family relationships (Barton 1994, 96-107, 121-124, 155-178, 215-219) and claims for itself the language of familial love (Thompson 2011, 56-59, Meeks 1983, 85-88). There are clear boundaries around the community – which is articulated theologically with insider/outsider language (Meeks 1983, 95, cf. 1 Thessalonians 1.9, Philippians 3.18f). Because of the centrality of community, communal and relational virtues play a significant role in NT ethics (Thompson 2011, 57-58, Hay 1994, 33).

The ethic of the NT is eschatological – even apocalyptic. Life in the world is envisaged as a spiritual conflict and there is a tension at the heart of how one lives in, for and over against the 'world' (Hays 1996, 19-27, Meeks 1993, 52-65, 111-129, 174-188); for example the adoption of the 'household' as a natural missional context in conflict with the levelling work of the Spirit in terms of charisms (Meeks 1983, 77, 191; cf. 1 Corinthians 12).

It is a commonplace to assert that the NT works with the same account of virtues and vices as the surrounding culture apart from the striking exception of humility which is bound up with the cruciform shape of NT ethics (Meeks 1993, 66-68, 85-88). Meeks does observe a greater reference to sexual misdeeds (68) and this, Thompson argues, reflects the Jewish critique of pagan idolatry and sexual immorality (2011, 94-99).

Making due allowance for variation across the NT witness, Hays summarises the substance of its ethic in terms of 'community, cross and new creation' (1996, 193-200).

## (b) Process

Analysis of the processes of formation generates natural links with psychology. Meeks (1983) offers a social-scientific description of formational processes which is recognised as fundamental to contextualising our understanding of the NT (Keck 1996, 3-10). However, it is not simply sociological processes that we are studying but the social impact of ideas (Stark 1996, 86). Baker proposes a combination social scientific analysis and narrative approaches as way of integrating such understandings of formation (2011, 235).

Keck explores the rhetoric of formation in terms of the 'deed' and the 'doer'. The deed is 'grounded' in the 'Christ-event' both in terms of its warrant and its *telos*. In contrast to Aristotle, this *telos* is not anthropocentric but rather focused on the completion of God's activity in Christ – which includes both people in relationship and the restoration of creation (1996, 10-12). For Paul, this eschatological vision is the basis for a theological transformational strategy (Thompson 2006, 31-60) which is based upon community formation and distinctiveness of character (Thompson 2011, 43-109) – a 'life worthy of God', revolving around reflecting God's character and discerning his will (Meeks 1993, 150-173).

Incorporation into Christ is understood as a gift of grace and this raises questions about the undermining of moral demand (Romans 6.1, Galatians 5.13). The fundamental warrants for obedience are positive – union with Christ, liberation from sin and gift of the Spirit (Hay 1994, 36-39) but at the same time there are sanctions against immoral behaviour which are rooted in the judgement of God (Keck 1996, 12-14, Hays, 1994, 39-41).

There is wide recognition of the impact of both Jewish and Hellenistic culture on the shape of the moral life of Christian communities, but disagreement in the way in which that

relationship is configured (Thompson 2011, 1-18, Hay 1996, 41, Dunson 2010, 68-75, Meeks 1987, 40-123). Thompson, in particular, challenges the way in which twentieth century Christian ethics tend to put law in opposition to the Spirit, freedom and love and argues that Paul's ethic shows much more affinity with Jewish sources with a strong place for the role of the law in moral formation and ruling the passions (2011, 10-15, 111-156). Hays argues that moral discernment in Paul is led more by the twin themes of 'unity of the community and the imitation of Christ' (1994, 41). Empowerment for the moral life comes from the Spirit's work in the community but that this does not exclude human action and response which is summed up by Paul as the 'obedience of faith' (Romans 1.5 – 1994, 43-45). Paul has a clear vision and strategy for formation based on an eschatological vision of moral transformation (Thompson 2011, 1-18, 2005, 7-60, e.g. Philippians 2.15-16).

**(ii) Virtue ethics – a hermeneutic of retrieval?**

When Evangelicals read the NT in the manner of a *'first naiveté'*, they tend to generate strong alternative communities that have a genuine mutual life over against the world. They are keen to invite people into this community but there is a powerful disconnect with life in the world. This compartmentalisation has led to dissatisfaction with the dissonance between 'church life' and the 'rest of life' often leading to a departure from church or at the very least an uneasy truce between different aspects of life (Bretherton and Rook 2010, 1-2, Greene and Cotterell, 2006, 13-24). To grow to maturity requires movement towards integrity of life – in which beliefs and convictions are expressed in holistic ways – this I take to be, for example, the organising principle of the Letter of James, and a mark of biblical wisdom from the Old Testament to the ministry of Jesus and beyond.

My question is whether a critical correlation with virtue ethics might facilitate a hermeneutic of retrieval of a biblical narrative about maturity which would create a '*second naiveté*' fusion of horizons with contemporary culture. Virtue ethics offers a way out of the fragmented ethical discourse of modern western morality and Nietzsche's deconstruction of the rational moral subject and offers once again a narrative or tradition in which the self can have a history and the formation of character have the time that it needs over against the atomised individualism of contemporary culture (MacIntyre 2007, 1-22, 109-120, 204-225).

This correlation has proved attractive to a number of writers. Disbrey finds virtue ethics to be a way out from the impasse of deontological and consequentialist approaches but her presentation of Christian virtue ethics owes more to situation ethics and the ethics of authenticity than it does to biblical hermeneutics (2007, 94-112). Kotva offers a fuller attempt at integrating Scripture with virtue ethics but does not address the impact of grace and eschatology either on virtue thinking or critiques of self-centredness and individualism (1996, 103-166). Other writers express caution about the almost complete absence of the language of Aristotelian ethics in the New Testament, which indicates rooting in a different tradition (Keck 1996, 9).

Wright argues that the New Testament retains the shape of Aristotelian teleology but that the core virtues are reformed to foster a new vision of the goal of human life. Instead of the self-focus of Aristotle's '*hero*' with the language of *Eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing), the NT focuses on the coming and pursuit of the Kingdom of God, also articulated as priesthood and kingship, glory, knowledge of God and the restored image of God. With this new vision comes a re-articulation of the core virtues from courage, self-restraint, wisdom and justice to love, kindness, forgiveness and especially humility. This



said, the NT has the same commitment to the process of formation for the good life based upon the cultivation of virtuous habits of life (2010, 27-33).

Wright places the renewal of the mind in the transformed Aristotelian context of '*Virtue Reborn*' and gives a much more thorough exposition of the process. The NT relates the call to a new life to the '*telos*' of the new heaven and new earth (Kingdom of God) anticipated in the resurrection and this is presented as a gradual process of transformation in which the virtues appropriate to this new life are formed through the interplay of grace and human response – foundational teaching of which most churches are desperately in need (2010, 117-155). Even so, he puts too much weight on cognitive processes and, in an attempt to challenge the tendencies towards passivity in much Evangelical writing moves a little too far in the direction of unaided human struggle. This is rooted in the lack of attention that given to the work of the Spirit. By contrast Peterson draws the work of the Holy Spirit more firmly into his account of the renewal of the mind (2010, 187-250) and in the process pays attention to chapters in Ephesians (4.17-6.9) that are rarely explored in Evangelical and Charismatic teaching.

Hauerwas and Pinches argue that Aristotle understands 'happiness' as a lifetime's goal because the virtuous journey needs a history of conscious and repeated virtuous acts. Aristotle is vague about the list of virtues, so it is open to us to shape our own picture – but we need to be reflective about what we mean by them (1997, 3-30). At root, Aristotle's is a conflictual ethic rooted in the heroic warrior culture (61-66) and expressing itself in courage, anger, pride, honour and vengeance (92-100). This they contrast with the Christian virtues of love and forgiveness in a vision whose goal is peace (64-69, 100-109). They note that Aristotle has elements of a communal vision since friendship is the place where virtue is formed; but in relationships of equality and likeness and one where you protect your friend

from the vicissitudes of your life. By contrast, Christian virtue does not involve suffering alone, but mutual support in weakness in relationships of difference (31-51, 70-88). The Aristotelian ethic is fundamentally self-referencing and individualistic – ‘self-sufficiency to guard against outrageous fortune’ (16, Keck 1996, 12). A Christian ethic is at once more humble and secure – a sharing of vulnerability and pain (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997, 38-51). Self-sufficiency is recalibrated through ‘reliance on God, Christ and the Holy Spirit’ (Malherbe 1986, 15). Hauerwas and Pinches conclude that ‘Greek accounts of the virtues are there to be *used* by Christians, not *built upon*’ through ‘carefully distinguish[ing] the true God from the gods of this world (1997, 67-68).<sup>6</sup>

Virtue ethics offer a way of talking about formation that roots it in narrative, community and history. At the same time, Aristotle’s ethic – combative, individualist, self-sufficient, homogeneous – has powerful points of contact with contemporary culture. Careful use should make it possible to allow a biblical narrative ethic to speak to points of contact and difference in a hermeneutic relationship. At the same time, it is important to remember other sources of influence on the formative strategies of the New Testament writers – namely the Old Testament, intertestamental writings and contemporary Judaism (Thompson 2011, 19-41, 111-156).

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<sup>6</sup> There is a parallel here with Frei’s ‘ad hoc’ correlation. (1992, 85)

## Conclusion

The gift of PT to the church is the conviction, over against applied methodology, to work unapologetically from experience. This is vital in an era where the church not only no longer controls the questions but does not necessarily know what they are.

To work from experience requires the art of correlation. This has been shaped in PT by a liberal paradigm that sacrifices Christian distinctives to a particular understanding about holding its place in the public square. Even under the impact of postmodernity this way of configuring public theology is remarkably persistent. Along with the view of the self-constructing individual and the therapeutic focus of ministry, this sums up PT's debt to modernity. Fowler's work epitomises these commitments.

The postmodern turn in PT has superficially challenged individualism and totalising perspectives. But it is striking to see how little impact either biblical hermeneutics or the post-liberal commitment to narrativity has had on PT; old liberal commitments are surprisingly persistent even amongst some radical attention to otherness. Perhaps this is why Fowler's influence persists in theological education?

There is a place for a hermeneutically-aware Evangelical PT, which responds to contemporary struggles with the biblical narrative, yet offers a way into practice-based Scriptural imagination – inspired by biblical scholars like Brueggemann and Wright. This is the question I hope to address in more depth in year two.

My research has shown just how much Evangelicalism has been formed by instrumental and expressive individualism, but the assumption that Scripture can be read solely with a 'first naiveté' means that biblical convictions can easily be subsumed by culture. Certain psychologies – psychodynamic and social – can offer a hermeneutic of

suspicion to concrete readings of Scripture, revealing in turn the complexities of human nature and communal life. This is not true of developmental and humanistic psychologies which are rooted in the modernist paradigm.

This study has drawn attention to the formational strategies of Pauline Epistles and it would repay further study to explore this in other biblical books. Attention to biblical visions of maturity – which are communal and eschatological – will bring into focus the relationship of the personal and communal and the reality of the formational journey.

Because virtue ethics has its roots in a kind of individualism and yet recognises the importance of community and narrative, it could operate as a hermeneutic of retrieval in a postmodern culture, providing a way to connect to biblical formation with its own distinctive teleology – the eschatology of the kingdom, the gift of grace, the goal of peace, the virtue of humility and the transforming power of the Spirit. But there is need for further work on the appropriateness of this correlation.

There is evidence of a turn to communal formation in the New Monastic Movement. This is not strongly articulated theologically, nor is it particularly driven by Evangelicals and Charismatics and seems most strongly represented in the USA. How far is our culture longing for a fresh account and experience of what it is to be persons in relationship and what contribution might churches make? (Jones 2008, 1-17)? I hope to return to this in stage 2 of the DPT.

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## **Appendix 29 – 09 20969: Presentation and publication of research – DPT, Year 2**

### **Releasing the Voice of the Other: Towards an Evangelical Methodology for Attending to Scripture in Practical Theology and Congregational Practice<sup>1</sup>**

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This article describes practical theology (PT) and Evangelical practice of engaging with Scripture, challenging PT's tendency to objectify Scripture and 'use' it or not as a resource amongst others and Evangelical tendency to objectify the reader under Scriptural subjectivity – which in practice means the subjectivity of the recognised interpreter; this raises three familiar but intractable problems. To respond to these, a practice of communal Scriptural reading ('Dwelling in the Word') is proposed, which privileges the subjectivity of the other – whether that means fellow listeners or the text itself. The practice is then articulated philosophically and psychologically in terms of attentiveness to the other – authoritative listening does not mean one person dominating another. Finally, it articulates the authority of Scripture without surrendering to the unitary objectivism of modernity, arguing that Scripture can still be authoritative whilst recognising its mediated, multi-vocal and contested nature.

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been prepared with the intention of submission to Practical Theology and therefore conforms to its conventions, excepting double spacing.

Keywords: Spiritual Practice, 'Dwelling in the Word', Inter-subjectivity, Hermeneutics, Authority of Scripture, Evangelical

### **Introduction: the scope and approach of this article**

'The Bible is essential to Christianity' but 'pastoral theologians seem to have almost completely avoided considering the Bible' (Pattison, 1988:106). This paradox, reiterated by Ballard (2012:163), encapsulates the fissure at the heart of PT over its sixty year existence. A recent survey of the field in PT has come to the same conclusion arguing that 'the practical theology academy, for the most part is content to sit loose to an engagement with Scripture' (Cartledge, 2013:281). This article proposes a persuasive and serviceable methodology for engaging with Scripture in practice which does justice both to the contextualised nature of practice and to the unique voice(s) of the Scriptural narrative. My own context lies at the boundary of parish ministry and ministerial training; my focus is both on how Christian communities read Scripture for everyday life and how ministers might be trained to lead churches that attend to Scripture in ways that are fruitful for their life in the world.

Theoretical articulation will be grounded in critical dialogue with lived experience: a conscious acknowledgement of the strengths of a PT approach. Second the specific context for this article is Evangelical practice; I will attend both to Evangelical challenges to PT methodology and vice versa.

(i) *Methodology*

For PT, the ambivalence towards Scripture relates both to uncertainty about its authoritative status and confusion about ways of interpretation in the light of both the history of biblical criticism and the ever-widening dialogue with other academic disciplines. This article takes the approach of grounding theoretical questions in their embodiment both in ministerial and church practice, beginning with a description of experience which will highlight problems and difficulties underlying present practice.

Next it will address an aspect which is typically omitted from considerations of the use of Scripture in PT, namely what communal practices might sustain a healthy approach to attentiveness. Without this step, proposals will fail to address the distance between academic paradigms and everyday usage and will be flawed in their transformative power both for congregational life and ministerial development. This approach is not simply experience to theology; the practice that will be proposed is 'theory-laden', which is precisely the point. Good practice must be theologically coherent and realistically embodied. It should provide a context in which normative proposals are birthed through contested dialogue between experience and theory.

The last two sections will explore the philosophical and theological assumptions that are embodied in the proposed practice. The third section offers a philosophical and psychological grounding which explains how this communal practice can overcome the collapsing of text and context from both directions addressing lack of attention to the unique voice(s) of Scripture and also the danger of controlling interpretations in community life; this is summed up in the choice of the word, 'attending'.

The final section offers a direction for theological grounding of the practice. It explains how it might resolve the impasse of Subject/Object dualism in the reading of Scripture and offers a way in which the authority of Scripture may be understood and experienced that does justice to the mediated nature of human knowing and without assuming that authority has to be either univocal or oppressive.

(ii) *Evangelicalism*

This article also aims to make a contribution towards the sparse Evangelical participation in PT (Bennett, 2012:475). What is meant by 'Evangelical'? A broadly accepted view proposes four central characteristics; conversion and assurance of salvation, preaching the gospel, the authority of the Bible and the centrality of the Cross. Though open to debate, these marks, however nuanced, remain the bedrock of Evangelical identity (Bebbington, 1989:1-34, 249-270).

Evangelicals do not see Scripture, Tradition and Reason as three distinct ways of knowing that interrelate on a level playing field. Tradition is the Church's ongoing attempt to interpret Scripture and reason is the capacity we use within that tradition (embodied within our language and culture) to articulate that interpretation (Newbigin 1989:53). Similarly, experience or practice would not be a fourth category of knowing, but rather the way in which this reception and interpretation is embodied through contested dialogical practice. Rather than four independent languages vying for influence, what Evangelicals seek is a description and a practice for the way in which Scriptural engagement will not simply make a contribution to the debate but rather be world-forming through embodied practice.

To develop an Evangelical methodology for our contemporary context requires that the paradox identified at the beginning of this article be addressed; without this Evangelicals will remain unconvinced by the seriousness with which PT engages with Scripture or persuaded by its methods. Evangelicals in turn need to do justice to the challenges within PT that lead to ambivalence in respect of Scripture; these are broadly epistemological, hermeneutic and ethical.

At present, Evangelicals favour applied theology approaches. The problem with this unidirectional method is that it generates idealised solutions which are unable to attend to the subtle nuances of contextual practice. Students nurtured with this approach do not take easily to theological reflection and their approach to Scripture in practice tends to be illustrative, proof-texting or simply absent. This does not prepare them well for the practice of ministry where theological reflection on practice is vital for cultural and contextual engagement. There is a creative dialogue to be had between PT and Evangelical practice, not least with Bennett's recent book (2013).

#### **(A) Description – the present state of research and questions raised**

##### *(i) The academy – what is Scripture?*

Pattison was first to raise questions about the use of the Bible in PT, arguing that the various approaches used the Bible for authorising decisions made on other grounds – falsifying both contemporary narratives and biblical text. Because the question of authority remained unaddressed, there was no rationale for using Scripture rather than any other helpful or inspiring source (1988:114-129). As confirmation of this critique, a recent

textbook offers no methodology for the use of the Bible in pastoral theology and practice or even the recognition that this might be an issue (Whipp, 2013).

There are shared philosophical assumptions in the PT academy that explains this silence; the journey away from the idea of Scripture as revelation – seen as untenable since Kant (Bennett, 2013:11-12, 35); or the critique of ‘biblicism’: the ‘scripture principle’ that justifies practice from the Bible even when we have not made the case for its authority. These views take as the starting-point liberal biblical critical scholarship, which is seen to have fatally undermined confidence in the authority of Scripture, revealing it as a contradictory, morally flawed, culturally distant and multi-voiced human document (Pattison, 1988:108-129).

In the intervening years, there have been a few who have taken up Pattison’s challenge (Ballard, 2011; 2012; Ballard and Holmes, 2006). Recently, there is evidence of growing interest in this question amongst practical theologians in Britain. A ‘Bible and Practical Theology Group’ was formed at BIAPT in 2011 leading to a Symposium in May 2012, referenced in Bennett’s recent book on this subject: ‘It felt to us that things were moving, that the ‘Bible’ was no longer the elephant in the room of practical theology’ (2013:7). For the work of this group, a paper was written offering a wide-ranging critique of the use of the Bible in PT in the author is critical of the various typologies he describes because none of them takes the unique voice of Scripture seriously enough (Cartledge, 2013:276-281).<sup>2</sup>

Therefore the first question to be addressed through embodied theological practice is the status of what we understand as Scripture.

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<sup>2</sup> There is some evidence that practical theologians want to engage text and context more thoroughly (Herbert, 2007; Rooms, 2012)



(ii) *Ministerial and congregational practice – how do we interpret?*

Grounded in such ambivalence in training, ministers have been left with uncertainty in respect of both pastoral and church practice. Evidence from empirical research indicates this uncertainty in respect of interpretation or else a pattern of sheltering in pre-modern or pre-critical reading of Scripture.

(a) Bible in Pastoral Practice Project

In 2002-2003, research sponsored by Cardiff University and the Bible Society into the use of the Bible in pastoral ministry revealed an approach which was pragmatic, predictable and unreflective – driven by the pressures of justification of ministry, busyness, relevance and avoidance of confrontation and personal engagement (Dickson, 2007:109-113); ‘...the paucity of reflective comment starkly revealed a largely activist Christianity in the UK today in danger of losing the capacity to evaluate and improve its pastoral practice.’

(<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/share/research/projectreports/previousprojects/biblepastoralpractice/the-use-of-the-bible-in-pastoral-practice.html>): a point underwritten by practical theologians involved in ministerial education and practice (Herbert, 2007: 195; Ballard 2011: 35-36; Rooms, 2012:81).

Three books were written from the Cardiff research; the second engages questions about Scripture and pastoral practice whereas the third is a workbook on approaches to the use of Scripture in practice (Oliver, 2006, Pattison, Cooling and Cooling, 2007). The first volume is the one that might be expected to address the question of methodology (Ballard and Holmes, 2005). However, much of the book is a historical journey about the use of the

Bible in pre-modern, modern and post-modern western contexts and whilst the chapters on contemporary scholarship raise important questions, the chapters on practical engagement are uncontextualised (121-304), which may be indicative of the lack of engagement with contemporary practical theologians (Cartledge, 2013:279).

(b) Studying lay practice

There is a small body of research about how church members engage with the Bible. Most has proceeded with assumption that what happens in ordinary reading of Scripture is best interpreted through Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons'.

Quantitative empirical research has revealed that 'ordinary readers' are 'not that interested in what scholars do' (Village, 2013:131). In particular the pre-occupation with reaching 'behind' the text does not engage them. Rather, for Evangelical and Charismatic Christians in particular, 'literalism' – even amongst those with higher education – is the means of maintaining transformative engagement with the text and that accordingly awareness of horizons is hard to achieve because of a lack of critical distance or the ability to embrace 'otherness' (Village, 2007:69-75, 90-91). Readers 'tended to 'fuse' rather than 'separate' horizons' (2013:133).

By contrast, a qualitative social-interactionist approach through discourse analysis of Bible-study groups has challenged the assumption of fusion of horizons as an interpretative principle arguing that 'talk' and 'text' run alongside each other and are 'held in tension' by a 'relational hermeneutic' that privileges 'insight' gained through 'fellowship' rather than knowledge as the key driver of the process (Todd, 2013:82). The groups read Bible and experience alongside each other but do not or cannot integrate the two.

From a social-psychological perspective it seems that some 'fuse' with the text perhaps from a deep desire to embrace its vision as truth, others distance themselves from it, perhaps fearing to be subsumed by it. The second question, therefore, raised by contemporary practice is one of interpretation and in particular how both ministers and congregations address issues behind, in and in front of the text.

*(iii) Describing Evangelical experience – authority and authoritarianism*

Evangelicals would argue that without understanding the Bible as revelatory, it is likely that its role in our practice will become muted. But it is at this point that the most emotionally sensitive challenge to Scriptural interpretation is mounted in relation to its authoritative function in our lives.

Starting with her own early experience as a questioning Evangelical, Bennett sets her description within the experience of struggle – focusing on practical-ethical questions which problematise the text as contested space (2013:9-10). Moving and painful stories speak of the way in which the text has been used in controlling, abusive and patriarchal ways and raise the question of whether the responsibility lies with the performers of the text or with the text itself? (11-15). This is a vital part of the description of people's experience with the Bible – a voice that needs to be heard by Evangelicals in particular – which has great impact on the ambivalence about its use in pastoral practice.

Roger's (2009, 2013) study of Evangelical Bible reading practice describes the everyday context that Bennett is uneasy about. The Conservative Evangelical church exhibited a Bible-centred ministry that touched the whole of the church's life and was grounded in a commitment to inerrancy: an objectivist and foundationalist epistemology

which equates truth with historicity. It was also committed to a one-way journey from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader and its interpretations were transmitted in a 'stream-down' way in a high authority sub-culture – one which acted like a 'bounded set' and was guarded by the homogeneity of the mediators of its teaching. In this church the Bible was valued and treasured as a doorway to truth and life, so much so that at times the word God, Jesus and Bible seem almost interchangeable (2009).

The second church in Roger's study self-describes as Charismatic Evangelical and with a more postmodern spirit, steers away from epistemic determinacy. Its focus is on existential encounter and it has a pragmatic and activist view of its relationship with the Bible, beginning with the congregational horizon. Whilst it places a high value on the Bible text, its approach to authority is 'trickle down' with little centralisation, and heterogeneity amongst those who mediate its teaching (2009). In practice, churches of this kind shortcut attention to the text in search of an immediate contextual hit and do not have a good record either of consistent exegesis in their teaching or of encouraging Bible reading habits amongst their members.

54% of members of the Conservative church read the Bible daily as opposed to 20% in the Charismatic church (Rogers, 2013:120); I suspect that this figure would be even less in non-Evangelical churches. This seems to suggest that the way people perceive Scripture influences greatly the attention they devote to it. Is it only a foundationalist and objectivist approach typified by the Conservative church that can inspire consistent engagement?

This is the kind of church culture that Bennett is reacting against as she sets out her description of encounters with the Bible. But the problem of starting only with struggle is that it narrows the field of description. A fuller account might include transformative and liberating experience of the Bible. My teenage experience of Scripture involved

encountering the person of Jesus, having my mind opened to the possibility of experience of God through the Spirit and hearing God's call to ministry. I have talked with countless people for whom Scripture has been similarly transformative – from the inner city to the academy. I have seen people transformed in character and healed of deep hurt through a long walk with Scripture and I know those for whom the Bible has been central to community transformation both here and abroad. Tamez argues that by focusing on specific problematic texts, 'First World radical feminists... leave aside the central message which is profoundly liberating' (1988:176).

Experience is not the problem, rather the narrowness of the description; the danger of oversimplification of a complex narrative world with the risk of shutting down debate or positioning it in such a way that only one conclusion is possible. '[E]xperience may be reified so that the learner is not encouraged or at least is not able to move beyond the boundaries of their experience.' (Scott 2004:133).

The central question is whether it is possible in a (post)modern culture to have an approach to authority that is not authoritarian? Many people share the experiences that Bennett describes of restriction of freedom to question, the discouraging of doubt and the (conscious or unconscious) underwriting of controlling or abusive behaviour – but is this the inevitable outcome of viewing Scripture as authoritative or rather of a particular configuration of the idea of authority?

Again, is it only authoritarian conservative churches that can preserve some sense of authority of the Bible in practice and in the process exclude those who find such an approach oppressive? Might there be a way of embracing the authority of Scripture without authoritarianism? Is our present dichotomy a particular outcome of western intellectual and

spiritual history? This is the third question which contemporary practice raises for those who wish to argue for the authority of Scripture.

To summarise the problems raised in this section: biblical criticism has raised questions about the nature and authority of Scripture in a way which can paralyse practical theologians, ministers and laity alike in the way they address biblical passages. Moreover, questions of hermeneutics raise challenges about reading behind, in and in front of the text which can seem highly sophisticated and inaccessible, but become increasingly important as people challenge and question the morality, meaning and relevance of biblical texts. Intertwined with all this is the question of how such texts are 'performed' in community and the relationship between claims for textual authority and the way in which such authority claims are embodied and enacted.

## **(B) Practice – reading and performing the text to shape healthy experience**

### *(i) Introduction*

The previous section highlighted three problems – critical engagement, hermeneutic awareness and authoritarian practice – which, though familiar, tend to hamstring the reading of Scripture at the level of both academy and practice. The response proposed here is grounded in an Evangelical context; ordinands and ministers find it hard to integrate critical theology into their practice and congregations are only dimly aware of the questions of interpretation, even if they are more alert to parts of Scripture that generate ethical and cultural questions. Moreover, few Evangelicals are involved academically in practical theology.

To understand what 'attending to Scripture' might look like, it is necessary to focus on practice or performance. Practices embody and demonstrate belief and provide the context in which answers to challenging questions can be tested. They offer accessible ways in which the majority of people can engage in attentive reading without presuming certain levels of academic interest or attainment.

Second, the locus of this practice is communal. For the NT context and for many centuries of church history, this would not be a controversial statement. In western churches, individual reading and interpretation has become the norm and people are not well schooled in listening and discerning communally. Communal reading lived at the margins of Protestantism amongst the Anabaptists and there has been some revival of interest in this from those thinking about church post-Christendom.

Such reading emphasises community over a dominant individual, Spirit as well as word in preference to the domination of intellect and education. It is Christocentric as opposed to Christological, interested more in doing than knowing (Pietersen, 2001:49-66, Murray 2004:293-300). This generates some anxiety in a post-critical era, not least over assumptions about the perspicuity of Scripture and the fear of pietistic rather than theological-critical reading. However, the way of reading proposed here has the potential to liberate attentive reading at the level of the local community whilst finding an appropriate place for academic and critical contributions. Specifically it encourages people to attend to the subjectivity of the other – both human being and text – and has the potential to build the maturity of the community through such attentiveness.

Finally, authority only makes sense in the context of practice; something is authoritative because it influences the way people live. So the authority of Scripture is a practice before it is a theory. Theory functions to make sense of practice or make practice

plausible. If theory is undermined, eventually the practice will change, be reviewed or annulled.

(ii) *'Dwelling in the Word'*

'Dwelling in the Word' (DITW)<sup>3</sup> is a spiritual practice based on 'Lectio Divina' whereby people listen to Scripture in community. The instructions go like this: 'find a reasonably friendly-looking stranger; listen that person into free speech as he or she tells you what they heard in the passage. Listen that person into answering one of two questions: 1) What captured your imagination? or 2) What question would you like to ask a biblical scholar? Listen well because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your *partner* has said... turn folks loose with their partners. Then wrestle together with what God might be up to in that passage for your group on that day' (Taylor Ellison and Keifert, 2011:88-89).

This runs counter to modern assumptions; challenging individualising readings and helping others' voices to be heard; challenging the idea of knowledge as something we appropriate – usually with the help of an expert and then move on. Rather it encourages long-term engagement – the act of knowing coming through community participation in the narrative. It might be argued that this is no more than a 'reader response' approach, or worse, the pooling of ignorance, but with long-term engagement, it encourages openness to question and surprise and places within the wider context of communal listening the encouragement to seek 'expert' knowledge when it is needed, but not simply to depend

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<sup>3</sup> A practice developed by Missional Church theologian Patrick Keifert based with Church Innovations Inc. in Minnesota, in the context of the missional discovery process called Partnership for Missional Church; it has its roots in pre-Reformation and Reformation practice.



upon it or defer to it. Finally, it counters the 'practical atheism' of much communal life in churches – especially in decision-making – with the expectation of listening to the voice of God in others.

Experimenting with this in the place of the sermon on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2014 reading Luke 10.1-12, I note that it gave room for hearing people's voices in a powerful way; some were able to speak positively about finding 'people of peace' others shared the pain and disappointment of being turned away. Others were enabled to ask questions about 'greeting no one on the road' or removing the 'dust of your town' and still others to give responses to their questions; the energy in the room was palpable and feedback from a midweek home group confirms this. There were one or two who appeared bemused by or even uneasy with the experience suggestive of the fact that some have little experience of being asked to offer an opinion or being given the space to be heard.

I recognise that I was maintaining the listening space, but there is no reason that the congregation could not learn to guard each other's subjectivity. There is also more to do in terms of developing openness to the subjectivity of the text, but in a context where people are not academically confident, building respect for their own subjectivity comes first.

This description sets an interesting challenge in terms of ministerial development. What kind of skills, qualities and character does a minister need to enable the practice of attentiveness to the 'other'?

### **(C) Philosophical and psychological perspectives on methodology**

This section explains how the practice described will address the key questions of the first section. Moving away from approaches that turn reader or text into an object to be controlled, DITW involves privileging the subjectivity of the other – whether person or text; this is what I mean by the concept of ‘attending’.

Bennett’s examples of struggle with the Biblical text occur in communal or relational contexts (2013:11-16). This should alert us to the fact that we are dealing not simply with how we read a text but how we perform that reading in community. The problem that we face is that the essence of the rhetorical performance of a Bible text is persuasion – this is well understood in the NT (John 20.31, 1 Thessalonians 2.1-12, 2 Timothy 3.14-17). But the risk of persuasive rhetoric is manipulation (2 Corinthians 4.1-2, 1 Thessalonians 2.3-6), something which the subject-object understanding of relationship in modernity makes particularly problematic. Either the Scriptural subject (mediated by an authoritative teacher) dominates the object who is the reader or hearer (as in Bennett’s examples) or else the subject who is the reader approaches Scripture as an object to ‘use’ or not as in much practical theology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I observe an objectifying approach to Scripture, from absence of reference – i.e. ‘not useful’ – (Browning, 1996, Graham, 2002); selective use alongside other ‘resources’ (Pattison, 2000); hermeneutical approach that privileges non-Scriptural disciplines (Capps, 1984, Gerkin, 1987). See also, Pattison, 1988 and Cartledge, 2013.

(i) *Listening to the 'Other'*

The dualisms of modernity have been well rehearsed; public/private, fact/value, reason/faith, head/heart.<sup>5</sup> Irigaray is not alone in seeing this as evidence of the subject-object split in modernity, though she extends her critique not simply to the Enlightenment but to the whole of the Western intellectual tradition. In particular she challenges a solipsistic concept of the self in which the embodiedness of the other is something to flee, possess or control (2000:30-39). This is rooted in 'a critique addressed to a monosubjective, monosexual, patriarchal and phallographic philosophy and culture' (1994:30). Though the centre of her thought is communication across genders, she herself recognises, though does not develop, the implications of this to cultures and ethnicities, and so I intend to draw on her work to extrapolate to wider relationships in community.

Irigaray argues that the male-dominated approach to the world treats all relationships as objects to a single subject, leading to the silencing and possessing of the other and the 'reduc[ing] of the feminine to a passive object' (2000:23). By contrast, inter-subjectivity results from the embodied encounter of two subjects in which their generic distinctiveness, their story and personhood is respected. There is a mystery to the other which is not to be violated or controlled, but protected on a journey in which identity and mutual knowing is formed through relationship (2000:17-29).

This journey to inter-subjectivity involves an attentive effort described as the movement from 'sensation' to 'perception'. 'Sensation' sees the other as an object. 'Perception' is a deliberate choice to listen and not just to look. It is a journey in which we

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<sup>5</sup> Campbell, 2005:138-160, 183-187; MacIntyre, 2007:57-59,83-84; Newbigin, 1989:14-38; Taylor 1989:234-247, 368-392.

refuse to allow the relationship to be reduced to a single subjectivity, refuse to appropriate the other, but allow them to be 'other' in embodied relationship (2000:40-47) – something that is expressed in our mode of language (2002:60). Furthermore this journey of openness to the subjectivity of the other is one in which we must be prepared to guard that subjectivity in ourselves and in the other. The goal is not fusion but rather 'a relationship between two subjects, the objective of which is to leave to the other his or her subjectivity' (2000:51). This leads Irigaray to develop the idea of a 'third space' – a silence in which there is room for genuine attention to difference, to the history of each, not least to the party whose history has most consistently been unheard (2000:62-67).

Though Irigaray positions this most powerfully in the objectification and silencing of the feminine in western culture, it is also possible to see the impact of the 'monosubjective' in communal relationships in a congregation (1994:57). In a culture which values rational knowledge above all, the ability to retain information leads to the domination of those with formal education in the reading of Scripture over those without and more specifically to the controlling role of the 'expert' clergy over the laity. Much energy is spent within theological education ensuring that clergy can at least approximate to the myth of expertise.

DITW subverts the culture of the expert and places the emphasis upon embodied, transformational knowing which is shaped by the value of liberating the voices of all in the community to be heard – this would correspond theologically with the 'democratising' work of the Spirit that Paul envisages in 1 Corinthians 12; something which brought him into conflict with the patriarchal hierarchy of first century households (Meeks, 2003:76-77).

The practice involves the developing of boundaried listening; the creating of a 'third space' in community – a truly hospitable place – where people learn to attend to each other's personhood, history, location and culture in the reading of Scripture. This challenges

the temptation to fusion and the melting away of human boundaries in a quest for ‘the answer’ or ‘our way of doing things’ that preoccupies the life of so many communities, consciously or subconsciously.

To cultivate such an approach to communal attentiveness requires both character and emotional honesty. It depends not only upon growth in both communal virtues (Rogers 2013:123-124) but also upon the development of psychological maturity. Problems of authority in reading Scripture are not simply about relationship to the text but also about the challenge involved in navigating difference in relationships, and the resolution of the authority of Scripture in practice is as much about our personal and communal maturity in relationships as it is about hermeneutics (Majerus and Sandage 2010).

Attention should be paid to developing in future ministers the psychological and spiritual capacities inherent in ‘differentiation of self’: the ‘capacity to balance both autonomy and connection in close relationships’ (Shults and Sandage 2006:180). People who struggle with this tend to ‘fuse’ or ‘detach’ in the challenge of communal relationships, demonstrate high levels of anxiety in holding the environment for inter-subjectivity and also lack the ability to recognise and hold appropriately their own subjectivity; either they subsume it to others’ views or expect that their view be espoused by all. This is not so much about mastering a syllabus as about the formation of psychological maturity. Developing inter-subjectivity will address the destructive issue of authoritarian control identified in the first section; ministers need to be committed to this as a gospel imperative.

(ii) *Listening to the 'other' in the text*

Is this simply 'spiritual reading' rather than a theological or critical reading? Some Evangelicals will be nervous because it risks undermining the authoritative interpretation that lies in the hands of the leadership, whereas those of a more liberal persuasion will be concerned that this means surrender to discredited pre-critical and pre-modern reading methods.

However, the practice of inter-subjectivity in community should develop maturity that recognises distance and difference in the forming of identity and can live healthily with this. Once this is broadly established, a second step can be made which although it looks very different is actually quite similar in kind.

Once the appropriateness of listening and supporting the subjectivity of another is recognised, listening to the subjective voice of the text becomes a parallel task. It has been noted that typical community reading in Evangelical congregations collapses text and context either by reading off or reading into the text (Rogers, 2009, 2013). However, 'amateurs' who are well-grounded in the practice of DITW, increasingly less afraid of hearing different voices, may be better placed to notice difference in dialogue with the text: both difference within the text and difference between the world of the text and their world. They may have the potential to be more sophisticated in hermeneutics than many 'professionals' might expect, as evidenced in embryo in my earlier example of practice.

Nevertheless the practice of DITW gives room to call upon the 'expert', but in a changed relationship. They do not control the territory, giving the answer from where we then move on; rather they offer their contribution to the embodied practice of the

community. Where the maturity of the community is developing, this may be received not only as confirmatory or explanatory but also as critical or suspicious.

Approaches to ministerial training might be configured within the rhetorical tradition, where in the generation of conviction, the reader response of the congregation would be understood as the 'pathos' and the 'ethos' – ethical practice – of the minister requires that they help the congregation pay attention to the subjectivity of the text – 'logos' (Young, 2013:29-30). This resonates with Irigaray's conviction about the situatedness of texts and the need to encourage a dialogue with the text that takes seriously its history, location and place and indeed the history of its interpretation. She is concerned about the danger of objectifying texts and using them as a means of subjective control; the hermeneutic challenge is to be faithful to the past, whilst being open to a new interpretative task (1994:41). This challenges modern hegemonic interpretation and postmodern melting away of textual boundaries.

In helping congregations manage these boundaries, the minister becomes not the receptacle of the answer but the facilitator of the congregation's engagement with resources that will help them better to hear and dialogue with the voice of the text in the context of their own communal conversation – a crucial conduit between academy and community in which attention to the subjectivity of the text is embodied and practiced, whilst paying attention to his or her own subjectivity as a reader.

To avoid this becoming a purely academic pursuit, the rhetorical triangle can be configured with the Spirit as author, interplaying the two triangles in a dialogue which takes seriously the community's transformational encounter with God through its reading of Scripture without foregoing the importance of the critical engagement with the humanity of the text (Young, 2013:19).

This addresses the criticism that DITW is only a 'spiritual reading' with no critical or theological edge while at the same time avoiding reducing reading to an academically controlled exercise. DITW has the potential to integrate critical study without disempowering congregations. Attending to the subjectivity of the other as person and text develops openness to the concept of distance and places hermeneutics in a meaningful framework. The ministerial challenge is to extend the practice of differentiation from human relationships to relationships with the text. Village speaks of congregants 'fusing' with the text (2013:133), which suggests that learning appropriate distance from the text is as much a psychological as a hermeneutical journey; ministers need to combine psychological insight with a role as intermediary between the academy and the congregation in order to support healthy attending to the strange voice of the text.

#### **(D) Theological perspectives on methodology: authority and interpretation**

##### *(i) Introduction*

The practice of DITW opens the way for attention to the other as human subject and as Scriptural text, addressing problems previously identified and offers relief to the impasse in PT in regard to Scripture and the tendency in Evangelical practice towards naive and authoritarian reading. It embodies some theological assumptions which need elucidation: namely, the impact of subject-object duality and the possibility of understanding the authority of Scripture in terms of an encounter with God as subject mediated through Scripture. I offer some proposals of how I think a theological justification might be framed, which warrants further study and reflection.



(ii) *Epistemology: Subjective and Objective in Modernity*

The philosophical roots of this dilemma lie with Kant's 'turn to the subject' (Bennett, 2013:35). The Enlightenment sought to turn all things – including God – into the objects of human knowing. Kant argued that we could never know the 'thing in itself' because knowledge of things is never direct but rather is processed by our minds. Therefore the idea of 'objective revelation' is problematic because our knowing is mediated through human conceptuality (Dorrien, 2012:23-74). Bennett's story of her journey away from controlling evangelicalism is deeply connected to this intellectual journey away from the coherence of the idea of 'revelation' (2013:12, 35).

From Kant onwards, philosophers and theologians sought for something precognitive beyond the subject-object dichotomy to articulate relationship to the world and God; for Kant this was the freedom of moral action, for Schleiermacher, feeling or intuition, for Bultmann and Tillich, existentialism (Bennett, 2013:35; Dorrien, 2012:98-101, 485-487, 532, 556-557). Bennett places herself firmly in this romantic liberal tradition by choosing Ruskin as a hermeneutical partner, in part, perhaps, to be free from the control of an objectivising claim of the text upon her life (16-17, 65-79).

In reaction to pessimism about objective knowledge, Evangelicals in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries articulated their view of revelation in the language of objective reality – through theories of inspiration, infallibility or inerrancy (Vanhoozer, 2010:37-38). Whilst scholars may hold such views with varying degrees of sophistication, the church experience that Bennett describes is one in which the assumption of simple, single meanings predominate and that access to them is straightforward and unproblematic – 'naive realism' (Wright, 1992:32-34). Not only does this lead to a collapsing of context into text, such defined,

propositional and simplistic approaches to Scripture are expressed in tightly boundaried and controlling approaches to interpretation noted in research of Evangelical churches (Wright 2011:28-29).

By contrast, if Evangelical approaches objectify the hearer before a controlling subject – the text mediated through its interpreters – then PT objectifies the text through the language of ‘use’.<sup>6</sup> ‘Use’ suggests, first, a resource that we put to work for us or not, dependent upon its usefulness; this might be conceived in pragmatic terms or in the light of a philosophical or interdisciplinary narrative. This means that Scripture is read through a predetermined and often unrecognised lens leading to a tendency to collapse text into context. The fact that there are many subjects that PT is interested in that are not directly addressed by Scripture lends credence to this approach, but this is precisely where attention should be given to a careful hermeneutic that reflects all subjectivities under consideration.

‘Use’ is also a controlling word, a managing word, a pragmatic and consumerist word. Just as Bennett is concerned about the language of ‘being under’ Scripture (2013:27), so those who want to embrace its authority are uncomfortable about the idea that it somehow stands under us waiting for our verdict about its ‘usefulness’ (Breuggemann, 1986:80).

Bennett’s chosen hermeneutic partner embodies this subject-object dichotomy. Objectively, Ruskin does not hold to the unique authority of Scripture, but subjectively he holds to the idea of God speaking through it because of his love for one who believes this (2013:16-18). There are many things about Ruskin’s approach that Bennett describes that are fruitful for attending to Scripture – a readiness for deconstruction, a practical

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<sup>6</sup> See note 4

disposition, privileging of imagination and seeing as an attentive practice of the heart (66-68, 74, 81-92).

However, his suspicion of the biblical narrative means that his hermeneutic of immediacy or analogy is likely to privilege context over text rather in the manner of much contemporary PT (2013:73-77). This pattern is repeated in Bennett's worked examples: generally speaking they privilege context over text and whilst they are reflective and contextually aware, they do not offer strong evidence of 'the Bible *in all its diversity and strangeness*' speaking as a distinctive subjectivity into the context (2013:126).

The debate about cognitive and objective revelation is rooted in the subject-object dichotomy of the Enlightenment. Liberal thinkers typically fear an elephantine Bible crushing all under its overwhelming weight and presence. Evangelicals fear the dissecting of the Bible and the reusing of that which is deemed serviceable. By contrast, through its commitment to giving voice to the other, DITW develops the practice of attending both to the subjectivity of other people in community and to the subjectivity of Scripture, which offers a different way through the conundrum.

(iii) *Hermeneutics*

'Attending to Scripture' carries assumptions about the way God is encountered through Scripture and how that authority is to be configured. Following Ricoeur on the journey from naive understanding, through critical engagement to post-critical understanding, DITW inhabits the world 'in front of the text' (Stiver, 2001:57-64).

It follows a number of contemporary biblical theologians<sup>7</sup> who understand the authority of Scripture in terms of how it enables us to encounter God or God's story; a more dynamic model that makes room for the work of the Spirit in a community as it seeks to dwell in the narrative of Scripture.

One way of configuring this encounter is as a five-act drama where, steeped in Acts 1-4, the community finds the "authority" for staging the fifth (Wright, 1992:139-142). This involves being committed to the storied nature of human knowledge but not in such a way as to suggest no relationship to reality. Wright adopts the idea of 'critical realism' as a way of describing knowledge that is real though provisional (1992:32-46). The idea of a grand story is open to charges of power moves and exploitation of the kind that Bennett articulates (2013:11-16). Wright seeks to safeguard this through the exercise of a 'hermeneutic of love' in which there is a genuine dialogue – each voice paying attention to the other. Authority is conceived not in terms of propositions and instructions, but as a participation in God's purposes through interpretative listening to the text in community (2011:26-28).

Brueggemann is cautious about metanarrative, offering a more pliable picture of 'core testimony' challenged by 'counter-testimony', proposing that God's people encounter God through a 'dialectical and dialogical' meeting of conflicting testimonies. The biblical text is polyphonic by nature and resists being closed down by the rendering of a single narrative; there are many but not just any interpretations (1997:61-89). The encounter with God is a process of re-engagement with the dramatic movement of the text rather than an

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<sup>7</sup> In this section, I draw on first year work on Wright and Brueggemann in which I addressed the hermeneutical questions raised in PT and offered a proposal for listening to Scripture as an authoritative voice. I have developed this here as a theological underpinning for encountering God through Scripture, which nevertheless recognises the reality of mediated knowing.

improvisatory completion of the drama. Drawing on Ricoeur, Brueggemann offers a way of responding to critical and post-critical concerns through the hermeneutics of suspicion and representation and argues that the text offers an open-ended dialogue in contention with the 'first naïveté' but with the hope of a 'second naïveté' (1995:3-32). Through the exercise of imagination, God is encountered as the subject of the text, which has 'the capacity to generate, evoke and articulate alternative images of reality, images that counter what hegemonic power and knowledge have declared to be impossible' (Brueggemann, 1997:68).

What these approaches have in common is a determination to allow the distinctive voice(s) of the text space to be heard and to encourage a genuine dialogue, which takes seriously the text of Scripture either as a place inhabited by God or through which we encounter God. The question for Wright is whether he is still working with a controlling narrative and precisely what that narrative is; Brueggemann's approach at this point is more compatible with DITW as it allows space for listening for God within the narrative space. However, Wright's determination to hold onto the real reference of the text maybe important in providing discipline in a practice that involves reading 'in front of the text'.

Drawing on Ricoeur's philosophy, both are able to navigate the 'polar oscillation between objectivism and relativism' (Stiver 2001:7). Ricoeur's ideas about the 'surplus of meaning' and the function of symbol and metaphor within a narrative explain why a hermeneutical approach to the authority of Scripture is vital (Stiver, 2001:87-136). His notion of 'distanciation' allows a relationship between authorial intent and 'front of text' which does not slide into critical obscurantism on the one hand or relativism on the other. Rather, leading to the idea of 'surplus of meaning', we find openness to meaning beyond authorial intent, but not neglectful of it (Stiver, 2001:89-97). Without a practice that privileges the 'front of text', Christian congregations will become more and more detached

from the core narrative of their faith. Encounter with God through Scripture becomes a communal and relational discovery, which has room for ambiguous and contested knowing. The idea of authority as univocal is a mark of modernity. Multi-vocal engagement is a product of knowing through relationship and offers a way to mediated authority that need not be authoritarian.

DITW as a practice of reading 'in front of the text' is a gift of the Scriptures back to the Christian community – reviving confidence in the transformative power of the biblical narrative. It is not naively pre-critical as it is rooted in a practice which understands and embraces the critical journey but does so in such a way that it does not imprison the reading behind the text and therefore within the sole purview of the expert. The freedom of God to be more than an instrument in our agenda requires a relationship between text and experience, which gives room for different narratives to breathe, speak on their own terms and interact. DITW theologises communal reading as a place in which to become formed by the narrative of the faith but a place from which that community engages with the voice of the other within and beyond its boundaries. The Ricoeurian approaches of Wright and Breuggemann give a theological articulation of a dynamic view of the authority of Scripture which supports the practice of DITW, which itself offers a way of engaging with the authority of the biblical narrative which can be life-forming without being oppressive.

## **Conclusion**

This article is motivated by two observations; the absence of a distinct and authoritative voice for Scripture in most PT and the absence of Evangelicals in the PT discipline. Further research highlighted three familiar, yet troubling questions and

demonstrated their impact on ministerial practice and congregational engagement, limiting the contribution that Scripture might bring to contemporary life. In the case of Evangelical practice, transformative encounter is achieved by embracing pre-modern literalism and collapsing context into text, creating ghetto communities with a profound separation between 'church' and the rest of life. Both perspectives have much to gain from creative and critical dialogue as demonstrated by the contribution of Bennett (2013) to this discussion.

As communal spiritual practice, DITW promotes deep engagement with the Scripture at congregational level, but is also an excellent foundation for ministerial practice and PT, addressing the causes of both disengagement from and controlling interpretation of Scripture that are inherent in the modern paradigm – allowing the voices of Scripture and of people to be heard. Taking seriously the subjectivity of listeners and text, DITW challenges the dominant academic paradigm of reading behind the text and the Evangelical reaction towards pre-modern literalism. It does not hide from academic rigour but enlists it in a critical but supportive way grounded in Ricoeur's 'hermeneutical arc'. This makes Scriptural interpretation more than an academic or intellectual pursuit, rooting it in the developing psychological maturity of both congregations and ministers. I have made suggestions about the implications of this for ministerial training and development, but there is more to be explored on this subject.

Theological articulation of the practice, points the way to a reorientation of the Subject/Object dualism of modernity such that knowledge and encounter with God come through mutual attention to the subjectivity of the 'other'. The authority of Scripture is experienced through a community's dialogical encounter with God and each other in the narrative, which does not need to be understood as univocal and unmediated in order to be

authoritative; there is more work to be done on justifying this, not least in terms of understanding the work of the Spirit in the Body of Christ and the wider world.

The test of the practice is simple; does it enable theologians, practitioners and congregations to hear the distinctive voice of Scripture through communal discernment in transformative engagement with the world and does it grow maturity through attention to the 'other'?

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## Appendix 30 – Debate with Zoe Bennett at BIAPT, July 2014

### Is ‘using’ the Bible the right language? *Debate with Zoe Bennett*. BIAPT Special Interest Group on the Bible, BIAPT Conference, Edinburgh, 16.07.14

Writing this piece, I find myself facing in two directions at once. First my study this year has confirmed the conclusion I reached last year – that Practical Theology (PT) writers do not attend greatly to Scripture – at least not enough to allow it to speak as a distinct voice.<sup>1</sup> Further research this year has revealed a lack of confidence with the use of Scripture in ministerial practice and an approach to hermeneutics in congregational life which either fails to engage the two horizons or else collapses one into the other.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, I find myself working in a discipline where fellow Evangelicals are notably absent.<sup>3</sup> This is largely because Evangelicals are unconvinced by the way Scripture is handled in PT, with the result that they tend to favour applied approaches to Bible and practice. This is a pity because an applied approach tends to create idealised constructs without paying proper attention to the realities of context; this is not helpful in generating the practice and skills of theological reflection that ministers need in congregational leadership.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Evangelical practice of biblical interpretation is open to the challenge that Zoe presents in her book – a challenge that needs to be answered.<sup>5</sup>

However, the problem of starting only with struggle is that it narrows the field of description too much; a fuller description would include transformative and liberational experiences of Scripture. It is not beginning with the experience that is the problem, but the narrowness of the description. There is a danger that we oversimplify a complex narrative world and risk shutting down debate or positioning it in such a way that only one conclusion is possible. Zoe’s contemporary examples of struggle with the biblical text occur in communal or relational contexts which alerted me to the fact that we are dealing not simply with how we read a text but how we perform that reading in community.

So I began looking for a practice of Bible reading that would attend more carefully both to the subjectivity of the readers and of the text itself and I found this in ‘Dwelling in the Word’ (DITW) – a spiritual practice based on ‘Lectio Divina’ whereby people listen to Scripture in community. The instructions go like this: ‘find a reasonably friendly-looking stranger; listen that person into free speech as he or she tells you what they heard in the passage. Listen that person into answering one of two questions: 1) What captured your imagination? or 2) What question would you like to ask a biblical scholar? Listen well because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your *partner* has said... turn folks loose with their

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<sup>1</sup> My first year work revealed an objectifying approach to Scripture in PT from absence of reference – i.e. ‘not useful’ – (Browning, 1996, Graham, 2002) to those who propose selective use alongside other ‘resources’ (Pattison, 2000), to those who attempt a hermeneutical approach but end up privileging the non-Scriptural discipline (Capps, 1984, Gerkin, 1987). See also, Pattison, 1988 and Cartledge, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Dickson, 2007; Rogers, 2013; Todd, 2013; Village, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, 2012:475

<sup>4</sup> My context lies on the boundaries of ministerial training and congregational life

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, 2013:9-15

partners. Then wrestle together with what God might be up to in that passage for your group on that day.’<sup>6</sup>

This is an approach to Scripture that runs counter to modern assumptions. It challenges individualising readings and teaches us to help others’ voices to be heard. It challenges the idea of knowledge as something we appropriate – usually with the help of an expert and then move on. Rather it encourages long-term engagement together in a passage, seeing the act of knowing as being participation by the community in the narrative. In a culture, where engagement with Scripture is very superficial, it encourages people to learn the habit of living personally and together in the narrative. Moreover it encourages habits of paying attention to the subjectivity of others in way which challenges the tendency within Evangelicalism to favour controlling and authoritarian interpretation. <sup>7</sup> This would be a mark of growing psychological maturity – differentiation of self – and an important aspect of ministerial training.

It might be argued that DITW is no more than a ‘reader response’ approach, or worse, the pooling of ignorance, but in a context where people are not academically confident, building respect for their own subjectivity must come first. As they learn to offer the same respect to others, it becomes more possible to grant the same subjectivity to text and be less alarmed about the strange distance. The practice of DITW gives room to call upon the ‘expert’, but in a changed relationship. No longer do they control the territory, giving the answer from where we then move on; now they offer their contribution to the embodied practice of the community. Where the maturity of the community is developing, their contribution may be received not only as confirmatory or explanatory but also as critical or suspicious. Managing this relationship is another challenge for ministerial training.

Theologically, this is a challenge to the subject/object dualism of modernity. Zoe’s struggle is with the controlling subjectivity of Scripture – mediated through human authority – which silences the object of its attention – or worse. There is a reverse problem for PT in which Scripture is objectivised and used as and when it seems appropriate. Just as Zoe is concerned about the language of ‘being under’ Scripture so those who want to embrace its authority are uncomfortable about the idea that it somehow stands under us waiting for our verdict about its ‘usefulness.’<sup>8</sup>

Zoe’s chosen hermeneutic partner embodies this subject-object dichotomy. Objectively, Ruskin does not hold to the unique authority of Scripture, but subjectively he wants to hold to the idea of God speaking through it because of his love for one who believes this. There are many things about Ruskin’s approach that Zoe describes that are fruitful for attending to Scripture – a readiness for deconstruction, a practical disposition, privileging of imagination and seeing as an attentive practice of the heart. However, his suspicion of the biblical narrative means that his hermeneutic of immediacy or analogy is likely to privilege context over text rather in the manner of much contemporary PT. This is the pattern that I see in

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<sup>6</sup> A practice developed by Missional Church theologian Patrick Keifert based with Church Innovations Inc. in Minnesota, in the context of the missional discovery process called Partnership for Missional Church; it has roots in both pre-Reformation and Reformation Scripture reading practices. Taylor Ellison and Keifert, 2011:88-89. I would be happy to talk about my observations of the impact of this practice.

<sup>7</sup> I have found Irigaray’s ideas of ‘intersubjectivity’ and ‘third space’ very helpful in articulating this.

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, 2013:27, Breuggemann, 1986:80

Zoe's worked examples: whilst they are reflective and contextually aware, they do not seem to me to offer strong evidence of 'the Bible *in all its diversity and strangeness*'.<sup>9</sup>

This leaves the question of revelation; can we have authority without being authoritarian? It is fair to say that revelation post-Kant makes no sense because of the mediated nature of human knowing<sup>10</sup> – if we are looking for a model of revelation that follows the monosubjectivity of modernity. But there are far more nuanced ways of viewing the encounter with God in Scripture – following Ricoeur, Brueggemann and Wright – which whilst making room for suspicion, contention and ambiguity, nevertheless create a way of attending to Scripture which allows more space for its unique voice; this is what I believe DITW can offer.

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<sup>9</sup> Bennett, 2013:16-18, 66-68, 73-77, 81-92

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, 2013:35

**Appendix 31 – 09 20978: Establishing advanced research practice in practical theology – DPT, Year 3, Research Proposal**

## Research Proposal

What are people's understanding of their experience of change and development when their church journeys with the Partnership for Missional Church process? What light might this shed on issues of maturity through community?

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[5952 words]

*I have removed the appendices from this document as they are already present as*

*Appendices 3, 5, 12, 13, 14 & 17*

# *Summary of Project*

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This proposal is submitted in preparation for the empirical research component of the Doctorate in Practical Theology (DPT). The project will focus on the narrative articulation of the transformative experience of one particular church involved in the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) process through the reflexive engagement of the researcher who is involved both as a member of the PMC delivery team and as facilitator of placement learning for students in training for ordination in the Church of England (See Appendix 1).

The core research approach will be ethnographic, supplemented with semi-structured interviews to allow more detailed articulation of personal narratives and to support people's journeys of reflection and reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:180-183). Findings will be reviewed with the PMC delivery team and the participants through a series of focus groups to allow challenge and questioning with a view to generating co-created knowledge (Freire, 1996:68-105, 2008:37-51). Field notes will be compiled and interviews recorded and transcribed. Data analysis will employ a thematic approach and will take place in dialogue with psychology and biblical theology in relation to maturity. The research will have ethical implications and permission will be sought from the University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee.

Research on PMC in the USA is based upon structured interviewing and the in-depth ethnographical approach offered here will broaden research perspectives. PMC is new to the UK and there is no research base at the present time. Though this is a small-scale qualitative project, the heuristic nature of the approach means that it will generate insights and questions that might be the basis for more focused qualitative and quantitative research.

The research will be of benefit to the host church in articulating and owning its own developmental journey and there will be value for theological education at a time of change through the light that is shed on ministerial formation and practice. It will be of benefit to the Church of England regionally as it reviews its practice of delivering PMC over the last three years. As PMC is being adopted by other dioceses, it will also help the Church of England and other interested denominations in reviewing applications for resourcing. The methodology of combining co-created learning with a nuanced approach to Scriptural hermeneutic will make a contribution to evangelical practical theology (PT) that will be of interest to the academic community but the aim will be to communicate also in ways that will be accessible to practitioners and lay people. Finally it will be of benefit to the integrating of my work in academic research, ministerial formation and church leadership.

## *Research Question*

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What are people's understanding of their experience of change and development when their church journeys with the Partnership for Missional Church process? What light might this shed on issues of maturity through community?

## *Aims and Objectives*

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The aim of this project is to facilitate one church's understanding and interpretation of its development through its participation in an intentional communal process of cultural change through PMC and from this to develop understanding of processes and marks of personal and communal maturation. The theoretical foundation will be situated as an



interdisciplinary study within PT and will be grounded in research on maturity in social and psychodynamic psychology in critical conversation with a biblical understanding of the 'telos' of human life and community.

The objectives of the project are:

- To observe participants in their pattern of life together and with the wider community
- To identify participants' (church members and clergy) perceptions of their personal and communal journey of change during PMC
- To offer my own interpretation of community formation based on:
  - (i) Analytical reading of ethnographical observations to generate key themes
  - (ii) Analytical reading of interviews to generate key themes
  - (iii) Exploration of these themes along with the theme of 'attentiveness to the other' in the light of social psychological, psychodynamic and faith development perspectives on maturity and development.
  - (iv) Critical correlation of this interpretation with biblical witness to the 'telos' of human life and assessment of the nature of the personal and communal journeys towards maturity
- To explore my interpretations of change and development through focus groups with the delivery team, church members and clergy in order to allow them to critique and contribute to the interpretation.
- To be alert to any configuration of the relationship between mission and discipleship that might arise.

## *Context*

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### The iterative relationship of my research interest and my work context

Twenty-seven years in Anglican parish ministry have convinced me of the centrality of community formation to personal development and maturity – embodied faith as ‘the hermeneutic of the gospel’ (Newbigin, 1989:222). Over that time, I have developed a growing interest in researching patterns of communal formation in Christian congregations. Four years ago, I entered the DPT in order to pursue this. For the last six years I have been involved in ministerial training at St John’s College, Nottingham, which involves teaching practical theology and overseeing students’ personal and ministerial formation. Reflection on my practice together with my DPT study has led me to the idea that ‘attentiveness to the other’ might be understood as a key catalyst or marker of maturity (Irigary 2000, 2002; Ladd 2014a).

An invitation from the Director of Mission in Southwell and Nottingham diocese to be involved in PMC drew me into involvement with clergy and congregational formation. I have been a member of the PMC delivery team made up of eight people – clergy and lay – from the two participating dioceses and responsible for organisation and facilitation of the process with the churches involved. I am also responsible for introducing students to the process through their placements.

Rather than offering a technical intervention or a ‘show and tell’ model, PMC is a process of communal spiritual formation, which also places ‘attentiveness to the other’ at

the centre of its practice. Combined with the fact that it is also a communal model of discernment and formation led me to the idea of PMC as a context for my research. The intersection of my study with the two main aspects of my work – ministerial training and congregational development – has resulted in the development of this research project.

From September 2015, I will combine work at St John's with parish ministry, whilst taking on greater responsibility for delivering PMC across the UK. There is deep connection between my research interest, my ministry experience and my developing professional practice.

## Situating this study in the literature and research

### (i) *Congregational Studies*

Originating in America in the mid-twentieth century, interest in congregations as the locus of meaning for Christian practice has crossed the Atlantic and become a major area of research in PT. There are two discernible strands in this research: the descriptive/interpretative that seeks to liberate the voice of a congregation (Fulkerson, 2007; Hopewell, 1987) and those which focus more on change and transformation in the context of the practical wisdom of the congregation (Ammermann, 1999; Browning, 1991; Dudley, 1983; Graham, 2002). In the UK both strands are in evidence – interpretative work with varying commitment to promoting change (Cartledge, 2003; Heard, 2010; Rogers, 2013; Village, 2007) and problem-focused research (Cameron et al, 2005; Swinton and Mowatt, 2006). Guest et al (2004) make a helpful distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' studies. With the increasing impact of action research methodology, the question

of the separation of the researcher from the context and the collaborative nature of problem-solving is being raised (Graham, 2013).

This research will lean more towards the interpretative model, but not undertaken in isolation. The intention is to collaborate with participants in shaping the interpretation (Graham, 2013:151). PMC in the USA has developed a significant research base. Their approach is to use structured interviews with an appreciative inquiry approach, albeit with a feedback loop to ensure that participants retain ownership of the interpretation ([http://www.churchinnovations.org/01\\_services/research.html](http://www.churchinnovations.org/01_services/research.html)). In-depth ethnographical approaches have not featured in the research and therefore this may offer a fresh description of the process. Moreover, there is no research base as yet in the UK, so this will be a beginning.

This research is 'intrinsic' (Guest et al, 2004) but the expectation is that it will offer insights and raise questions that may be explored through more focused qualitative and quantitative approaches that will be instructive to PMC-UK and the wider church for future development. Initial exploration of a possible context for this research has received an enthusiastic response, not least in terms of the potential for enabling the congregation to develop its own reflective self-awareness as it narrates its stories.

(ii) *Psychological perspectives*

The intention is to allow the interpretative themes to emerge from the participants' narratives. However, there is a research base in psychology that has explored approaches to articulating maturity. This research will use these perspectives on personal and communal aspects of maturity to interrogate the participants' narratives; I am not aware of congregational studies that have been situated in this territory.

Though the majority of empirical research has focused on 'spiritual well-being', there is evidence that the social psychological concept of self-differentiation can support the articulation of maturity (Majerus and Sandage, 2010:42; Shults and Sandage, 2006). Psychodynamic studies of maturity – drawing on object relations theory – may also be a fruitful avenue to pursue (Hall et al, 1998; Hall and Edwards, 2002; Rizzuto, 1979). The same may also be true of faith development theory (Hart et al, 2010).

### *(iii) Biblical Perspectives*

Psychological exploration will be critically correlated with the biblical witness, specifically Paul's vision of moral formation expressed in the exhortation to 'live a life worthy of the gospel' because of evidence that Paul offers an intentional vision of formation, one that is shaped both by a particular 'telos' and through the interplay of the personal and the communal (Philippians 1.27; Thompson, 2011). In order to avoid oversimplistic correlation and to reveal the uniqueness of the biblical vision, this critique will be developed in conversation with virtue ethics. Virtue ethics has the advantage of a 'telos' which is individual and humanistic, which correlates more easily with contemporary culture but it also has a commitment to formation and practice that resonates strongly with Scripture (Hauerwas and Pinches, 1997; MacIntyre, 2007).

The theological exploration will also involve attention to an 'other-centred' approach to mission and discipleship to see if this approach orientates and integrates these practices in new ways.

# *Research Methods*

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## Methodology

The purpose of this project is to produce an in-depth reading of one Christian community's journey of development, taking account of both personal and communal dimensions. It is hoped that this will make a significant contribution not just to this community's self-understanding and practice but to the wider church's also.

It is assumed that the interpretation of our life worlds, the construction of social knowledge, is both a human characteristic and a divine calling and generates real if provisional knowledge as our contingent and contextual experience is read in hermeneutic relationship with the narrative of our faith (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Brueggemann, 1997:61-114; Graham, 2002:112-171; Ladd, 2014a; Wright, 2001:121-142). It will be conducted with a communal, collaborative and egalitarian disposition appropriate for situated, co-creating learning models (Costley et al, 2010:84-85; Freire, 1996:68-105; Lave and Wenger, 1991:47-58; Rogoff, 1990).

The methodological approach will be ethnographic as this is an ideal way to study a 'culture-sharing group' (Bryman, 2008:403; Creswell, 2007:68-69). The core practice is immersion in a cultural context; taking time to listen, question and observe, attending to cultural processes and culminating in an account which does justice to the voice of the participants and the researcher (Bryman, 2008:401-402; Creswell, 2007:72; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3). This supports the intention to interpret the community's development through its performance and practice.

There is a further intention of enabling the community to contribute to the interpretation through liberating its reflexive voice. Purposive sampling through interviews will sharpen the focus and move the interpretation forward. The testing and retesting of narratives will offer interrater reliability (Bryman, 2008:383, 414-415).

The movement away from positivist and naturalistic approaches to ethnology means that reflexivity now lies at the heart of the process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:18). It is assumed, therefore, that the co-creation of contextual knowledge is held in critical dialogue with the researcher's reflexivity in a way that allows for a balancing of distance in critical reflection with the practice of situated knowing. This is not the decontextualisation implied in Fowler's model of the fish escaping the tank to reflect on the water (<https://www.integrallife.com/integral-post/stages-faith> ); more like the metaphor of a 'balcony view' – implying critical distance rather than absence from the context.<sup>1</sup> (Boud et al, 1985; Le Cornu, 2006).

A core implication of this methodology is that the research process will be qualitative (Costley et al, 2010:89). This is because contextual knowing is generated by attention to personal and communal narratives that allows for the diversity, depth and complexity of the experiences being described (Costley et al. 2010:85-90).

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<sup>1</sup> A metaphor used in PMC.

## Research Methods

### (i) *Ethnography*

I will spend a year with the congregation, participating in its life as broadly as possible given the constraints of my own working life and commitments. The enactment of the role will fall closer to 'participant-as-observer' than 'observer-as-participant', intending to be more than simply interviewing whilst recognising that the scope of my participation will be time-limited (Bryman, 2008:410-11).

Because PMC is a journey of cultural and communal change, ethnography is an appropriate way to study its impact. Though verbalising narratives is an important aspect of reflection, the search for understanding is broader than cognitive expression alone. The ethnography will pay attention to performance and practice and will attend to visual and non-verbal clues. It will focus on observing the practices of the congregation and their life together and with the wider community as well as listening to their perceptions in respect of change and development. There are documents they have created on the PMC journey which will be important to study (Bryman, 2008:401-432; Creswell, 2007:68-72).

Given the relatively small scale of this project, I am negotiating a suburban evangelical context which will be relatively familiar to me, in order to reduce some of the challenge involved in learning a cultural language (Bryman, 2008:465).

One of the key issues is access; this will be negotiated carefully with gatekeepers at the beginning. The ongoing development will sometimes be a matter of good fortune, so it is imperative to stay open to the unexpected. At the same time, careful planning and building rapport with the community will facilitate opportunities and help find key informants.



A church is theoretically an open context, but privatised culture can create closed, family-style systems; the negotiation of public space is a key focus in PMC (Keifert, 1992:1-26). My intention is to be overt in my practice because I am trying to generate collaborative learning, but I will need to be alert to those who may not be aware of the role I am taking (Bryman, 2008:404).

Field notes are a significant aspect of the research process. It would be unhelpful to be seen in public with a notebook and pen, but important to write things down while they are fresh. I have a good memory, but will also need to develop a practice of making quick notes to be followed up swiftly with a full account.

There will be a natural end point for me because of the time-frame of the DPT. However, I will take care to make a good ending with the church by involving participants in reviewing my findings and by offering a presentation to the community as a whole.

### *(ii) Semi-structured Interviews*

Five and eight months into the study, I will run eight semi-structured interviews. This will allow space for people's narratives to unfold as they articulate deeper insights which may not be on the surface of their minds. This is a shared journey of construction, which involves seeing through participants' eyes but also giving them the space and time to develop their own reflective and reflexive abilities (Bryman, 2008:366-387). At the same time, it will add shape and consistency to the process which will make some level of comparison possible.

The breakdown of each group of eight interviews will be: two from amongst those who strongly influence decisions, four who come regularly but do not know each other well, and two whom the congregation would feel do not really belong but have some level of

connection: these are 'family', 'inside' and outside strangers' in PMC terms (Keifert, 1992:8-9). From their experience, Church Innovations consider that this range of interviewing provides a balanced description of the culture of the church. I also plan to interview the clergy ([http://www.churchinnovations.org/01\\_services/research\\_ethnography.html](http://www.churchinnovations.org/01_services/research_ethnography.html)).

I will develop a series of open-ended but targeted questions (Appendix 7) to explore the nature of the personal and communal journey, paying attention to the way they describe the level of their engagement and their perception of personal and communal change and development; this is an interpretative approach around the subject of maturity in community. The interviews will be coded around key themes; most of these will arise from the analysis of the data, but I will also use the theme of 'attentiveness to the other', which has emerged in my own observation and reflection during the PMC journey.

### *(iii) Feedback loop*

A focus group with the delivery team will give them the opportunity to contribute to and review the interpretation. Several of them have extensive research experience and I will ask one from each diocese to read the data alongside me to improve interrater reliability.

Participants deserve fair value for having contributed their time and their reflection to the research. Three focus groups for the interviewees will give them the opportunity to review my findings and see if what has been discovered resonates with them. This demonstrates some humility in the researcher but also prioritises the creating of a learning community.

Focus groups give the opportunity to study collective construction of meaning and allow for views to be questioned and challenged in a way that is not possible in an individual

interview; this is particularly helpful in studying communal processes, which lies at the heart of the research strategy (Bryman, 2008:473-6).

The use of multiple methods of inquiry, along with different types of group and individual research will contribute towards the validation of the research through triangulation (Creswell, 2007:204).

(iv) *Collecting the data*

*Ethnography*

I will:

- Write a letter of request to the PCC [Appendix 2]
- Keep full and detailed field notes throughout the period of the ethnographic study
- Keep a reflective journal as an aid to my own reflexivity
- Sample the wider community through structured interviews [Appendix 3]

*Semi-structured interviews and focus groups*

I will:

- Write a letter of invitation to selected individuals [Appendix 4]
- Send an information sheet and a consent form to each potential participant  
(Appendix 5 & 6)
- Create an interview guide for the interviews [Appendix 7]
- Digitally record and take summary notes during the interview and read back for approval. Having a listener record and read back gives the interviewee a chance to clarify meaning. Interpretation begins face-to-face in the 'read back'. We become

the servant of the story-teller: a self-emptying along the lines of Philippians 2.

([http://www.churchinnovations.org/01\\_services/research.html](http://www.churchinnovations.org/01_services/research.html)).

- Invite interviewees to read the completed transcription to check for veracity and offer any further reflective comments.
- Produce an interview guide based on the findings for the focus groups.

#### (v) *Data Analysis*

I will:

- Use an ongoing process of thematic analysis on my field notes during the year of ethnographic study.
- Transcribe interviews and focus groups myself – this aids deep reading of the data.
- Spend time reading the field notes and the transcriptions in order to become familiar with the material as a whole.
- Code data to identify key themes and further analyse and correlate to sharpen the focus of these themes.
- Explore emerging themes in dialogue with the psychological and biblical perspectives from the literature study and with my own reflexive engagement with the process.

#### (vi) *Trustworthiness and Authenticity*

Reliability and validity are controversial concepts in qualitative research because of the questioning of assumptions about the possibility of single descriptions of a social world (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Alternative language proposed is Trustworthiness – dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability – and Authenticity (Bryman, 2008:376-379; Creswell, 2007:201-221). The following points can be made:

### *Dependability*

Care will be taken with checking transcriptions of interviews. I will keep careful field notes throughout the ethnographic study and a research journal to ensure attention to reflexivity.

A structured approach to coding that involves constant re-checking in the light of further study of the data will serve the accuracy of the interpretation.

### *Credibility and Transferability*

'Prolonged time in the field' offers credibility to an ethnographic account (Creswell, 2009:192) and 'respondent validation' is generally viewed as bringing credibility, though the assumption that participants' view is necessarily superior needs to be handled critically (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:181-182). Participants' personal perceptions will be triangulated with the ethnographical study and with the communal perceptions of the focus groups.

My own reflexivity is an important part of the triangulation, though I will want to be alert to bias – this may be shaped by my role and the power dynamics within it as well as by my own values and assumptions. The reading of data by the delivery team will offer interrater reliability. I will be particularly alert for data that does not fit with themes that are identified.

### *Confirmability*

Whilst it would not be expected that a small-scale, focused qualitative project will provide generalisability, it is the intention that the 'thick description' of this specific context will provide data for others to work with in terms of confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

## *Authenticity*

It is anticipated that the research will meet the four categories of authenticity:

- Fairness – in the representation of participants’ perspectives
- Ontological – in helping participants grow in understanding of their context
- Educative – in helping participants understand each other’s viewpoints
- Catalytic – in supporting the transformational aspects of their corporate journey

(Bryman, 2008:379)

## *Ethical Considerations*

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### *(i) Authorisation*

Authorisation for this project will need to be two-fold; from the dioceses as represented by the Directors of Ministry and Mission, who are also members of the PMC delivery team with whom I have already discussed the project and the research question, and from the local churches through consultation with its minister but seeking formal permission from their Church Council (Appendix 2). The faculty of St John’s College are aware of my research plan and approval will need to be sought from the University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee.

### *(ii) Participants and power – issues of care and good practice*

For a church to allow a researcher to observe their life together is a risk, so it is important that I conduct myself with respect and discretion and that whatever I see and hear remains confidential to the research process, within the bounds good safeguarding

practice. I propose to discuss 'ground rules' for my participation with the church council (Appendix 2).

Participants who have been involved in PMC events will recognise me as a member of the delivery team. This may mean that they associate me with the authority structures of their diocese as half of the delivery team are diocesan officers. However, whilst I need to be aware of the power dynamics, it may be easier for the laity to be honest when interviewed by someone who is not a member of their community as compared to previous interviewing in PMC which was done by members of their own congregation.

One of the clergy is a placement supervisor and the other a former student. They may feel that I have critical knowledge of their ministry from student feedback. I will want to allay any fears that I may be critical of their practice or drawn inappropriately into church issues.

There is value in drawing on skills in the delivery team to generate interrater reliability, but the churches and particularly the clergy may perceive them as authority figures. Moreover, the team is committed to PMC and therefore I will need to ensure critical distance. I am addressing this by engaging in the ethnographic research without reference to them. Using two of them to review interview data independently will challenge bias in all of us and involving participants in reviewing the findings broadens the triangulation.

Interviews can be experienced as hierarchical (Costley et al, 2010:42); I will mitigate this by the practice of reading back to interviewees and sending them a transcript to give them the opportunity to question and re-shape what I think I have heard. This will be extended by the opportunity to feedback on the research through participating in a focus group.

Focus groups generate their own power dynamics through the potential hierarchies to be found within the groups. There may be problems with people speaking at the same time, individuals dominating or the generation of 'group speak' (Bryman 2008:488-9). I will need to attend to the process and facilitate carefully. With the delivery team, awareness of the power dynamics will be important, particularly between clergy and lay and between senior and junior diocesan officers. I will be aided in this by the fact that the team is already committed to a high level of reflexivity and reflection on group process.

It may well be a challenging experience at times for the congregation and clergy to reflect on the PMC process and it is likely to touch on experiences that have been painful or conflictual. I will have two named persons available for people for whom issues arise: one with a counselling brief and one who will offer spiritual accompaniment (See Appendices 4 & 5).

### *(iii) Reflexivity*

Creswell notes the developing 'focus on the self-reflective nature' of qualitative research since the 1990s (2007:3), something which is central to PT (Graham, 2013). It is disingenuous to pretend, in defence of a spurious objectivity, that this research is not grounded in personal experience (Muncey, 2010). Reflexivity can be an asset in understanding and interpreting the world as we encounter it (Etherington, 2004:15-24). The growing literature on 'work-based' or 'insider' research recognises the unique opportunities for those who have experience of what they research in terms of access, prior knowledge and the opportunity to make an impact on the development of the organisation (Costley et al, 2010:1-7).



Nevertheless, there are pitfalls in reflexive research not least in terms of issues of partiality, power, bias and lack of transparency of intent, which means that there are ethical issues to be addressed (Costley et al, 2010:25-35).

Notably:

- My personal involvement and investment in PMC: 'insider' knowledge may be helpful in articulating the questions and interpreting the context, but care needs to be taken to avoid simply finding what I am looking for (Costley et al, 2010:6). The use of a research journal will be of importance in maintaining robust reflexivity.
- A collaborative approach requires that I should not be a 'covert' observer (Bryman, 2008:403-406). However, because of my commitment to liberating people's voices, I will need to be aware of the risk of 'going native' (Bryman, 2008:409-412).
- Ethnographic approaches encourage the identification of key informants. Care will need to be taken not to become over reliant on a small number of gatekeepers.
- There is a balance to be kept between active and passive participation. I want to avoid being merely an observer, but I must take care as an experienced minister not to be drawn into inappropriate pastoral roles.
- 'Insider-researchers' may form relationships that lead to confidences over which people are later regretful (Costley et al, 2010:41-2).
- Constantly changing roles throughout this process – observer, participant, interviewer, facilitator and researcher: I will need clarity about the interplay of these roles for myself and for participants in order to avoid manipulation or confusion.
- I need to be aware of the nature of my positional and personal power as an ordained person and member of the PMC delivery team. This can be mitigated by, for

example, conducting interviews in places where participants will feel safe and comfortable.

- Focus on community formation and maturity; the Church of England is more anxious about numbers than quality at the present time, so care will be taken not to skew the findings through unconsciously adjusting for this.

I intend to construct my research with these issues in the foreground; accurate and ethical research needs the exercise strong critical self-awareness to ensure good levels of reflexivity. Careful analytical work with field notes and transcriptions as well as consistent reflective journaling will support this. I will draw on the support of my supervisor, seek peer review from my DPT cohort and reflect with my spiritual director throughout the project.

*(iv) Consent, withdrawal and confidentiality*

Clergy and the church council members are obvious gatekeepers and their help will be sought in the first instance. But others may prove to be 'key informants' – particularly for access to the wider community. I will take the same consultative approach for finding the relevant people to interview, but will also rely on my own contacts as they develop through participation in the community.

I will issue invitations to take part and send a detailed information sheet explaining the research with a consent form to those who express interest. I will include the opportunity to withdraw at any point but will seek permission to use data that has already been produced (Appendices 4, 5 & 6).

I will protect confidentiality in respect of my participation and observation of the community – both within and beyond the church and apply the same to interviews and focus groups. I will ask those who participate in focus groups to keep confidentiality.

Participants and the church itself will be anonymised in field notes, transcripts, dissertation and any subsequent writing arising from this research. Pseudonyms will be used where names are necessary. I will take care to avoid anything that might give clues to particular people, to the church or to roles within PMC.

(v) *Data management*

Interviews and focus groups will be recorded. Data will be stored securely and electronic recordings and transcripts will be password protected on computer. However, people have the legal right to see any information held about them and I will also need their permission to give access to recordings to my supervisor. Audio material will be deleted at the end of the project, but I will seek permission to retain transcripts for a further five years in support of future research.

(vi) *Benefits for the church and individual participants*

The church has made a significant commitment to PMC, probably passing through challenging and, at times, unnerving experiences. I am confident that this journey matters to them and that they will be interested in the research. Because I intend to work collaboratively with them, I anticipate that sharing in creating the research and offering their learning to others will make it a good investment of their time.

The interviews will give participants the opportunity to reflect on their spiritual journey, which will contribute to their personal development and to the church's mission.

Two Church of England dioceses are already deeply invested in the PMC process and two more will begin in September 2015. Present leaders of the process will be interested in the outcome of a research process. Moreover, developing a UK research base is important for analysing the impact of PMC and to justify investment from the national church.

## *Research Plan*

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| <b>Date</b>             | <b>Research Plan</b>                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Summer 2015             | Ethical review process<br><br>Recruitment of participating church and delivery team                                               |
| September-December 2015 | Begin ethnographical study<br><br>Pilot interview questions<br><br>Recruit people for first group of interviews                   |
| January-March 2016      | Continue ethnographic study<br><br>First group of semi-structured interviews<br><br>Recruit people for second group of interviews |
| April-September 2016    | Continue ethnographic study<br><br>Transcribe interviews<br><br>Second group of semi-structured interviews                        |
| September-December 2016 | Transcribe interviews<br><br>Analyse data (though this will have been ongoing through the study)                                  |
| January 2017            | Focus group with Delivery Team<br><br>Focus groups with church                                                                    |
| February-April 2017     | Transcribe focus groups<br><br>Analyse data from focus groups                                                                     |

# *Statement of Resources*

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## *Finances*

- If I am unable to borrow appropriate recording equipment, I will have to purchase it.
- To ensure counselling or spiritual accompaniment for participants where necessary may require payment. I would aim to secure £500 of support through grants.

## *Time*

- During autumn 2015, I have few lectures to give, which will give extra space for starting the ethnographical study.
- Time will be allocated within my work programme to allow me to do the ethnographical study and the interviewing.
- I am due for a sabbatical between Christmas and Easter in 2017, which will be useful for data analysis work.

## *Skills*

- Help with recording technology can be sought from work colleagues.
- Support with social research skills will be useful either informally or through taking a short course.
- Learning about cultural anthropology will be necessary

## *Potential Research Outcomes*

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The collaborative and situated approach to reflective learning will be developmental and empowering to the church congregation involved, facilitating a greater degree of lay responsibility for and ownership of knowledge. This will make a contribution to the democratisation of knowledge for the wider Church that urgently needs to become less dependent upon clergy. I will write material accessible to practitioners and laity on the learning about communal maturity arising from this research.

At the same time, there will be learning about priorities and practices for ministerial training and formation at a time when the Church of England is sponsoring a major review of the efficacy of theological education. I have already published on this subject (Ladd, 2014b) and will expect to write more as well as contribute to the planning of a new regional 'situated learning pathway' for ordination training.

The Church of England regionally has committed significant time and resource to PMC over the last three years. This research will be of value to the delivery team as it reviews the experience of PMC and to the senior leadership as it reviews its effectiveness. This will dovetail with national decisions concerning the funding of PMC. I will feed back to colleagues on the delivery team and write reports for consideration at regional and national level in the Church of England. I would also anticipate that this small scale research piece will raise ideas and questions worthy of further focused qualitative and quantitative research to be sponsored by the church in the future. It may also provide a model for researchers to evaluate other churches, whether within the PMC process or not.

The approach to intersubjectivity and learning to listen to the distinctive voice of Scripture in correlative work will be a uniquely evangelical approach to PT. I have already

given papers on this at the BIAPT symposium on the Bible in PT in May, 2013 and at BIAPT and DPT summer school in July 2014. I will expect to do further conference work and write academic papers from this research. It will also be made available at a more accessible level to practitioners and lay people through writing and course material.

The DPT programme values professional development and I anticipate that this will help my own practice to grow in relation to my developing role in PMC, my involvement in training ordinands for the Church of England and in the light of my imminent return to parish ministry.

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## Appendix 32 – Paper for IRC Conference, Pittsburgh, June 2017

### The Cinderella Practice: Observations and Questions about the Diffusion of the Practice of ‘Announcing the Kingdom’ – an Ethnographical Study of an Anglican Congregation and Parish in the Fourth and Fifth Years of their Partnership for Missional Church Journey (Slide 1)

#### 1. Introduction – The genesis of my research

These are early days for me in the analysis of my research and I appreciate the opportunity to put some of it ‘out there’ and see how you respond. This is one angle on or one view of a journey outward to the community through the spiritual practices – particularly of Dwelling in the Word, Dwelling in the World and Hospitality. It is based around my curiosity and puzzlement about the apparent absence of one spiritual practice – Announcing the Kingdom – which on paper seems so appropriate for the journey which this church has been on.

I have always been interested in how church communities grow and develop and how they foster or inhibit personal maturity [bit of background on 30+ years of ministry] – this is what I decided to study for the thesis part of my Doctorate in Practical Theology. My involvement with Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) began in 2012, two years before I was required to write my research proposal. As I was drawn more deeply onto the PMC journey, it began to occur to me that a church that had deliberately chosen to enter a process of spiritual formation would be one where the experience of communal and personal development and growth might be central to its journey so I decided to choose a PMC church in which to base myself and use the following research question:

*What are people’s understanding of their experience of change and development when their church journeys with the Partnership for Missional Church process? What light might this shed on issues of maturity through community? (Slide 2)*

Initially, I wondered about doing a comparative study of three churches in the PMC process, but it soon became clear to me, partly influenced by my reading of Hopewell<sup>2</sup>, that what I wanted to do was an in-depth theological-ethnographical study of one congregation – to tell the story of their journey of transformation through PMC and reflect on the issues of maturity and development that this surfaced. I did not want to compare churches and create a league table rather I wanted to dig deep into one journey to see what themes and questions might emerge for further study in the future.

#### 2. PMC – some background

I am given to understand that not everyone present will have a working knowledge of PMC, so forgive me those who do if I give a bit of an explanation – you can critique it later!

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<sup>2</sup> Hopewell, J. F. (1987). *Congregation: Stories and Structures*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press.

PMC is a communal process of spiritual accompaniment to enable cultural transformation of congregations into mission. It starts with a number of assumptions:

- God is present and active in God's world for good – to care for and heal God's creation (**Genesis 1 and 2 and onward**).
- Human beings were created to partner with God in this transformational work and will find their true fulfilment and meaning as they discover this vocation personally and in community (**Genesis 2 and Genesis 12.1-3**).<sup>3</sup>
- God has a preferred and promised future for the church: promised, because the coming of God's future kingdom is guaranteed through the Resurrection of Jesus; preferred because it involves each congregation making a choice as to whether it wants to partner in God's mission or choose to be a 'burial society'. Though God's purpose is ultimately assured, the call for each congregation is not irresistible and involves a decision to follow the way of the Cross. So the journey is very much one of being formed in Christ – crucified and risen (**Philippians 3.10-11**).
- The church's challenge through listening and theological reflection is to discern the people and places where God is at work, resourcing his mission through partnership; the focus of energy is a sign of the Spirit's prompting and the discovery of people who want to make a difference in God's world (**Philippians 2.1-11**).
- We are in a time of major cultural change in the West where time-honoured approaches to mission and evangelism will no longer work. Congregations need to discover new approaches by experimenting with adaptive challenges – missional action which involves them in personal change in partnership with others rather than delivering programmes to and for others where the others do all the changing.<sup>4</sup>
- Engagement in missional experimentations cannot simply be taught or programmed but rather takes place through a process of 'diffusion' in which people gradually take on the new approach usually through the influence of their peers beginning to practice it.<sup>5</sup> A journey which is the mission – rather than reaching the mission at the end of the journey (**Slide 3**)

This process of missional experimentation is different and risky, not least in how it asks congregations to learn to inhabit public, civic space when everything in modern culture has served to privatise religious belief and practice. For this and other reasons the missional experimentation is grounded and formed through a series of what are described as 'disruptive missional practices'. Each of these practices in its own right and in relation to the others, helps to create the dispositions involved in reaching out and partnering with others (within and beyond the congregation) in kingdom-shaped missional experiments which, through a process of risk, failure and adoption begins to shape the missional vocation and character of the congregation.

Here is a brief summary of the practices: (**slide 4**)

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<sup>3</sup> This has strong resonance with Wright, C. J. H. (2006). *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> The thinking about adaptive change has been drawn from Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

<sup>5</sup> The key influence here is Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovation*. 5<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition. London: Simon & Schuster.

- Dwelling in the Word (DitW) (slide 4a): a practice of attending to Scripture through listening to and giving voice to the thoughts of others first by listening in twos and then by sharing your partner's insight with two others and so on as time allows. This is in some ways the foundational practice for PMC: it contains a challenge to accumulation approaches to knowledge and the voices of experts practising with the assumption that God can engage with anyone through the chosen passage. Moreover, by encouraging people from the start to find 'a friendly-looking stranger' (there are strangers in church!) it inculcates the idea of moving out towards the 'other who is different from ourselves.' By using a passage for a year at a time it challenges the idea that knowledge is about gathering information and moving on but rather it involves encountering God through Scripture, again and again, until we begin to be 'read' by Scripture rather than the other way round: that is to say our perception of and engagement with the world begins to be shaped by the biblical narrative not simply the dominant messages of our culture. A further challenge with DitW lies later in the process where congregations are encouraged to practice it with 'bridge communities' in mission that they form with their partners so that the kingdom work they do does not become simply well-meaning social activity.
- Spiritual discernment (slide 4b) – communal and personal: a lot of weight is placed on looking for and discerning the activity of God in the church and the wider community (being 'detectives of divinity') and this practice is encouraged in order both to help the congregation make decisions about its missional experiments and also to learn to attentive to the presence and activity of God around them everywhere – not simply in the church. It encourages the congregation to take responsibility and become theologically reflective.
- Dwelling in the World (DitWorld) (slide 4c) is a practice in which people learn to be open to the presence and activity of God in the wider community looking for those people who might be 'people of peace' – people of good will – and perhaps partners who will join with us in a shared experiment. This is a completely different way of engaging with God's world than the normal 'come to us' or even some 'go to' models.
- Hospitality (slide 4d): more familiar to us, except that it is expected that the practice will be about receiving as well as giving hospitality as one of the key learnings in contemporary missiology is about how to be guests on other people's territory, rather than assuming that they must always come to us.<sup>6</sup>
- It is easy to see how all the above practices work together in creating community for mission. However, the missional communities created are a mixture of those who actively follow Christ and those who do not. Might we not expect that God will be at work not simply in the shared task but also personally in those who are taking part? Just as the congregation is encouraged to discern the presence and activity of God when seeking partners, why should they not learn to notice and name the presence and activity of God as they share life with their partners in the wider community? This is the practice called 'Announcing the Kingdom' (slide 4e) – sometimes referred to as PMC's version of evangelism, which is potentially

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<sup>6</sup> This was of course discerned and practiced long ago by Donovan, V. J. (2001). *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai*. London: SCM.

misleading. Bearing witness may involve sharing something which we have seen and experienced – as the apostles were called to bear witness to the resurrection. But bearing witness may also be about naming what we see God doing ahead of us sharing the gospel. We are used to understanding witness in terms of sharing with others what we have discovered and we assume that this is what Scripture says in all places. But when we look for it, we can see countless examples of people bearing witness to God’s activity: Jesus does it frequently when he commends people’s faith or talks about people being ‘not far from the Kingdom of God’. Similarly, Peter has a similar experience with Cornelius and Paul with Lydia. Scripture is littered with examples of God’s work ahead of us to which we are called to witness; indeed, John’s gospel speaks of the witness of the Spirit as the precursor to the disciples’ testimony (15.26-27). This is not to say that there is no need for the invitation to as well as the announcement of the kingdom.

- The final practice, Focus for Missional Action (slide 4f), comes in the last year of the three year process and aims to help the congregation to be clear about its missional vocation. This is when the church begins to make plans to keep on course to be the kind of missional church that it has been transforming into during the process – to choose the God-given vocation rather than simply to do everything that seems good and comes to hand. The church creates five working documents including a short vision statement and a three-year ‘long-range plan’ to focus its missional life. This is not planning the future that is still to come – as in most vision work – but planning to stay on course with the vocation that the church has discerned on the PMC process.

### 3. The research journey so far: the formation of a question

Discussions with the church leadership in September 2015 revealed that they felt they had a journey that they wanted to tell and were keen to welcome me despite my warnings about what I might discover along the way.

They were interested in what [my research] might do for them, but also what it might do for others. There was a sense that they were at the beginning of a process – for themselves and the wider church; that they were in the ‘vanguard’ and that’s the first time that this had been the case.

(14.09.15 – Meeting with Leaders to discuss my proposal, Field Notes [FN]:7)

(Slide 5)

I have been involved with the congregation as a participant observer (probably with slightly greater emphasis on observer) since November 2015. I have been to a good number of all church services (including a Christmas Day service) – always attending coffee after the 10.30 service; I have been to a range of meetings – quite a few related to the ongoing development of the long-range plans, communal discernment, a discipleship course, home groups, AGMs – including one that reflects annually on the journey, leadership meetings of various kinds, social events, community events, Community Group meeting. I went to a series on meetings about setting up new small groups focused on the practices and seeking to encourage welcome and multiplication – this is a key aspect of year 2 of the long-range

plan; I also walked the whole parish on one Saturday. I have had lots of informal one-to-one conversations with church and community members. I have done focus groups with nearly all of the home groups and with members of the 8.00am service. I have also done a focus group with some in the 18-30s bracket, who have been noticeably under represented at most of the events and activities that I have attended. I have also conducted one-to-one interviews with a range of people – age, gender, level of connection with the church and with varied responses to PMC. In the interviews and focus groups, I have given people the opportunity to explore their own journeys of personal and communal growth and development and to explore the impact of the PMC process upon this. I have done random community interviewing around the parish and some more focused community interviewing, some one-to-one but also through posting a survey on the Community Group face-book page. I wanted to test the church's perception that they have been engaging much more deeply with their community. As I approach the end of my time with the church, I plan to offer a focus group in July to test some of my findings and a more formal presentation to the church in the autumn.

There are some things I have decided not to do. I wanted my focus to be with adults so I have not done any work with under 18s – although I see their engagement on Sundays and I have been to a youth leaders' meeting. There is also a congregation that meets once a month in a community centre in a different part of the parish. It does not seem to get much focus from the PMC process so I decided not to add this to my load. There are some other groups I have heard about in the course of my research which I have not been to (groups for the elderly, toddler group, hall management group, finance and fabric group), though I have heard people speak about them, but I felt I had to draw the line somewhere.

I consider that this has given me a considerable opportunity to gain insight into the life of this congregation – through observation, participation and listening. In terms of the spiritual practices, what I have noticed is considerable engagement, both positively and negatively, with DitW; genuine understanding and some practice of DitWorld and Hospitality; practice of discernment, corporately and individually; there is even a good grasp of the five documents amongst the leadership, a good sense of the vision and long-term plans in the congregation and even some growing use, with much encouragement, of SMART plans as a vehicle for spiritual discernment.

In the context of this level of diffusion of the practices, albeit with a very wide range of adoption, it is remarkable how silent the church is on the practice of Announcing the Kingdom – I am not sure I have even heard the phrase used. This is not to say that there is no evidence of the practice – though it is very hard to come by – but I find it fascinating how little role this practice appears to play.

This observation has really stimulated my curiosity and it was with this in mind that I came up with the title: Cinderella Practice – left behind and not invited to the Ball! I decided to trawl my notes and transcripts more fully to explore this question and offer my reflections to the conference.

So I want to narrate the church's journey outwards – the perception and the reality – community engagement, dwelling in the world and sharing faith. In the context of this

journey, I want to explore what appears to be the absence of a practice which would help them do something which appears to be important to them and offer some real opportunity to engage spiritually with their community.

Whatever I say in this paper is only in the manner of observations and questions. I would not dream to draw huge conclusions at this stage in my analysis or with only one church in my sample. However, it may offer more than straws in the wind; there may be resonance with your experience. I would like to offer some theological and cultural reflections on my analysis and make some suggestions for future research.

#### **4. Discovering our community – leaving the castle; becoming the tree with branches that welcome the world**

Broadly speaking, the congregation is enthralled and excited by what it perceives to be its new-found openness to and connection with the community.

‘if you had asked us at the beginning to find someone to talk to in the community we would have found it really difficult, but now we are falling over them.’

(14.09.15 – Meeting with Leaders to discuss my proposal, FN:7) (slide 6)

There is a sense of being released to be what they have always wanted to be – an integral part of the community.

I mean, right at the beginning, uh, you know, I think what they discerned, did they not, that our church was a bit like a sort of fort. People are going in ... You know, we're like a fortress mentality, and we didn't, uh, you know, sort of relate terribly well to those outside, as it were, that there was a little bit of, had been in the past, a sort of "them" and "us" between, you know, the church and community, and, uh, now, we are having so many ...

H at Focus Group [FG] 1, 10 (slide 7)

They have been struck by the metaphor of the fortress or castle that was offered to them in the interpretation of questionnaires that they completed at the beginning of PMC. I have heard this so often that I have toyed with the idea of the story of Sleeping Beauty as a metaphor for their journey – the hedge is broken through and the princess is awakened to new life. Though a few might see it more as Hansel and Gretel – being lured unwittingly into danger and possible death.

By contrast they have been envisioned by the vision of the mustard seed growing to a tree that shelters birds of every kind.

‘The parable of the mustard seed has come forward again; followed us over the last few years. Picture of different kinds of birds in same tree [picture on screen]; not just one type of person – all kinds. This is the tree we are called to grow in this place; the tree we are nurturing when we urge you to share life – the fruit we are looking towards. It is the church as a place of belonging,



security, love in which there is room to roost; the tree God has planted in our midst. It is a challenge? – yes; will it happen overnight? – no. Will you join with me? No longer a castle surrounded by a moat with the drawbridge up, but a tree in which every bird can find a place to roost’.

A at the AGM, 30.04.17, FN:172-173

However, my experience of interviewing the home groups complicated this picture. I asked myself where is the new thing happening because I am not sure I am seeing it in the house groups? As I spent time listening to the groups, I have felt an awareness of change, something is happening but it feels like it is ‘over there.’ I formed a question to clarify this. Is the transformational journey something they are:

- Watching (with approval/good will)
- Participating in
- Resisting
- Ignoring or oblivious of

All of these are responses that I have met. However, as far as the house groups are concerned, I have drawn the conclusion I am getting an interesting but slightly detached encounter with PMC because the house groups are support-focused rather than risk-focused, inward rather than outward. They are the key mode of close community but, as with most churches, they seem to be the most extreme formed of privatised community in the church – the ultimate bounded set. I am discovering individuals who have been on a developmental journey with PMC within the house groups, but the groups themselves (organisationally) are either resistant/hostile or benignly but inactively supportive. Individuals do not seem to be too keen to come ‘out of the woodwork’ in respect of their PMC experience when they are in the home group context – though some do.

Further to this, there are some who have found the emphasis on connecting with the ‘other’ disabling to their personal faith journey. It is hard to convey on paper the hesitancy and bewilderment of this contribution. There were long pauses and struggle to articulate the words. I felt this was a person in pain.

You know, the, the talk about, erm, trying to connect with other people and get them involved and all that kind of thing, the sort of active, erm, the active, erm, movement to look outward... Obviously, I understand why that was there on the intellectual basis but, er, at the place I was in it was quite a daunting thing – because I didn’t feel I was, really, settled and secure enough in my faith and belief to go out there and do what they were aspiring to. Because I was, very much, erm, I felt myself very much to be a beginner in this new found... Yeah, erm, faith and still quite, erm, unsure and feeling my way, tentative, baby steps in, in it.

Interview with E:11-12<sup>7</sup> (slide 8)

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<sup>7</sup> This interview cuts to the heart of the question of knowledge – how we learn and how knowledge grows. This correspondent, along with a good number of others in the church who struggle with DitW, sees knowledge as something that is imparted through groups in which she can draw on expertise. She believes her knowledge base is not secure enough for her to be able engage her new-found faith (2 years when PMC started) with others who may not share it. She is not confident and feels exposed by the process. This is an important interpretative point for another occasion.

There are also those who are clearly hostile to the PMC process and challenge the claim that it has connected the church more with the community.

‘... we withdrew from community engagement for three years in order to do community engagement – it makes no sense to me.’

TTT in conversation over coffee after church, FN:140-141

TTT was sceptical about the level of community involvement from the congregation citing the lack of church members at the recent planting of a community orchard. He felt that community engagement in the past was more extensive and effective, giving the example of the now discontinued Holiday Club.<sup>8</sup>

Generally, there is a sense of a new spirit of co-operation and connection with the community and this is certainly backed up by the more community-minded amongst local residents.

It’s very different to anything I’ve experienced before in 45 years. I’ve never seen a church so actively involved in creating a sense of belonging without having to be religious – left to choose to believe. Believing in community – God working in community – rather than having to be a believer.

Community Interview with AAA, 24.01.17 (slide 9)

## 5. Who’s dwelling in the world?

Is the enthusiasm for a new-found engagement with the community matched by genuine participation from the congregation – or sharing of life, as their vision articulates it?

A number of the congregation pay tribute to how much the engagement with people in the community is led and modelled by the vicar. There is genuine acknowledgement that he is the key player in this.

I hope it’s because it is the, sort of, community and church involvement. Erm, and yeah, I, I, but once again, I think [the vicar] has done the majority of the work on that, you know, some, some of us haven’t really been in the first phase, but, but they’re looking to support the second phase, and once people, once people are coming in.

Interview with NN:47. (slide 10)

By ‘first phase’ he means the initial contact; the second phase is about welcoming people once they come to church. This is something that is mentioned by a number of people

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<sup>8</sup> The memory of the Holiday Club and what it stood for is a significant symbol, almost totemic, for some and yet I am surprised but the lack of overt conflict when it was discontinued. It testifies to a completely different vision of mission (Christendom and attractional) and missional leadership espoused by the previous vicar, whose ‘baby’ this was; maybe, despite the huge input to this it was never truly owned by the congregation – or most of those who owned it have left. I have picked up differences on this, but no major conflict – but they do say they do not really do conflict. Just discovered how important it was to the 18s -30s.

and it is borne out by responses from the community. In response to the question, 'How would you describe the church's relationship with this community' one community member replied:

Brilliant, excellent; I don't think I've ever come across anywhere where the link is so close. Because [the vicar] is such a warm, open, jovial guy and he doesn't push it in your face; he teases and we have a good laugh. He is supportive and helpful, open to anyone – non-judgemental. They do a lot to encourage and they're inclusive. It's a good church that does a huge amount for the community and it's a huge benefit for the community. I appreciate the openness of approach of [the vicar and his wife] – very caring and very funny.  
Interview with PPPP, 16.03.17 (slide 11)

The vicar himself comments on how much more at ease he is in the community than in the church and how it is the opposite for his congregation.

Despite this growing passion for partnership, [the vicar] talked about how difficult they found to do one-to-ones: 'the risk of going out to somebody and having a conversation; why would they want to talk to us? And then wanting to have the conversation scripted and, of course, that's impossible because they have the other half of the script!' For [the vicar] that's the easy thing – getting out and relating to the community; finding partners in the community is what he does best, his greatest fear is with the church. 'I don't fear that they will attack me, they're too polite for that; but they'll vote with their feet and not come.'

FN:26

So how far is this a transformative process or just another vicar doing what comes naturally?

Nevertheless, there is strong evidence of congregational involvement in DitWorld:

- There are several members of the church on the Community Group working with other residents to build community
- The Hall Hire Committee is a mixture of church and community and working with a vision to make the halls a facility for the whole community.
- The Fabric group are experimenting with partnering with the community on practical tasks
- Some established groups, like Toddlers and the Luncheon Club are developing stronger aspects of partnership in activities that have traditionally been put on 'for' people.
- And there's more...

## 6. What's happened to evangelism?

Those who mention evangelism mention a new perspective or a sense of relief that they are not pressed to do evangelism nor feeling responsible for failing to do what seems to be an unnatural and alien task.

#### Embarrassment:

But I think it has given people a lot of confidence because instead of talking about evangelism, you know, where people just thought, you know, felt burdened. "Oh, I've got to try and find somebody-" "Who I can invite to the quiz or whatever." You know? And it's actually a quiz which is going to- you know, every tenth question is going to refer to Jesus and how am I going to, you know, how am I going to- am I going to feel comfortable with Steve from work if it's absolutely horrendous... And, and things like that and it's just so artificial. And whenever you're asking someone to do something that's artificial it's going to be fake and then you're gonna come across as fake and the event is going to be fake.

Interview with TT:25-28 (slide 12)

I think I will use the fast show sketch about evangelism here: British Christians' greatest fear! [Fast Show Clip – S02E02 – 3.25-3.41 – You Tube](#)

#### Partnership:

I think, previously, there was a bit of a sense that the church and the world beyond the church were a bit polarised. I think we have begun to see the wider community, not so much as people who we need to evangelise, but people who we need to be partners with.

J at FG4:53 (slide 13)

#### Responsibility:

When we started to do Dwelling in the Word, there was a point at which there was a little bit of a, I can't remember in what capacity it was now, but there was a switch for me, I, I felt very loaded with this need for evangelism at one point, and needing to, when we started talking about relationships with the community, that we needed to get out there, and start making new relationships and new friends. And there was one passage that we looked at, and I suddenly realised that actually, that the conversion role is God's, and that I can place that responsibility with him, and that I then will only do what God wants me to do, you know, within my, you know, within my gifts.

FF at Huddle FG:81

And yet, this is not a church that is disinterested in sharing its faith nor are its leaders. But it is interesting that the default mode for the leadership when moving towards the question of sharing is still the idea of our responsibility to impart something to others.

Sermon in which we were encouraged to pledge to pray for five people every day and for the opportunity to share our stories of what God has done in our lives and how he has brought us through times of trouble (FN:173).

They have also been following an interesting initiative offering the opportunity to people to explore a different kind of small group – not based around learning/teaching but around spiritual practices, not based simply upon inward looking support but on encouraging openness to the other and committed to multiplication. This is one strand of second year of the long-range plan which focuses on ‘developing new relationships.’ Between fifteen and twenty-five people came on six evenings in Lent out of which three new small groups have been created involving around twenty people in all. It is a bold experiment and seems to have some real energy for a significant group within the congregation.

In the early meetings we spent a significant time on DitWorld and building a picture of our circles of relationship. What struck me was that we were being encouraged to be open and attentive to the presence and activity of God in our everyday life and responsive to who God was bringing across our path but still the focus was on some kind of personal evangelism; building relationship in such a way as to make such opportunities natural and possible. It generated some predictable anxieties and generates familiar responses.

On the first evening my group shared the following reflections:

H: My task (she meant over the years) has been helping people grow in faith [meaning not evangelism. To explain why some can do this and others can't she illustrated it from golf] Some people find it relaxing, leaving everything behind, others stress over the next shot. Some find this rewarding others stress; it's a personality thing.

L: I became a Christian a few years ago and we had lots of non-Christian friends. Now my circles of friendship are narrower and more Christians. I didn't have many circles – family, one or two friends and then halt; not much outward movement.

NN: I put myself at the centre as the most important development is me. Then I have friendship circles – people on a ride with faith, people move in and out on the rings – fluidity. It's about noticing where the proximity is. Are we consistent – the same person in each of the circles? True to ourselves and God – or do they see a different person?

FN:151 (slide 14)

On the second evening, we shared where we had encountered God with people. CCCC talked about God providing for her this week. AAAA and H were encouraged, but I noticed how little one-to-one encounters there were which people considered of spiritual significance – at least enough to mention; including me (FN:154).

It seemed to me that both in the sermons and during the meetings about new small groups, there was a wonderful opportunity to explore the practice of ‘announcing the kingdom’ – learning how to discern the activity of God in others and to name

what God seems to be doing in their lives. But the practice remains unmentioned. Does this mean that no-one is doing it?

## 7. Where is 'Announcing the Kingdom'?

I wanted to get a feel from the community as to whether people were aware of the church and what assessment they would make of its impact in their lives. I haven't yet had time to do a lot detailed analysis on the surveys, but there are some interesting things.

First, I did a piece of random surveying (24 face-to-face surveys) on a Saturday in September last year in the four areas of the parish and the results were perhaps unsurprising. Most people had no knowledge of the church and it had no impact on their lives – except for people who went to church elsewhere and they exuded a sense of general goodwill towards the church.

I then did some one-to-one surveys with some of the Community Group (committee) and posted my survey on the group's Facebook page – I have in the region of 70 responses. There are around 1600 members of the Facebook group, but it is not used on a regular basis by this sort of numbers. I am not looking for statistical sample here, more drawing out some opinions and impressions. Some of the key questions elicited some interesting responses.

- Nearly all respondents knew of the church and where it is. There is an anxiety in the church about people being unaware of them because they are hidden away down a side road; clearly not the case (all 60)

- *What contact have you had with St X over the years?* (all 60)

Generated the responses you might expect: connections through children's groups and schools; worship at festivals, occasional offices, some members and ex-members

- *Can you give examples of anything the church has done in or with the community over the last four or five years?* (55/60)

Very full picture of the range of things that the church either sponsors or partners in the community

- *How would you describe the church's relationship with the community?* (58/60)

The responses were extremely positive with many offering a sense that the relationship was growing and developing

- *Can you think of any way that the church's relationship with the community has changed over the last four or five years?* (51/60)

A number of people had no answer for this; those who did were generally positive, mentioning greater informality, welcome and the church coming to the community. A number of people spoke about how they appreciated the vicar.

I finished the survey with two statements for agree/disagree about church and faith.

- *Recent experience of St X has made me more likely to come to church* (scale: 58/60; comment: 48/60)

There was a more or less 50/50 split on coming to church. Those who disagreed tended to offer more generic answers – ‘I don’t do church’. Those who agreed appreciated the community engagement of the church and some spoke of how this had awakened their interest in attending the church.

- *Recent experience of St X has made me think more about questions of faith* (scale: 57/60; comment: 38/60)

There was a very high level of people saying they strongly disagreed with this statement (42%). Many of them didn’t offer a comment, though judging from those who did, once again the reasons were broadly generic – ‘I’m an atheist’ or their sense of faith does not require a church. Those who expressed positive responses spoke of the community engagement of the church, services that had helped and conversations with the vicar; one or two had come into the church recently.

75% of my respondents were female

Broad age spread – though 70% in 31-64 brackets

81% from the area in which church is based; 7% from two other areas; 11% other areas

There are some pointers here that those who are closely involved with the community recognise and value the church’s involvement and see it as changing and developing in a good way. For some this is generating a review of the role the church might play in their lives and some reassessment of the place of faith. This should not be overstated and it should also be noted that the influence predominates in the area closest to the church and this may indicate also the people who are most active in community building.

This in itself is not evidence that the church is practising ‘announcing the kingdom’ but it does suggest that for some the church’s engagement with and partnership in the community is raising questions about faith.

*Comment: I go occasionally – I was there last Sunday. Churches used to be for weddings and funerals; now a lot of my friends go to church*

*Community Interview with AAA: 24.01.17 (slide 15)<sup>9</sup>*

*Comment: I’ve accepted faith more – it’s become another facet of my life, not the dominant. I’ve also become a Freemason – which also has a belief in a higher being. I look at my life in a compartmentalised way. 60-70 hours at*

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<sup>9</sup> Note what Rodney Stark (1997) says about the growth of the church through growing ‘attachments’: *The Rise of Christianity*. New York, NY.: HarperOne.

work – pays my bills; time in the evening with my wife after 8.00pm; weekends with the children and taking the dog for a walk; getting fit; I want to make most of work, getting fit and family. I now have another piece of the pie chart – faith; it didn't exist before; I want to have that spiritual exercise. 3-4 hours running; 1½ hours at church for spiritual experience.

Community Interview with AAA: 24.01.17

Another interesting insight emerged from an interview where the respondent described a number of groups where people were drawing people in from the fringes and from outside the church to work together – wardens team, toddler group, holiday activities – where people were involved not just in practical tasks but in the spiritual journey, creating a fluidity of roles in church life that some find unnerving.

Would these people naturally have done this cos of who they are or is the allowance of PMC and [the vicar's] outward looking – 'this is not going to be the vicar', this is the church, this is leading people, drawing people and working outwardly; has the PMC process helped to evolve these things?

Interview with EE:71-72 (slide 16)

Porosity and decentring

There is some evidence in the new small groups that attention to DitWorld and trying to be aware of God's presence and activity is resulting in relationships and conversations that have some real spiritual traction. One man spoke about a colleague in another firm who was in his view being unfairly treated after she resigned and being asked to repay large amounts of money which had been spent on her training. He decided to express his support on the day of her interview with HR.

Er, so I'm going to send her a text message to say that she can take it how she wishes but I'm going to be praying for her for this meeting on Monday, 'cos she was anxious about it. And she sent text message back along the lines of, "Well, that's really thoughtful," you know? (Laughter) Fair enough, that's fine. Not, not, "You're completely cuckoo." Erm, but you know, it was very thoughtful."

And it ended up she went to this, er- she went to this HR meeting and, and they gave her an apology for their conduct. Er, and they're, they're not going to recoup any money from her apart from the cost of- they've invested in that year's practicing certificate which is, you know, obviously, a fee you pay for the ability to practice as a- as a solicitor, which is- which is reasonable.

Interview with TT:46 (slide 17)

## 8. The 'Cinderella practice'

Here is a church that has (re-)discovered its community – or at least one significant part of it. It is learning to build relationships and partner with people and groups in the community to bless the life of the community not simply to serve its own ends; and



people notice. There is evidence that people in the wider community see a change in the church and they value the sense of inclusion and partnership. For some in the community, this is generating a re-assessment of church and faith and there is evidence of new people coming into the orbit of the church family – though is more decentred than in the past. Now this may be led strongly by the vicar with the church in support, but some in the church are going further in leading on partnerships in the community and actively looking for the activity of God in their lives and for those God is bringing across their paths.

There is a sense of liberation for some from traditional understandings of evangelism which sought what was felt to be culturally inappropriate ways to communicate the gospel to people. Others feel that traditional evangelism is not in keeping with the spirit of partnership they are developing. With a new-found sense that conversion is God's business, people are relaxing more and paying attention to 'sharing life' – building genuine relationships with people.

The church has not lost its desire to see people discover faith, but it doesn't want to impose it. So why is it that the practice of 'announcing the kingdom' has diffused so little when it seems to offer a real way in to exploring faith without imposing it on people?

I have begun to test this out a little in recent interviews which I have not yet transcribed.

One person (IS) had never heard of it and when I described it to her she felt it was intrusive and uncomfortable to be saying something about what you see of God in someone else's life.

A second person (F) was aware of it and aware that I hadn't figured in their journey very much. He equated it with evangelism – which is saw as preaching in church – and felt this wasn't his calling.

*What does it look like?*

My wife met a young woman at toddler group who was having trouble with her neighbour below and her dogs; they were noisy and they frightened her children. She was reacting extremely strongly and bad mouthing her neighbour in no uncertain terms to the council. Anne suggested a more conciliatory approach; why not meet your neighbour and invite her for coffee? The young woman came back to toddler group a few weeks later with a story to tell about a new-found friend; they are inseparable now. Anne very simply talked to her about how her actions really were God-breathed and expressed something about who God is and how God was at work in her life. As the weeks have unfolded, the church members have grown closer to both women and their families – they came to church over Easter, even joining a small exploring faith group that my wife has just started – though not coming very regularly! Anne saw the presence and activity of God in and through this young woman and she named it; something has shifted in her life and in her family. Not so hard, but brave. Speaking of God in the public space is not easy.

*Why does it matter?*

In large resource churches, a considerably higher percentage of members invite people to 'their church': they are confident about it and they want to share it. Hopefully people will then join Alpha courses and join the church. This seems a successful approach and the Church of England is endorsing it with considerable funding.

But what if, as many missiologists and practitioners believe, we are seeing the 'last gasp' of attractional churches in Western culture and that large numbers gathered around the minister's personality and gifts (as happened with the last minister at St X) tend to dissipate over time?

There is evidence that the decentring of the church that PMC encourages is happening at St X and people are beginning to form community with others of little or no faith and see where God takes them. This makes Sunday less of a 'draw' and numbers are definitely down – bad news as far as the church hierarchy is concerned. But this could be good news in terms of the laity taking responsibility for building Christian community with those outside the orbit of the church.

'Announcing the Kingdom' would be gift in these circumstances. But let's be clear – it is not an easy option. Sensitively exploring the impact of God in people's lives and expressing that in language that people can understand is not second class evangelism.

*Why is it not happening?*

- My guess would be that the minister does practice it – as I suspect it comes naturally to him; but that raises the question as to why he does not mention it. Perhaps it is happening in an unarticulated way through the dwelling in the world they are doing and the community partnerships? I don't think this is quite enough though because there is a danger it won't rise above the level of good social connections. Dwelling in the Word in Bridge Communities has not yet become a practice.
- Perhaps it is partly to do with the church's evangelical heritage and that of the ministers. When we begin to talk about 'sharing faith', however sensitively, we seem to default to the idea that it is something that we have which we must pass on to others. This is not wrong – but the biblical witness is more complex; yes Jesus and the apostles proclaim, but they also witness to what they see of God around them and in people's lives, however attenuated this may be.
- Is this diffidence to speak of God in public something very British? Or is it a mark of Western post-Christian cultures? Are we still seeking a language that will open people's imaginations rather than generate closed responses?
- I think it cuts to the heart of my interest in maturity. If the gospel teaches us to look for partners beyond the church and work with them, then does it not also encourages us to be open to the voice and presence of God in people of little, different or no apparent faith? Is there maturity in allowing people to have their

distinctive perspective and not seeing evangelism as a way of getting people to become like us? Might we not be changed by a faith journey with others and not simply impose what we already know and expect others to conform? Perhaps 'announcing the kingdom' is challenging not simply because it invites us onto other people's ground to see what God is doing but also calls us to self-differentiate in allowing people to have their own voice in their spiritual pilgrimage without compromising our own. Is this what a decentred church might look like? It is my conviction through this research process that differentiation/individuation is a sign of maturity and health. Being in an undifferentiated tribe preoccupied with a narrow view of common meaning and identity may be easier, but ultimately it will neither help people see Christ nor help them grow in that encounter – personally and communally. Peter went on a complex journey to be able to recognise the presence and activity of God in Cornelius; several chapters of Acts witness to the church trying to unravel this. And what did Annanias feel about praying for Saul's healing not simply as a penitent but as a persecutor whom God had called to be his apostle?

There is a strong driving force in the congregation (in all human beings?) to be considered 'normal' to 'fit in' and be a part of their community. I wonder whether in our post-Christian pluralist culture this desire does two things in church communities:

- Either: leads to the avoidance of embarrassing claims for fear of being seen as different, bigoted, controlling and unacceptable.
- Or: generates a tribalist invitation to be 'one of us' – where 'normal' is now measured by being part of a community that sees things in the same way

Maturity in this post-Christian secular context might involve contending for the faith through responding out of a generous understanding and empathy whilst offering an invitation to see things through different eyes in the context of a genuine meeting of different views. Sometimes 'naming' God will be a very simple act (as in Anne's story earlier), sometimes a more complex dialogue. But it seems to invite the kind of maturity that Scott talked about when he mentioned Welker's 'free self-withdrawal for the sake of the other.'

#### *How might we follow this up?*

- I want to test my findings and perhaps some of my theories with the congregation and minister. I am offering a Focus Group to do this in July
- Is there some learning here for PMC-UK?  
Is there some wider research that could be done on this in churches on the PMC process?  
Might there be a way of walking with congregations perhaps later in the process beyond the three years to see what they are doing with announcing the kingdom and whether they are diffusing this practice.  
Perhaps there is something to be said for a fuller revisiting of the practice in the three-year journey

There is nothing incompatible here with offering an invitation to God's Kingdom. This twin practice of seeing (naming) and inviting seems to be central to the ministry of Jesus and so should be for us also. In this way evangelism might become not an embarrassing imposition but an invitation to come closer to the person who people are beginning to see in their lives (John 1:35-50: come and see; I saw you; the key thing is 'seeing' and being 'seen' by Jesus – something we can share, but do not control).

## Appendix 33 – Paper given to the IRC Conference, Zurich, June 2018

The interplay of personal and communal in the story of growth – the way in which a communal ‘vehicle’ inhibits or supports personal and communal growth (slide 1)

### My research journey (slide 2)

For those who weren't here last year (or don't remember what I said!!), from November 2015-July 2017, I travelled an ethnographical research journey with a church in England that was following the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) process. I joined them more or less at the start of year 4 – that is to say after the formal three accompanied process had finished and they set sail on their own with the first year of their three-year long range plan that had been developed in the third year of the guided process.

I finished (or brought to an end would be a better phrase perhaps) the accompaniment of the congregation in July 2017 and there followed a fairly intensive period of analysis of the data (assisted by 7 weeks sabbatical that I was owed by my college!) During this process, I settled on a narrative analysis approach, particularly for the focus groups, because it allowed a focus on communal life and shared story and let me explore the various clues that the corporate narratives reveal. So I was interested in the shape of their life together, their relationships, the way they carried their story, who influenced whom – the dominant voices, the power and gender relationships, the tone and the feeling of what was said, use of humour and silence, how they listened, handled difference and conflict, controlling stories – not just the words. It was not always easy to detect the undercurrents because in long-standing groups people have developed communal narratives with certain boundaries, limits and shorthand and in any case they often disagree very politely and it's often easy to miss the expression of difference – and I was constantly challenged over how much I should encourage and facilitate this.

At the same time, I coded the focus groups and interviews to provide some triangulation for my more impressionistic readings and to look for correlation between themes discerned. Out of this coding, I developed categories, which I then ran with through my field notes to look again for correlation and difference. On this analytic journey, I identified eight or nine key themes, out of which I felt that I could write effectively on five of these in the space that I had available in the thesis. So I chose the ones which I felt would contribute the most to my research question.

In December 2017, I returned to the church for an evening to test run my findings in these key areas – to see how they responded to my interpretation. There were about 25 people present made up of people who were very committed to the PMC journey, some who were quite or very hostile to it and a few who were relatively new to the congregation and were interested to hear about the research. In an adult congregation that could be between 40 and 70 on a Sunday, this seemed like good representation. It was an interesting evening where they experience resonance, offered push back (especially around the theme of learning) and were generally interested and excited by what I offered.

In the spirit of James Hopewell, I tried to offer stories (myths which embody the ethos of the congregation). Lacking the classical knowledge of Hopewell, I opted for fairy stories, but in contrast to Hopewell who offered a single story, I offered two which seemed to reflect something of the conflictual and contested story of the church – which again generated both resonance and questioning. In due course, my reflections will explore the idea of whether a mark of maturity is the ability to live creatively with story and counter-story rather than feeling the need to expunge the ‘unacceptable’ story. I wonder whether such fluid and contested narration is always present in groups if we take time to hear it or whether it is the product of a period of change and transformation different to the time when Hopewell was writing. I am struck by the way the OT carries story and counter-story for example over the question of kingship in 1 Samuel 8-10 (another time of change) and the way in which Brueggemann builds this into his way of reading the OT in a liberative way.

My analytical work is still ongoing in iterative relationship to the writing that I am now doing.

### Introduction to this paper – some PMC background (slide 3)

In the Partnership for Missional Church process, planning does not come at the beginning as a way of defining the goals of the journey as in most processes and programmes. It is the part of the task of the third phase of the process in which, after two years of spiritual formation and discernment, the congregation seeks to identify its sense of missional vocation.

In this process, planning is not a way of plotting the journey before starting, rather it is a way of ensuring that the congregation remains true to the vocation that it has discerned and seeks to live ‘into’ it.

Out of the process of listening, discovering partners and missional experimentation in the first two phases, the congregation works on creating ‘documents’ that articulate its sense of missional vocation. The ‘missional vocation statement’ is a short articulation of how the congregation sees its missional calling – memorable enough for all to recall easily. The ‘vision for embodiment’ is the fruit of a process of imaginative journeying and story-telling about the proximate future – one that seeks to be concrete and specific – embodied – rather than grandiose and idealised. It focuses around the immediate future to inspire action rather than a far distant future that has no purchase in the present. Their story-telling focused a lot around a changed relationship with their local community.

St X arrived at this missional vocation statement (slide 4): ‘Sharing life with Jesus, with one another and with our communities’; abbreviated to the everyday phrase of ‘sharing life.’ A brief look at this may not reveal just how revolutionary this was for this middle-class congregation and how much it represents the fruit of a radical transformation of missional identity. The vicar explained it to me like this: ‘once upon a time people would see their missional task as inviting someone to an Alpha course. If they said “no”, job done; if they said “yes”, then over to the vicar, job done!’

Their journey in PMC led them out into their communities and to recognising that their first and ongoing calling was to build relationships - something that came back to them time and again as they ‘dwelt’ in Luke 10. This is a huge shift from a programmatic and even transactional approach to mission to a relational one in which people commit to investing in relationships with others for the long-term rather than drawing them into a programme that

remains the responsibility of the 'professionals'. Needless to say not everyone has yet made the journey to embracing this sense of vocation.

Working with the missional vocation statement and the vision for embodiment, the congregation then work on a long-range plan, which contains one broad priority each year for three years. While I was with St X, I journeyed with them for two years of this plan: year 1 – deepening relationships and year 2 – discovering new relationships. These broad foci helped them to keep true to their missional vocation, to discern and set more specific priorities and to ensure that they did not try to do too much. The PCC took responsibility for a fourth 'document' – the plan for missional formation – which they interpreted as creating a timetable through the year in which they would reflect on the outworking of the plan and try to keep the church accountable for the journey it had committed to.

This background is important to understand the focus of this paper which aims to look at the impact of 'communal vehicles' on the personal and communal development of the congregation as it unfolded with home groups/small groups during the first two years of the long-range plan.

Thesis: The interplay of the personal and communal: how communal vehicles inhibit or foster change and growth (slide 5)

This piece is based upon an insight which began to develop late on in the research process after I had spent time running focus groups with established home groups between May 2016 and June 2017 and also participated in a series of evenings during Lent 2017 exploring the possibility of creating a new form of small group.

Examining the respective journeys in the two types of group in the light of the formational process that the church had embarked upon in 2012 suggested to me the idea that for new personal insight and change to become embedded in people's lives they needed a communal 'vehicle' in which to carry and support the new identity and to be accountable to one another. But at the same time, personal change stimulated the desire and created the potential environment for an experiment in a new kind of communal gathering. So my suggestion is that growth happens when a new personal journey is embodied and embedded in an appropriate communal 'vehicle' that gives it identity and support.

What is still to be formulated is how I articulate this in respect of the concepts of change, growth and maturity.

## Researching 'home groups'

A week after my first service at St X, I went to an evening for 'small groups' the purpose of which was to explain and explore the first year of the 'long-range plan' that had been developed in the final year of the PMC process.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The long-range plan is generated through reflection on a number of key parts of the PMC process – in particular the 'missional vocation statement' and the 'vision for embodiment'. The former statement at St X is 'Sharing life with Jesus, with one another and with our communities' and the latter consists of a range of pictures and imagined possibilities of how they see their life unfolding in the immediate future. The 'long-range plan' consists of a decision to focus on one thing each year for three years in the light of the first two documents. The first year of the plan at St X was: 'deepening relationships.'

I decided to sit down with one of the smaller groups who only had three people on the table. I did sort of recognise them and then I clicked that it was D and E who I'd met on my first Sunday and M – who I should have known because he is B's wife and I knew them both previously. I scored some points by remembering E's name! E's first comment, with which D concurred, was that they were confused by the term 'small groups'. They are a home group (though I later discovered that they meet in a pub! – not in a separate room, just gathered around a table, having some drinks and opening the Bible.) And they said that at first they hadn't realised that this was a meeting for them because they did not recognise the phrase 'small group'. This was partly an explanation for why less than ½ of their group was present – though I was interested/surprised that they felt the need to explain this to me.

I reflected on this as follows: My impression at the time which I have reflected on further is that part of me thought it was disingenuous to say that they didn't understand that they were included in the category of small group but then I also wondered whether there was a communication problem here and whether A. was assuming a sense of identity amongst church small groups that does not actually exist – except in his mind/aspiration/assumption; that would be a very understandable church leader perspective. [FN:21 -23.11.15]

(Field Notes [FN]:21 – 23.11.15)

The group members' attention ebbed and flowed through the meeting. D and E hated 'dwelling in the word' but they got quite engaged with the question of 'deepening relationships' in their home group.

They talked about coming along to their group some time and I was struck by my response. I think I was a bit taken aback or surprised and caught unprepared. So I think my first reaction was a bit non-committal. Then I became conscious of my response and tried to recover saying, 'Oh yes I would like to do that.'

On reflection, I wrote, I hope that didn't put them off because it occurred to me that attending home groups could be a good way of getting to know people, seeing how they act out the faith and learning what makes them tick. 7 or 8 people per home group with 6 or 7 groups, that's most of the adult population of the church; I must be on the look-out for these invitations. I felt they were interested in growing, they were interested in what deep relationships were about, but struggled to see where to go with this process. [FN:24 – 23.11.15] I think my reticence about responding to their invitation was that when I first met them, I felt they wanted to interrogate me quite closely about what I was there for. I also recognised their critical agenda and I think that early on I was a bit over sensitive about being manipulated.

This was a serendipitous moment that led me to the decision to run some focus groups with the home groups. Between May 2016 and June 2017, I ran focus groups with five home groups and one group of 18-30s who do not meet as a group but are nevertheless very close to one another. There was one home group that I was never able to tie down to a date. At first, I was very disappointed about this, thinking I had failed in some way to gain access. Later, I discovered why I had not been able to meet them and this is a major part of the argument of this section of the story.

It occurred to me that not only could I meet a large proportion of the 'committed' adult membership in this way but would be able to see how they expressed faith in a communal session in addition to asking them as individuals. I felt that this would enrich my



plan to explore maturity through community by being able both to listen to them as individuals but also to watch and listen to how they 'performed' faith in community.

For the first two focus groups, I wrote an interview guide which invited them to tell me a bit about their group story and then to reflect on their experience of PMC and its impact on the church (Appendix 8a). After the first two groups, I reflected that focusing solely on the PMC process would not serve my research question fully as I wanted them to explore the formative impact of PMC in the light of their own developmental journeys as Christians. I decided to begin with an 'activity' which would allow them to explore questions about growth and maturity together. I chose 25 words or phrases – some traditionally associated with Christian growth and maturity some drawn more from the language of PMC and invited them to discuss together and decide their 'top ten.' I asked them to think about stories and experiences that were informing their choices and invited them to share these when they had concluded their choice. This led to the sharing of some fascinating and moving insights. From here, I moved on to questions about PMC and whether they felt this process had contributed to their personal and communal journeys of growth and development. From group to group, I developed my list of words slightly and re-shaped the later questions about PMC a little in the light of the group discussions that took place (see appendix 8d).

## 'Home group' stories

### *(a) Journey with PMC*

Each of the five home groups interviewed revealed their own narrative identity. Groups 3 and 6 were hostile and critical towards the present direction of the church. Group 3 was lively and good humoured yet felt alienated from the wider church, whereas Group 6 was quieter and more cautious with me, carefully managed by its leader. Group 5 was not hostile to the PMC journey, but felt distant from it as if it were happening 'over there.' None of them had people who were participating positively (if at all) in the PMC journey. The groups tended to back one another up on most things and it felt like they inhabited and reinforced one story which they told me in various ways through the evenings.

Groups 1 and 4 each had some members who had become deeply involved with the PMC journey personally. This generated more dialogue and difference about PMC.

Group 1 were broadly supportive of PMC and disagreements were polite and only gently conflictual – but they were there.

Group 4 was much more vocal about their disagreements with one another over PMC, but in a way that demonstrated that they knew where each was coming from and had learnt to live with it. I was intrigued by the way in which humour and stereotyping was used to ritualise and routinize their response to difference in the group. In a long discussion about the experience of dwelling in the word, one person stood out as uncomfortable with the experience and feeling that she was never listened to but rather forced to participate. In the process, she said something very interesting:

RRR: I think probably one of the reasons why I felt uncomfortable as well, as you guys all know. I don't always see a positive in maybe that bit of scripture, I want an answer to something. (slide 6)

The group did not really attend to the depth of her question here but rather used humour – talking about ‘doubting Thomas’ – and tried to smooth over the depth of disquiet and disagreement.

Generally, there was more support for PMC in these two groups, but it was hard to see any difference it had made to the group in practice.

The home groups had been invited and encouraged to make a ‘Smart Plan’<sup>2</sup> about how they were going to respond to the first year plan of ‘deepening relationships.’ The groups were left to decide and discern whether this meant within or beyond the group. In two of the groups the subject never arose; one group simply said, ‘we didn’t do it,’ because they felt they were all involved in enough [FG5:44].

One group made a plan of action which included advertising home groups more widely and talking to different people after church, which never happened, and offering to help with the next ‘Pilgrim Course’ – which they did:

For the church they thought: picking up C.’s request for help with the new Pilgrim course whilst A. is on study leave. They felt a real sense of responsibility to support C. U. had the idea that they plan to talk to people on Sunday. I thought that was a radical and disruptive challenge! U. also talked about putting up a plan in church of broadly where all the home groups are. That led them to try to work out how many groups there were and who led them. They build up quite a picture, mainly through V.’s knowledge, but they weren’t sure they had got them all [FN:35].

Another developed a plan which involved a deliberate decision to meet up with another home group and a search for a charity to support. [FG1:18]

Those that did create Smart Plans saw them more as a list of tasks rather than creating an accountable journey around deepening their relationships. Part way through interviewing the home groups, I wrote a memo to articulate what I felt I was seeing:

My reflection on my time with home groups over the autumn is this. Where is the new thing happening because I am not sure I am seeing it in the home groups? As I spent time listening to the groups, I have felt an awareness of change, something is happening but it feels like it is ‘over there.’ I formed a question to clarify this. Is the transformational journey something they are:

- Watching (with approval/good will)
- Participating in
- Resisting
- Ignoring or oblivious of (RL:15) (slide 7)

The conclusion I drew then, which remained after more group interviews was that, despite certain individuals’ level of involvement in PMC, the home group perspective was about watching, resisting or ignoring.

### *(b) Journey together*

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<sup>2</sup> Creating a ‘Smart Plan’ is understood in PMC as a spiritual practice of discernment – rather than a management tool – in which a group try to discern together God’s call to them and create an accountable plan for how they are going to respond. This is not easy to grasp in practice – it seems to take quite a time.

Whatever their views about PMC, the home groups were important to all the members. People spoke about the group as a 'comfortable space' – a safe space in which they were accepted and could be themselves.

SSSS: Um, I really like it because we've been doing it so long, I feel really comfortable with everybody. So it's easy to share in a smaller group with people that you feel you can be open and talk to. [FG3:4] (slide 8)

Home groups were a place of mutual support and pastoral care – relationships in which they have found strength and comfort in the ups and downs of life. It was a place where they belonged, a fellowship of people who would pray for each other and give counsel.

CC: And we've been able to share with each other and support and encourage each other and we've told people things that we perhaps wouldn't tell people generally. But speaking personally I think, it's been a great comfort to me when things have been difficult in different ways to know that there are people here who are supporting me and supporting DD and the others and others would hopefully say the same. [FG5:15]

Home groups were also seen as a place of learning – for growth in knowledge and understanding. Though one or two people tended to take the lead in this, others were encouraged to participate and even take a turn at leading. Home group was a safe place to try this.

TTT: Yes. As you know, learning, you have to prepare. So, not how hard it is, you just, because you have to think about it a bit more, you learn doing that. That's certainly, that's where I learn most, is actually in preparing to lead, and then in response you learn a lot in that process, and I think as we have shared that a lot more, then you see it in each of you. That learning going on, and that growing as part of that learning. [FG6:18-19] (slide 9)

A sense of identity in the group helped some to participate more easily in the wider church, though for others the home group was their only involvement with St X.

PPPPP: Yeah, but I mean, the, it's the quality of, like, when I'm going and the services and actually being invested in, in the services and in the family, and that, that I think is the important thing. Not saying that going to church, don't ever go to church 'cos I think it is good for you to go but...

EEE: But I think that's the importance of, kind of, your small groups.

PPPPP: Hmm.

EEE: You're the group that meet, erm, and do different things 'cos you're still, kind of, you're within that wider family.

PPPPP: Yeah.

EEE: Erm, but yeah, Sunday's aren't always the best place for people to be there because of other things going of [FG18-30:14-15]

*(c) What does growth and maturity mean?*

In some groups people talked very openly and movingly about their personal journeys. For many people suffering and struggle had been very important in growing in faith and they valued the supportive relationships, prayer and biblical wisdom that they had received from one another over the years. But the focus of attention tended to be on sustaining their lives with God and each other – emotional sustenance and therapeutic care from God.

GGGGG: I've been through some really tough times. And if it wasn't for these guys, I probably wouldn't be here today. It was so tough and if it wasn't for when I found friends within this group, and they've supported me and they've helped me. Even at one point I just couldn't deal with Bible study at all. I just thought, "No. This does not feel right. It just doesn't." and my sister actually got involved because she is a vicar and she started just to do gentle coursework, the Pilgrim coursework with me. By doing that with her, I came back and I felt I could cope with it. As I say, with these guys, all these years they've been there for me and it's- some of the time it's been so tough, really tough and I got through it. It's only just little chinks but I get set back, then I come forward, I get set back and then I come forward. Now, I know what faith means. It's just little bits and he keeps going, "Yes you can." And then I'm going, "No you can't, no you can't" to God and he says, "Yes you can." And he's just pushing me forward, every little bit [FG4:44-45]. (slide 10)

In the church as a whole, there is a recognition that home groups are hard to get into. They are not advertised and people talk about them being 'cliquey' and unwelcoming. The membership of the groups reflect this. Most of the group members have been part of the group since each group started, whether that be 3 years, 7 years or 10 years. None of them had had new members in the past 4 years except for one person who had joined a group recently. Some home group members will say that they do not want new people because it would disturb the trust that has developed and would no longer be the safe and comfortable place that they value.

L: And I also put it in my resignation letter that, there was one, one particular PCC meeting I spoke about it, about how it was difficult within our church to get into the small groups, and there was, there was a lot of cliques.

Int: I've heard this. I've heard this, yeah. Did you try and find your way into another group then, or...?

L: Not, not specifically, but, but I know, and I've got a- I, I mean, we were guilty of

being part of a clique, there's no doubt about it, but, er, but I then, we was in a position then found, myself and Q, that we were looking for something else but nobody was invited.

Int: Yeah.

L: That was the thing, there was no... And then when I raised it at the PCC there were several members of different groups there and not one of them says, "Come and join our group."

Int: Oh, that's interesting.

L: So, I put that in the, in my resignation letter.

Int: Yeah.

L: You know, it was almost a plea, but it was not picked up, other than one, one woman said, "Oh, we don't like new people coming into our group because then we can't talk about ourselves and colleagues and our family." [Interview with L:35-36] (slide 11)

The function of home groups seem to be a place of mutual support, a place to learn more through study and a place to be prayed for. The name 'home' group is interesting – even when one meets in a pub. It speaks of a private space for personal and family-style spiritual support.

## Reflection 1

I was puzzled by the fact that in church which was clearly on a journey outward towards the 'other' and towards its community that I could not find evidence of this in the home groups. There were a couple of groups where PMC was making some deep personal impact, but this was not really changing the life of the group as a whole. Generally the PMC experiment seemed to be something taking place somewhere else.

As a communal 'vehicle', it seemed that home group model was not capable of fostering or supporting a vision of outward movement. Moreover, though they were regular and committed gatherings of people, they did not seem made for the more holistic 'sharing of life' that the church was edging itself towards in its new sense of vocation.

The first reason for this might be that the home group is grounded in privatised practice, which focuses on the interior life of the group and sees its task in terms of support and the accumulation of learning. Secondly, perhaps the model is individualised so that despite gathering people together, it is predicated upon the support of personal spiritual journeys. Note the use of the word 'home' even for a group which met in a pub and also the way in which D and E were puzzled by the use of the words 'small group' instead of the more family and privatised language. Perhaps some deep personal relationships were formed, but this was not characteristic of the life of the group together.

Home groups are tied to the ideas of learning information and sharing knowledge and supporting one another. They are by definition bounded sets because they need this to

sustain safety and mutual support. Even if people within them see a different vision and want to follow it, the vehicle systemically won't allow it.

## The missing 'home group'

There was one group I never managed to meet. I was disappointed about this, because I felt that it had members who were more actively committed to the PMC journey.

I was tentatively booked to go to K's home group on 28.06.16, but she texted me on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> to say that they had to finish their SMART plan work for a big church meeting next Tuesday (05.07.16) and so they would need to postpone. FN:95 – 26.06.16

Talked to K about her home group; it is not meeting regularly so I can't really do a focus group with them – sounded a bit chaotic. FN:135 – 29.01.17 (slide 12)

I discovered that this was not a failure to gain access, but rather a reflection of the complexity and busyness of people's lives. At the same time, K clearly had a yearning for some kind of smaller group relationship that felt truer to what she was learning through PMC, but she did not know how to go about it.

K has felt a real strain with this over the years and they are now wondering about moving church. But they value the way things are being done here and the strain is nothing to do with the PMC journey in her eyes – quite the opposite. She is very encouraged about the small group initiative. I asked her about the absence of young families at most things I attend – and she talked about their irregularity and the difficulty of getting them to home group – though she sees the importance of small groups. She talked about asking them to form in relationship groups and work out their own times to meet. FN:136 – 29.01.17 (slide 13)

## Year 2 plan and meetings in Lent

As it turned out, K was not on her own in respect of a longing for a small group experience that would 'work.' A number of people spoke of how cliquey they found the home groups to be and how hard it was to break into one, whether you were an established member of the church or a newcomer.

There is a desire to belong and connect; it's voiced by new people and by people who've been around for a long time – some of whom felt less like they belong now. In some cases, they are not in a small group. [FN:120] (slide 14)

More than that there was a growing vision for a different kind of small group – one that was orientated outwards with porous boundaries and one in which people would 'share life' with one another more deeply. The small group initiative was one of the strands of the year 2 plan with its focus on 'discovering new relationships.'

AAAA I've been coming to this church for a year now and I haven't got involved in any home groups. I like the [new] idea because it is flexible, open to others – a place where we could bring people. I like the idea of bringing different groups together – church and non-church; like making a four for badminton with church and non-church people. A group that is open and ready to grow – unexpected and exciting. [FN:151] (slide 15)

Having presented this to the home group leaders in December 2016 and the PCC in January 2017, A offered an opportunity to come to an evening to explore the possibility of setting up some new small groups. I went to the presentation that was given on a Sunday evening at the end of January where an invitation was given to come to a series of Sunday evening gatherings during Lent where this idea would be explored with anyone who was interested. I attended five out of the six of these evenings as a participant. I felt it both inappropriate and logistically difficult to record these evenings, though I was able to take detailed notes at various points and wrote up my recollections promptly in my field notes. There were between 15 and 25 adults present at each gathering – not inconsiderable in a church with a regular Sunday attendance of about 60 adults.

The evenings started with worship and prayer and then there were a combination of fairly fulsome explanations of what A envisaged (20 to 30 minutes at a time) mixed with a range of reflective work and thinking together. The reflective times modelled the way A saw the groups taking shape and were based around the missional practices that were at the heart of the PMC process. So we did 'dwelling in the word' and were encouraged strongly to move around (find a friendly-looking stranger) to listen to people we did not normally spend time with. A also offered us a number of practical tools for embedding the outward-looking practices of 'dwelling in the world' and 'spiritual discernment' at the heart of our everyday lives. As an observer, I found this process both interesting and frustrating – I thought A talked far too much – but as a participant I found it challenging and formative in my own life.

During the final session, A invited people to form two groups to think about how what we had been exploring might be acted upon after Easter: one group for existing home groups and one for those who wanted to form some new experimental groups; I spent time listening to each group.

Established home group members had a measured discussion about the balance between maintenance and change, between inviting new people and staying the same. There was a sense of caution and uncertainty about how they might move forward.

H: The groups we have were set up for teaching and once upon a time we had leaders who very strong on this.

M: Outward focus: who can we invite/include? People have been invited to home groups since this course has started.

VV: It's made people stop and look.

J: There are relics of a more centrally organised approach; sometimes suggesting groups should be geographical. Thursday night was meetings night. Patterns break down, but habits stay. There is the question of balance of stability and openness to others.

M (to VV): You're always thinking about who you could invite; maybe not all groups are doing that. [FN:166] (slide 16)

The biggest group was those who were interested in forming new groups; these were a mixture of established members who felt shut out of the present home group structure, new members who had not been able to find their way in and folk who had caught the vision for something different, which also included some of the newer people. By the end of the evening, they had agreed to gather at the home of one of the group to have Chinese takeaway and make a plan for the future.

A: We could set up a new group to try something and then reflect in 4, 5, or 6 weeks' time. Established groups may want to explore and they might also come together to reflect. A cluster with other small groups who aren't coming on Thursday. We could do that here; all meet together for worship and then one cluster meets in this hall and one in the back hall. [FN:166 – 09.04.17] (slide 17)

### 'Connect Groups'

The new groups were not imposed but offered; in the event three groups were formed, which focused around the practice of 'dwelling in the world.' What people wanted was a group in which they could reflect on their public lives as Christians in everyday life and where they could be accountable for staying with this new way of being church that had drawn them in but which they felt was a new shoot that needed nurturing.

K: But you, I think you take a step back because, erm, it's different isn't it. Yes, I go to church, you know, I would say that. That's quite, but then it wouldn't go any deeper really.

Int: Right. This helps it go deeper somehow does it?

K: Because you just share what you do. I don't know what it is but they know you, you know, so there is that moment you are spending more time. You become intentional about spending time with people and the people you think God's calling you to. And I think that's what PMC calls you to, because God has gone before you. You know it's like in the Luke passage isn't it, Luke 10. It's emblazoned in my mind. Every passage I can just relate to something that's happened in my life which is good, but not so good at times. (Laughter) Too painful.

Int: So, I mean, in terms of PMC, the sorts of things you are talking about there sound like the, sort of, the practices around dwelling in the world and discernment in a way, and learning? And you see your place in the world differently that way?

K: Yes, yes, yes, because of that.

They wanted groups that would be open to welcoming new people and indeed they grew significantly in the first few weeks of their existence – particularly drawing in people on the edge.



K: We've got a couple coming along who we didn't know their names, you know. NNN went, "Who are that couple who filled their trailer up with soil for me?" and I said, "I don't know their names." "Right, okay," he said, "I'm not in church on Sunday but I've said you're welcome to come to the group but I don't know their names from Adam." I said, "I'll go and sort this," so we went, I went and I said, "Sorry, look, I don't know your names but I know that NNN has asked you to small group, to our small group," I said, "What are your names? Do you want to come this week?" You know, and they started coming, and they are on the periphery of church. [Interview with K:34] (slide 18)

Moreover, they wanted groups in which their aspiration for 'sharing life' would be fulfilled. And by this, I think they meant that they wanted to share the whole of life – not just a 'spiritual' part, they wanted it to touch their whole life and they wanted it to be a shared communal life – not simply a brief tangential touching of individuals, once a week or once a fortnight.

T: And, erm, and its little nuggets like that, that you kind of go, "And what happened?" So, we were building a foundation at the bottom of the garden for the greenhouse. I don't know if you can see it? It's just behind there. And, we built it wrong, and I'd cried about it, because life had just got to me. And they said, "Do you know what? Why don't we come round and have home group at yours on Thursday?" Or, whatever we call it. We now call it the Foundation Builders, because they built the foundation for the greenhouse. [Interview with T:72-73] (slide 19)

Int: Oh, okay.

T: So, they came round and we had a barbeque, and we properly shared life. We had all the kids in the garden, everyone with their hair in funky bunches, and some of the blokes were building and that, and we shared a meal. And that, that is just-

I was struck by the fact that I could never get to interview K's previous home group because it never seemed to meet. During a one-to-one interview with her, I asked her how it was that previously she and others were too busy to meet fortnightly, but now they were happily meeting once a week?

K: Yeah, yeah. It's been amazing. We love Thursday nights.

Int: And is that something you wouldn't necessarily have said of home groups previously?

K: Yes. In the sense, because I always had to lead them, not always but, you know, it's the emphasis of, oh, I've got to plan something else.

Int: Right.

K: I've got to make sure, not make sure, but, you know, as a leader, oh, it's home

group tonight and we did it every two weeks and in the end it just didn't work. People weren't coming, you know, but you commit now. I mean, every-, all of us block out Thursdays.

Int: Because you are weekly now aren't you, not fortnightly?

K: Yes. We all block out Thursdays.

Int: So, what's the difference then between a fortnightly pattern that you can't keep up and a weekly pattern that everyone's committed to?

K: Erm.

Int: What's happened?

K: What's happened? People have got to know each other. We've yet to dwell in the word, we dwell in the world a lot and I think that's been remarkable because the cluster of the groups all met here and it was like, erm, the *X-Factor*, you know, so everyone put their name in and we have like one, two and three and then turn them over, you know.

Int: So you just went with who you went with, sort of thing?

K: And that's quite unnerving for some people and yet, erm, in our group, unbelievable, erm, three, four people have lost jobs and been on the breadline and really made them view things differently, and the strife that they cause. Erm, two people have had experience of miscarriage and death of baby and stuff so, erm, but people are sharing on a really deeper level. (slide 20)

Int: Can I say, did you know this already or this is coming out in the open already in three or four weeks?

K: Yes, yes. There was one group, there was one meeting where something changed because of someone spoke of how they felt and it took a lot of courage and it was, it was earth-shattering really in that moment, and I miss the people if they are not in church. [Interview with K:32-33]

Notice the 'outward' of dwelling in the world' and the 'inward' of a deep sharing of life – with new people. When I met with a number of folk in December 2017 to reflect with them on what I had seen and learnt, I discovered that each of the new 'Connect Groups' as they were called was exploring some form of community building for missional action with people outside the church – embodying the practice of missional experimentation that is the hallmark of PMC. I hope to find out what has happened with this on a visit in July 2018.

## Reflection 2

The seminal work by Bellah et al (1985) explored the way in which Americans in the 1980s negotiated the relationship between the private and the public spheres in an individualised culture. Though time has moved on and I am writing on another continent the essential challenge is the same, particularly concerning the spiritual versions of therapeutic individualism on the one hand and community formation and development on the other.

A contextualised understanding of maturity at the present time must have to do with the way in which individualised Christians seek an appropriate public expression of faith. I argue this firstly because of the biblical and theological priority of engagement with the other and secondly because a kingdom-shaped teleology must challenge a church that is immersed in its own private existence, whatever the reasons for this might be.

Most of those who have opted for the 'Connect Groups' are responding to genuine sense of call and conviction about finding a way for their faith to be appropriately public and to engage more holistically with everyday life – inside and outside the church community. This is a personal journey they have taken and is reflected in many of the stories about engagement with the 'other' which they have told me about.

However, the energy and vision that is driving their involvement in the 'Connect Groups' has to do, I suggest, with the need to find a 'communal vehicle' that will support and encourage this developing personal vision. It seems that genuine growth and development depends upon the interplay of the personal conviction and communal identity. Something needs to happen for an individual in seeing and embracing new possibilities but in order for that personal change to embed, we seem to need a communal expression in which to find shared identity and accountability.

What is happening in the 'Connect Groups' is the creating of a new vehicle to embody communally a new way of being – small groups that embody dwelling in the world where people start to gather around the question and experience of what is God doing in everyday life with the people that they meet.

One way to theorise this is to adopt a less individualised and staged approach to Fowler's 'stages' 3 and 4. Typically, Fowler sees the security and affirmation provided by peer relationships as something that needs to be left behind on the journey of individuation. The experience at St X with the 'Connect Groups' suggests a more complex interplay of the personal and the communal. Certainly group identity and 'groupthink' can be restricting and create forms of community that are resistant to new insight; this is what I observed in the established home groups.

But to think that the way to maturity is to leave community behind in a quest for individual authenticity seems to be an inaccurate portrayal of genuine growth. New personal insight prompts the desire to form community around the new perspective which is both identity-forming and accountable. It is not an 'either-or' but rather an iterative journey between the personal and communal which is healthily formative.

Communal vehicles can and I suggest will become stagnant; as a rule group identity tends to reinforce the status quo where there is no practice of reflection and experimentation. Some of the original home groups have received new people for the first time in the face of the challenge of the new Connect Groups and perhaps they can reinvent themselves. My instinct is that they are too wedded to individualised and privatised culture to achieve this.

New communal vehicles have the potential to embody personal transformation in a way in which will help it to be shared and sustained. My sense is that without this, new

transformative insights will not embed either personally or communally; there is a subtle interplay between the two which is hard to predict but easy to see when it happens.

## Some Personal Reflections

As I conclude, I want to say something about the participant aspect of my role as participant observer. I think this came to the fore as I joined them for 5 of the 6 sessions in Lent 2017 to explore the possibility of a new kind of small group.

A helped us to explore the practice of dwelling in the world from week to week by giving us tools to work with and inviting us to reflect on our experience during the week of noticing and responding the presence and activity of God and to the people God brought across our path. In the early weeks there was some experience of dissonance between our aspirations and experience:

As we did this activity, there was lots of laughter (wry laughter) because of the sense that we don't share life with many non-Christians; desire for a different kind of life  
There was distress and anxiety masked by laughter about what we noticed. There was also a sense for some of God being at work. [FN:155 – 12.03.17] (slide 21)

As the weeks wore on, these things became more of an established practice for us and the sense of challenge and accountability helped me in my own journey with people I was meeting in the community in my own parish. We named some particular people and were invited to take a note of each other's names and pray for them. After missing week 4 and returning in week 5, I had this experience:

Conscious I missed last week, but didn't pick up any mention or any sense of what I missed. We shared about what had been happening and H mentioned how she had been praying for my group and that led me to reflect on the conversation I had had with them the previous Friday and how they are taking responsibility for community work and how Sarah and Daniel came to church on Mothers' Day. I was very moved by H's perseverance in prayer – way better than mine. [FN:162-163 – 02.04.17] (slide 22)

I found that I was being challenged and supported by this accountable group and learning to practice things which did not necessarily come naturally to me, yet which I longed to do effectively. The communal 'vehicle' was working for me to.

I am also struck by the fact that has had some important 'communal vehicles' along the way – not least the delivery team I was part of with Nottingham and Leicester dioceses from 2012 onwards. I note the lack of such a communal vehicle in my life at the moment and here I move from being researcher to disciple who needs the same kinds of personal and communal contexts in which to grow and flourish.

## Appendix 34 – Paper given to the IRC Conference, Wellington, South Africa, June 2019

### What might PMC-UK learn from a five year journey at St X (Slide 1)

#### Background

My research focus for my doctorate was about how church communities foster or inhibit the journey towards personal and communal maturity. For the empirical research, I spent two years with a church in Nottingham (September 2015-July 2017) who were in years 4 and 5 of their journey with PMC (Partnership for Missional Church). So I was with them for first two years after the formal guided PMC process came to an end. After this period, I returned in December 2017 to present and discuss my findings with them; then in November 2018, I returned again to run a focus group with those who had formed to new 'Connect Groups' to see if they had been able to stay with their vision for open community and 'dwelling in the world.'

In this paper, I want to explore what appear to me to be some of the sticking points in their journey that are stalling their missional development. But before I do that, I want to begin by stressing the transformational nature of their journey with PMC. I have offered papers on my research here over the last two years and the main headline would be that the PMC journey has been transformative for the church and I would say has helped both personal and communal maturation.

Here are some of the things that have been evidenced in my research. (slide 2)

- A journey outwards towards a different kind of relationship with their community based on mutual hospitality; they were struck by the image they were offered in summary report of their interviews in the first year of their being like a 'castle with a moat'. This was replaced for them with the biblical image of the mustard seed growing into a tree that sheltered the birds of the air. This outward journey was confirmed through interviews I did with the wider community in which the church is placed.
- How 'dwelling in the world' helped them to foster partnership and attention to the 'other' in their communities: led initially by the minister but increasingly embodied by the congregation. I noted also how this affected the way in which they shared their faith – a move away from a transactional and colonising approach to a relational exploration within their new found partnership relationships.
- 'Democratisation' of learning – reflections on the purpose and nature of 'study' and 'learning – expressed in the diffusion of and conflict over Dwelling in the Word. Was learning the transfer of knowledge within the closed circle of the church, marked by therapeutic individualism – like the home groups – or was it reflection on public life as a disciple of Christ, discerning how to live into God's missional call?
- Taking responsibility – engaging with questions of power and conflict, to some extent; discernment and reflection – who is the God we are journeying with? God as subject.

- How they took and continue to take responsibility: Supporting a new perception of living the Christian life in public with different ‘communal vehicles.’ *[I talked about this last year]*

Where I want to focus this year is what I see as some of the sticking points – which are grounded in the way some of the spiritual practices have taken root in the congregation and offer some thoughts and questions about the kind of leadership that might work more creatively and critically with this and how it might be supported.

I have entitled it as what might PMC-UK learn, because those of you who have journeyed with this for longer may well have met the challenges that I am going to share and therefore I hope may offer your own insights on it. For the sake of focus and time, I have chosen two areas which I think are significant for maturation of the community.

## The Challenges at St X

### (i) **Mission in the Public Space** *(slide 3a)*

Their journey outwards to the community led them to meet a local community group coming towards them who were also seeking to build community in the local area. This has become a fruitful relationship in which they have continued to collaborate on one-off community building events: strengthened the church’s public identity and relationships. This has somewhat masked how difficult they found it to do one-to-ones and form community around kingdom-based initiatives in year 2 and in particular a very mixed experience of learning to do DitW with folk from the community and not really experimenting with naming God in those developing community relationships and partnerships: two years ago I spoke here about the absence of Announcing the Kingdom – calling it the ‘Cinderella Practice.’

Nevertheless, the experience of Dwelling in the World was transformative for many of them personally and led them to explore setting up new kinds of groups (Connect Groups) in which they might be accountable to one another for their public Christian life. *[I spoke about this last year].*

For those who have run with this, they have seen a real transformation in their relationships with friends, neighbours and strangers – where they are continually both aware of and surprised by meeting God in their relationships.

I went back in November 2018 to run a focus group with these ‘Connect Groups’ to see how they had got on in the year since I had last met them.

Their sense of mutual accountability was still strong as was their personal experience of God moments with different people in their personal lives.

What was interesting though was that though they had talked about possible missional experiments back in 2017, not much had happened.

So they had gone looking for possible partners:

Fire Station – water and doughnuts – it was a very hot summer; but they have not taken this further.

They were also exploring practical support for people going through hard times

But the most self-aware of them recognised that they had not really developed any partnerships for mission, any missional experiments.

If I go back to Lent 2017, to the series of evenings when they explored the possibility of new groups, I was struck then and even more so when I began to write this up by the fact that the vicar had presented Dwelling in the World as a personal discipline [illustration of my experience with our community group – personal challenge and accountability]. There was no talk of forming community with folk outside the church for mission.

Their Misisonal Vocation Statement (MVS) (slide 3b) was about forming community for mission in the public space.

It seemed obvious to me that the vicar might have encouraged each of the three Connect Groups to try to run a missional experiment in the manner of year 2 of PMC. In a group of 8, they might have explored a missional adaptive challenge, sought out partners and then maybe three or four of them might have formed a Mission Innovation Team with three or four folk from the community: forming community around a missional experiment. It's almost as if they did not want to or know how to revisit the disruption of year 2.

Charles Taylor (Secular Age); he argues that 'enchantment' in a pre-modern age generates a 'porous self' which is open to the other – including the other in the spiritual world. Whereas the 'disenchantment' of the modern era leads to a 'buffered self' – a defended and boundaried self. From this flows an instrumental individualism, which tends to use the other in the making of self. Bauman says similar things about transactional and economic relationship in 'Liquid Love.'

In following their MVS, they have genuinely challenged the transactional aspect of individualism, embracing a relational approach which values the perspective of the other and doesn't simply seek to colonise them with the faith. However, the sheer force of individualisation has driven them to individualised approaches to their presence in the public world.

It seems to me that it is the responsibility of reflective and self-aware leadership to say: our calling is to form community for mission with the 'other' – so how can these new groups take the risk of forming community for mission in which we start to name God amongst us? Leadership needs to understand the force of individualising perspectives in our culture; to be self-aware and reflective about the power of individualisation (slide 3c)

**(ii) *Spiritual stand-offs: a tale of two stories (slide 4a)***

Another leadership challenge is about how they journey with difference as a community in a way that is transformative.

When I offered them my findings in December 2017, I offered them two stories, a bit in the manner of James Hopewell, as myths that encapsulated ethos; the difference being that whilst Hopewell looks for one overarching mythos, it seemed to me that St X was living with story and counter-story. (slide 4b)

Sleeping Beauty – awakened to the journey outwards: escaping the moated castle: public presence – partnership people who are different  
Hansel and Gretel – being taken on a dangerous journey to the witch in the woods and desperately trying to lay a trail to get back to the safe and proper place – a church that puts on things and invites the community in to hear/receive the message.

This conflict was encapsulated in the reception and response to the practice of Dwelling in the Word. (slide 4c)

The first practice – more than chronologically; the one that is the most diffused at this point and therefore generated the greatest amount of embrace and push back. It is one that everyone has an opinion on and the opinions are strong. I have huge amounts of data that express people's positive and negative responses to the practice

It is important in a diffusion model that people have the freedom to push back, to say no. In an individualised culture, human agency is highly prized and necessary. One of the strengths of PMC is that it allows people to journey gradually with change rather than simply to take it or leave it. Potentially, this has a lot to offer in terms both personal and communal maturation.

However, it is not obvious what to do when the positive and negative views are entrenched within a community.

Typically the response is individual. People, if they do raise their concerns, raise them personally with the vicar and on the whole they found him 'pastoral and caring'. What this meant in practice is that he helped them to find personal strategies for dealing with their discomfort.

However, what the most reflective people said to me was that they had no systemic approach for dealing with conflict. So the vicar ran an evening while I was there, which I wasn't able to get to, offering some reflection on the fact that introverts and extroverts have different challenges in coping with DitW. As I wasn't there, I cannot comment on the event, though no-one gave me the impression that it had been transformative. It was offered as another example of the vicar helping people to 'cope' with DitW.

What struck me about the year 3 passage, Acts 6, was that it was an attempt to help the whole community own and address a conflict together. Once again the individualising tendencies in our culture make this difficult and unnatural. (Slide 4d)

It seems to me that spiritual leadership in this context involves two things:  
First, to learn the skills and qualities involved in managing communal discussion of difference. (slide 4e) That the final word is not simply that I have my opinion and I'm sticking to it or that we just make sure that we don't push it too much so that we don't upset people – both of which perspectives I heard on a number of occasions. Communal growth and maturity involves the ability to sit down and to genuinely hear our differences and not using various ways of fusing and distancing to avoid the adult conversation.

The second strand has to do with pastoral leadership (slide 4f)



One of the things that emerged in negative response Dwelling in the Word can be summed up in the resistance to engagement with the other, whether that is:

The proximate other in the congregation who is different from me

The distant other in the community who I am invited to approach and form relationship with

The otherness of God as God comes to us through attention to the text of Scripture or through the Spirit in moments of discernment.

My research suggests that engagement with these various types of otherness are crucial for personal maturity. Moreover, research on spiritual development and maturity using psychodynamic psychology suggests that 'individuation' is a crucial element in spiritual growth and maturity. This suggests that missional practice needs to engage pastorally with areas of personal growth as well as offering the communal practices that enable missional transformation. This suggests pastoral ministry which does not simply offer comfort, but invites exploration of the kind of personal spiritual formation which develops the capacity to embrace and engage with difference.

## **Conclusion**

I offer these two observations amongst many – partly so that I don't go on too long, but partly because they seem to me to be the most significant – raising most sharply the challenge of engaging with individualisation.

In suggesting that there are implications here for spiritual leadership is not meant as a criticism of the vicar. I was in a privileged position of being able to listen and observe over a long period of time without having responsibility for the congregation and its mission. I am wondering what an accompanier of my and my wife's ministry on a similar journey might uncover?

And that leads me to my final observations and question.

First the question:

I am wondering whether those of you who have walked the PMC journey longer have experienced these things and what insights you might be able to offer? Or whether this is more strongly a mark of European or British culture?

My observations are:

1. How might it be possible to offer mutual accompaniment between churches as they move on beyond the three year accompanied journey in PMC?
2. What resourcing might spiritual leaders need particularly to understand the power of the individualising nature of our culture and how to accompany their congregations on the more complex and demanding aspects of engagement with otherness in communal formation?

In offering these reflections, I am suggesting that communities are called on a journey of maturation – and not simply the individuals within them; but also that attention to personal development is also necessary if communities as a whole are going to make such a journey.

# **Appendix 35 – Paper given at BIAPT Bible and Practical Theology Symposium at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, May 2012**

## **Bible, evangelicals and practical theology**

### **Introduction**

As a general rule, practical theology has not engaged with the question of the authority of the Bible in a way that is convincing and functional for most evangelicals. If the sacramental role of the Bible is not given sympathetic understanding, this makes it difficult to do proper descriptive work for evangelical and charismatic churches. More seriously, evangelicals will not engage with practical theology as a discipline if this question is not addressed – something that I have experienced at first hand since I have begun to teach theology for ministry at an evangelical theological college; generalised language about conversation and dialogue is not enough. Therefore, in the early stages of my doctoral study, I have found it necessary and important to engage with theological questions about the methodology of practical theology.

### **Practical Theology and Correlative Method**

Practical theology is a contextual, situated and dialogical approach to doing theology for and in the practice of ministry. In order to contextualise itself in the realities of social and cultural life, this dialogue rightly and inevitably takes place both with other academic disciplines and within popular culture. Because of this, practical theology is thoroughly interdisciplinary and therefore the way in which this relationship (between theology and other disciplines) is conceptualised is foundational to the way theology is practised. The methodology of practical theology provides the central clue for understanding this conceptualisation.

Methodologically, practical theology can almost be equated with theological reflection. Typically, this cyclical, dialogical approach proceeds by describing and analysing experience or practice by means of a variety of non-theological disciplines. The insights gleaned are then brought into dialogue with theological resources and traditions with a view to generating new approaches to the practice of ministry (Killen, P. & De Beer J. 1994, Ballard, P. and Pritchard, J. 2006, Thompson, J. 2008, Green, L. 2009, Cameron, H., et. al. 2010). Though in practice this process can be more iterative than it sounds, this is the essential shape of the process. This method is clearly dependent on the theology of Paul Tillich and David Tracy and in particular the correlative approach which they developed.

Tillich's theology starts with anthropology; human beings ask questions about their own sense of being and from this point find in God the 'ground of being'; correlating 'questions from an analysis of existence with answers from Christian revelation' (Woodward & Pattison, 2000, 93). Tracy's method, adopted by Don Browning, is a modification of this

which 'critically correlates both questions and answers found in the Christian faith with questions and implied answers in various secular perspectives' (Woodward & Pattison, 2000, 93). There is a clear apologetic intention behind this for Tillich and Tracy. Only by seeking a shared public language can one communicate in a secular and pluralist context. Browning follows Tracy in this when he asserts that 'we cannot address these issues in the public arena from a narrowly confessional stance' (Woodward & Pattison, 2000, 95-6). He contrasts his approach with that of Thomas Oden whom he says, 'insisted that only symbols formed by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (*Deus Pro Nobis*) provided this language, whereas I insisted on a correlational method... that correlated our secular intuitions of this ground with the language of revelation' (Woodward & Pattison, 2000, 95).

This is rooted in the fact that for Tillich (and Tracy) the possibility of knowledge of God or 'Ultimate Being' is rooted in a common unity of being and therefore his theology proceeds on the basis of the 'scholastic principle of *analogia entis*. For because of the unity of being, what one knows about man, by analogy, he may know about God' (McKelway 1964, 63). This is precisely the direction that practical theology characteristically follows. But Tillich reaches this point because he does not start from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ but rather his ontological concept of the 'New Being is applied to Jesus and he is called the "Christ" because he conforms to a prior principle of salvation represented by that title' (McKelway 1964, 26); Christology 'becomes a subordinate part of soteriology' (McKelway 1964, 25).

Tillich would argue that the content of the faith is not changed merely the form; I would suggest, however, that whenever this correlative approach is used it consistently privileges the hermeneutic of the context over the hermeneutic of the text and the search for the strange message of the gospel is subsumed in the cultural agenda. The distinctive horizons of text and context are not maintained in the dogmatic employing of the correlative method after the manner of Tillich and Tracy. This is because, as Frei points out in his discussion of Tracy's method, Christian self-description is subordinated to the academic pursuit of 'formal and universally applicable, context-invariant criteria' (1992, 33) in the anthropological and phenomenological method of correlation. This approach is grounded in a philosophical assumption about the universal nature of religious experience rather than the narrative-shaped and embodied world of a particular religious community. And so, 'the correlation is a matter of subsuming the specifically Christian under the general, experiential religious, as one "regional" aspect' (Frei 1992, 34).

I am not arguing that those who use this correlative method today are necessarily committed to this somewhat questionable view of universal religious (limit) experience or to the existential philosophy that undergirds it. However, the method of theological reflection that assumes that unproblematic movement from interdisciplinary description and analysis to theological reflection (and even the collapsing of the one into the other) owes its unquestioned assumptions about the unproblematic nature of this project to Tillich's analogy of being and the adoptionist Christology upon which it is based.

Unlike Tillich, Karl Barth did not abandon the Chalcedonian commitment to the two natures of Christ and offers a more critical and nuanced approach to the question of correlation. Dorothy van Deusen Hunsinger (1995), drawing on Barth's *Church Dogmatics III/2*, offers an approach to interdisciplinary study in general and the problem of correlation in particular, which she describes as based on the three distinctive of the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures of Christ, namely,

‘the “indissoluble differentiation”, the “inseparable unity” and the “indestructible order” of two particular terms (often but not always divine and human). “Indissoluble differentiation” means that they are related without confusion or change. “Inseparable unity” means that they coincide in an occurrence without separation or division. And the “indestructible order” means that in their differentiated unity, the two are asymmetrically related, with one term having logical precedence over the other. The two terms are thus differentiated, unified, and ordered in a particular way. (1995, 65)

This allows her to maintain the uniqueness of the different discourses whilst at the same time allowing an appropriate interrelation within a specific situation. Moreover, by proposing an asymmetrical ordering of discourses, she is able to give an appropriate level of authority to different descriptions of reality and experience. She illustrates each of these three principles through a critique of three pastoral theologies: Edward Thurneyson’s separation of sacred and secular healing, Edward Edinger’s collapsing of the Christian narrative into Jungian categories and Tillich’s symmetrical correlation of healing and salvation. On this latter point, she notes that Tillich’s correlation of healing and salvation, which, whilst beginning with the assertion of asymmetry of the correlation actually goes on to argue for a ‘dialectical identity’ of the two.

‘As the concept of healing is thus elevated, it is conceptually placed on the same level as salvation and can thus enter into a kind of reciprocal relationship with it. At the same time, the particularly Christian understanding of salvation, at least from a Barthian perspective, seems to be lost’ (Hunsinger 1995, 90).

From the point-of-view of the practice of ministry, Hunsinger’s approach allows the different discourses to contribute without collapsing one into the other. She illustrates this with the example of the concept of sin and victimhood in respect of ministry to the abused. One example of the danger of confusing these concepts is that the abused person might blame themselves as a sinner for the evil done to her. Similarly a pastoral counsellor might press a person to forgive without recognising the importance of acknowledging the counselee as an innocent victim of evil and in the process reinforcing the repression and failing to enable the victim to place the responsibility and blame where it belongs.

But as Hunsinger further points out, ‘there may come a time when she will see how the repression of her early trauma may have compelled her to act in self-destructive or harmful ways. She may even come to see how she has repeated patterns where she has victimised others, even as she herself was victimised (1995, 101).

This simple but profound example illustrates well the importance of the differentiation of interdisciplinary discourses in the practice of ministry and resonates with my own experience in ministry. But this differentiation does not preclude a sense of unity as each discourse contributes to and shapes the other in the context of ministry. But an asymmetric relationship needs to be guarded between the discourses, if one is not simply to be turned into the other. Moreover, the asymmetric relationship also guards the priority of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Thomas Oden wants to argue, with Barth against Tillich for *analogia fidei*’ rather than *analogia entis*’ (1978/1966, 114-145). Tillich’s approach requires there to be an analogy of being between human beings and God

through which it is possible to read from the human to the Divine. 'Since God participates in being perfectly, he is knowable analogically from the knowledge of any being in which he participates' (Oden 1978/1966, 131). Oden argues with Barth that the analogy must flow from God to human beings and that our knowing is based on God's self-disclosure – the analogy of faith. Anything less will falsify the Christian revelation by making it dependant on human knowing. With this picture in mind, Frei argues for what he describes as 'ad hoc correlation'. This is an approach which avoids imposing a philosophical schema for correlating the text with a predetermined concept or theory. Rather,

'applying a general scheme to specific reading may well be an ad hoc affair, rather than a matter of systematic or tight correlation between text and reading, but that in order to use schemes in an ad hoc fashion, we will have to *subordinate* them to the text in the context of the self-description of the Christian community' (1992, 85).

## Conclusion

Traditionally, evangelicals are more comfortable with an approach that is more akin to applied theology. However, developing understandings about the importance of context both in the articulation of theology and in the practice of mission and ministry means that a more flexible and dialogical approach is urgently needed. But I would argue that a more nuanced approach to the authority of scripture is needed than is supplied by the language of dialogue or conversation.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, from the perspective of social psychology, differentiation (in which one is neither subsumed by nor separated from the other) is the mark of a healthy relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> I realise that there are different ways of positioning this dialogue. Watts (2002) is critical of Milbank (1990) and Hunsinger (1995) at exactly the point at which I want to follow them – namely in recognising the importance of some level of hierarchy between the discourses.