



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

***THE PROVISION, DESIGN AND EFFECTIVENESS
OF WEBSITES FOR LOCAL METHODIST CHURCHES***

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is about the nature of the relationships between Websites – which enable global access to data and interaction – and local churches – which are congregations whose core focus is on particular, geographically-located, communities. It considers the thesis that there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

The argument presented plays a part in the integration of the fields of missiology and information technology, making an original contribution to knowledge because of the way in which macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology are considered along with the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. In conjunction with the gathering of new data about local church mission priorities and Websites and the production of original statistical information, new insights are revealed concerning the deployment of information technology in the context of Christian mission and, in particular, new insights into the deployment of Website technology in the context of local Methodist churches.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS (1)

INTRODUCTION	1
THE DEVELOPMENT OF WEBSITE TECHNOLOGY	2
LOCAL CHURCH WEBSITES AND MISSION	3
RESEARCH RATIONALE	7
RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS	9
Mission Priorities	9
Missiological Significance of Website Design Quality	9
Applying Commercial and Secular Standards to Church Websites	9
Websites as Neutral Tools	10
THE THESIS BEING ADDRESSED	10
SUMMARY OF CONTENTS	11
 PART 1 – MISSIOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	 13
CHAPTER 1 – MISSION AND LOCAL CHURCHES	14
1.1 Towards an understanding of ‘Mission’ for Local Churches	14
1.2 Mission in the Universal Church	16
1.3 Mission in the Local Church	21
1.4 A Framework for Studying Mission in the Local Church	23
CHAPTER 2 – MISSION AND TECHNOLOGY	25
2.1 Missiological Significance	25
2.2 Relating Technology to Mission	28
2.3 Mission, Ecclesiology and Information Technology	31
2.4 Mission in the Context of the Internet and Websites	38
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	44
3.1 Researching the Mission of the Churches	44
3.2 Researching Website Provision and Design	46
3.3 Researching Website Effectiveness	50
3.4 Questionnaire Design	52
3.5 Piloting the Questionnaire	53
3.6 Questionnaire Mailing and Responses	55
3.7 Data Verification for Social Statistics	58
 PART 2 – WEBSITE PROVISION	 59
CHAPTER 4 – LOCAL CHURCH WEBSITE PROVISION	60
4.1 Government-Produced Socio-Economic Data and Website Provision	60
4.2 The Nature of the Churches	64
4.3 Church Membership and Attendance	68
4.4 Possible Economic Influences	71
4.5 Website Design Capabilities	72
4.6 Reasons Given for Not Having a Website	74
4.7 Causes for Having a Website	76
4.8 Webmasters	78
4.9 Financial Cost of Website Provision	84
4.10 Concluding Remarks about Website Provision	86

TABLE OF CONTENTS (2)

<i>PART 3 – WEBSITE DESIGN QUALITY</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>CHAPTER 5 – WEBSITE PROMOTION</i>	<i>94</i>
5.1 Domain Name	95
5.2 Searching	99
5.3 Literature Promotion	106
5.4 Browser Compatibility	107
5.5 Concluding Remarks about Website Promotion	112
<i>CHAPTER 6 – USE OF WEB DESIGN FEATURES</i>	<i>114</i>
6.1 Text Display	115
6.2 Colour	122
6.3 Graphics	126
6.4 Sound	134
6.5 Menus	136
6.6 Simple Animations	139
6.7 More Complex Animations with Macromedia Flash®	142
6.8 Video Presentations	143
6.9 Electronic Documents	146
6.10 Search Facilities	149
6.11 Email	150
6.12 Blogs	151
6.13 Concluding Remarks about Use of Web Design Features	153
<i>CHAPTER 7 – WEBSITE LAYOUT AND STYLE</i>	<i>154</i>
7.1 Aesthetics (pleasure of use)	157
7.2 Intuitiveness (ease of use)	164
7.3 Consistency (standardisation of functionality)	172
7.4 Compactness (size of Website files)	177
7.5 Completeness (presence of all elements)	180
7.6 Concluding Remarks about Website Layout and Style	184
<i>CHAPTER 8 – WEBSITE STRUCTURAL COMPLEXITY</i>	<i>185</i>
8.1 Tree Complexity	186
8.2 Hyperlinks	192
8.3 Website Mapping	196
8.4 Concluding Remarks about Website Structural Complexity	198
<i>PART 4 – WEBSITE EFFECTIVENESS</i>	<i>199</i>
<i>CHAPTER 9 – EFFECTIVENESS OF WEBSITE DESIGNS FOR MISSION</i>	<i>202</i>
9.1 Relating the Mission of Local Churches to the Internet	202
9.2 Webmasters' Views of Effectiveness of Websites for Mission	211
9.3 Local Methodist Church Mission Priorities	218
9.4 Effectiveness of Website Content in Supporting Mission	227
9.5 Effectiveness of the Use of Feedback	234
9.6 Concluding Remarks about Website Effectiveness	239

TABLE OF CONTENTS (3)

CONCLUSIONS	241
PART 1 – MISSIOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	243
PART 2 – WEBSITE PROVISION	245
PART 3 – WEBSITE DESIGN	247
PART 4 – WEBSITE EFFECTIVENESS	249
 APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE	 253
 APPENDIX 2 – COVERING LETTER FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE	 266
 APPENDIX 3 – CHURCH WEBSITE HOME PAGES	 268
 APPENDIX 4 – OTHER WEBPAGES	 313
 APPENDIX 5 – WEBSITE DESIGN SOFTWARE	 337
 GLOSSARY OF COMPUTING TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	 341
COMPUTING TERMS	341
ABBREVIATIONS	345
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 348
ARTICLES, BOOKS, REPORTS AND WEB DOCUMENTS	348
JOURNALS	366
WEBSITES	367

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (1)

FIGURES

Figure 6.1	Font Samples from Microsoft® Windows® XP	116
Figure 6.2	Some Colour Combination Possibilities	123
Figure 6.3	Graphics from Local Methodist church Websites	128
Figure 6.4	Logos found on Local Methodist church Websites	129
Figure 6.5	A Church Picture and Two Thumbnails	131
Figure 6.6	Stills of Animations from Local Methodist church Websites	140
Figure 8.1	An Example of Website Structure	186
Figure A3.1	Abbots Langley Methodist Church – Home Page	268
Figure A3.2(1)	Amptill Methodist Church – Top & Left of Home Page	269
Figure A3.2(2)	Amptill Methodist Church – Bottom & Right of Home Page	270
Figure A3.2(3)	Amptill Methodist Church – Home Page after pressing “F11” Key	271
Figure A3.3(1)	Croxley Green Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	272
Figure A3.3(2)	Croxley Green Methodist Church – Middle of Home Page	273
Figure A3.3(3)	Croxley Green Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	274
Figure A3.4	Deanway United Church – Home Page	275
Figure A3.5(1)	Digswell Village Church – Top of Home Page	276
Figure A3.5(2)	Digswell Village Church – Bottom of Home Page	277
Figure A3.6(1)	Harlington Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	278
Figure A3.6(2)	Harlington Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	279
Figure A3.7(1)	Harpenden High Street Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	280
Figure A3.7(2)	Harpenden High Street Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	281
Figure A3.8(1)	Hertford Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	282
Figure A3.8(2)	Hertford Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	283
Figure A3.9(1)	Hoddesdon Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	284
Figure A3.9(2)	Hoddesdon Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	285
Figure A3.10	Ley Hill Methodist Church – Home Page	286
Figure A3.11(1)	Marlborough Road Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	287
Figure A3.11(2)	Marlborough Road Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	288
Figure A3.12(1)	North Harrow Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	289
Figure A3.12(2)	North Harrow Methodist Church – Part 2 of Home Page	290
Figure A3.12(3)	North Harrow Methodist Church – Part 3 of Home Page	291
Figure A3.12(4)	North Harrow Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	292
Figure A3.13(1)	Notting Hill Methodist Church – Top of Home Page	293
Figure A3.13(2)	Notting Hill Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page	294
Figure A3.14	Oxlease Methodist Church – Home Page	295
Figure A3.15(1)	Panshanger Church – Top of Home Page	296
Figure A3.15(2)	Panshanger Church – Bottom of Home Page	297
Figure A3.16	St. Andrews Methodist Church, Bushey Heath – Home Page	298
Figure A3.17(1)	St. Hugh & St. John’s Church – Top of Home Page	299
Figure A3.17(2)	St. Hugh & St. John’s Church – Bottom of Home Page	300
Figure A3.18(1)	St. Mark’s & Putnoe Heights – Top of Home Page	301
Figure A3.18(2)	St. Mark’s & Putnoe Heights – Middle of Home Page	302
Figure A3.18(3)	St. Mark’s & Putnoe Heights – Bottom of Home Page	303

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (2)

FIGURES – CONTINUED

<i>Figure A3.19(1) Southdown Methodist Church – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>304</i>
<i>Figure A3.19(2) Southdown Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>305</i>
<i>Figure A3.20(1) Trinity Church, Harrow – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>306</i>
<i>Figure A3.20(2) Trinity Church, Harrow – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>307</i>
<i>Figure A3.21(1) Trinity Church, Knebworth – Home Page</i>	<i>308</i>
<i>Figure A3.21(2) Trinity Church, Knebworth – Top of Psedo-Home Page</i>	<i>309</i>
<i>Figure A3.21(3) Trinity Church, Knebworth – Bottom of Psedo-Home Page</i>	<i>310</i>
<i>Figure A3.22(1) Watton Methodist Church – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>311</i>
<i>Figure A3.22(2) Watton Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>312</i>
<i>Figure A4.1 Amazon.co.uk (2005) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>313</i>
<i>Figure A4.2 Amazon.com (2005) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>314</i>
<i>Figure A4.3 Argos (2003b) – Netscape Error Page</i>	<i>315</i>
<i>Figure A4.4 Easyjet.co.uk (2005) – Top of Bookings Page</i>	<i>316</i>
<i>Figure A4.5(1) Holy Trinity Brompton (2004) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>317</i>
<i>Figure A4.5(2) Holy Trinity Brompton (2004) – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>318</i>
<i>Figure A4.5(3) Holy Trinity Brompton (2006) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>319</i>
<i>Figure A4.5(4) Holy Trinity Brompton (2006) – Middle of Home Page</i>	<i>320</i>
<i>Figure A4.5(5) Holy Trinity Brompton (2006) – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>321</i>
<i>Figure A4.6 The Hungersite (2004) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>322</i>
<i>Figure A4.7(1) Philishave Registration (2005a)</i>	<i>323</i>
<i>Figure A4.7(2) Philishave Registration (2005b) – Error Page</i>	<i>324</i>
<i>Figure A4.7(3) Philishave Registration (2005c) – Competition Page</i>	<i>325</i>
<i>Figure A4.8 Pinner, Love Lane, Methodist Church (2004) – No Home Page</i>	<i>326</i>
<i>Figure A4.9 Putney Methodist Church (2004) – Home Page</i>	<i>327</i>
<i>Figure A4.10(1) St Pixels.com (2006) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>328</i>
<i>Figure A4.10(2) St Pixels.com (2006) – Middle of Home Page</i>	<i>329</i>
<i>Figure A4.10(3) St Pixels.com (2006) – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>330</i>
<i>Figure A4.10(4) St Pixels.com (2006) – Top of Worship Page</i>	<i>331</i>
<i>Figure A4.10(5) St Pixels.com (2006) – Bottom of Worship Page</i>	<i>332</i>
<i>Figure A4.11(1) Tesco.com (2004) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>333</i>
<i>Figure A4.11(2) Tesco.com (2004) – Bottom of Home Page</i>	<i>334</i>
<i>Figure A4.12 Tesco.com Extra (2005) – Top of Home Page</i>	<i>335</i>
<i>Figure A4.13 Webcameron (2006) – Home Page</i>	<i>336</i>

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (3)

GRAPHS

<i>Graph 4.1</i>	<i>Website Availability vs. District Rank</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Graph 4.2</i>	<i>Website Availability vs. District Employment Rank</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Graph 4.3</i>	<i>Website Provision vs. Church Nature</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Graph 4.4</i>	<i>Membership vs. Website Provision</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Graph 4.5</i>	<i>Worship Attendance vs. Website Provision</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Graph 4.6</i>	<i>Age Profiles of Webmasters and Churches</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Graph 4.7</i>	<i>Website Design Experience</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Graph 5.1</i>	<i>Share of Web Searches, February 2004</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Graph 9.1</i>	<i>Ministers' Responses as to whether their Church has a Mission Statement</i>	<i>212</i>
<i>Graph 9.2</i>	<i>Webmasters' Responses as to whether their Church has a Mission Statement</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>Graph 9.3</i>	<i>Responses to Questions about Existence of a Church Mission Statement</i>	<i>214</i>
<i>Graph 9.4</i>	<i>Percentage of Websites that 'fit in' with Mission Statements (Webmasters' Views)</i>	<i>216</i>
<i>Graph 9.5</i>	<i>Webmasters' Responses as to whether Websites' Effectiveness for Mission is Assessed</i>	<i>218</i>
<i>Graph 9.6</i>	<i>Ministers' Ranking of Mission Priorities (All Churches)</i>	<i>219</i>
<i>Graph 9.7</i>	<i>Ministers' Ranking of Mission Priorities (Methodist Churches)</i>	<i>220</i>
<i>Graph 9.8</i>	<i>Ministers' Ranking of Mission Priorities (Ecumenical Churches)</i>	<i>220</i>
<i>Graph 9.9</i>	<i>Weighted Ranking of Mission Priorities (All Churches) – as a percentage</i>	<i>221</i>
<i>Graph 9.10</i>	<i>Weighted Ranking of Mission Priorities (Methodist Churches) – as a percentage</i>	<i>222</i>
<i>Graph 9.11</i>	<i>Weighted Ranking of Mission Priorities (Ecumenical Churches) – as a percentage</i>	<i>223</i>
<i>Graph 9.12</i>	<i>Types of Feedback and how Webmasters use them</i>	<i>237</i>

LIST OF TABLES (1)

<i>Table 3.1</i>	<i>Pilot Questionnaire Assessments</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Table 4.1</i>	<i>Website Provision and Church Nature</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Table 4.2</i>	<i>Churches by Denominational Mix</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Table 4.3</i>	<i>Churches With and Without Websites</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Table 4.4</i>	<i>Website Design Capabilities</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Table 4.5</i>	<i>No Website Designers – Reasons for not having a Website</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Table 4.6</i>	<i>With Website Designers – Reasons for not having a Website</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Table 4.7</i>	<i>People who suggested having a Website</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Table 4.8</i>	<i>Types of Influence in having a Website</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Table 4.9</i>	<i>Gender of Webmasters and Church Congregations</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>Table 4.10</i>	<i>Age of Webmasters and Church Congregations</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Table 4.11</i>	<i>Webmasters’ Experience</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Table 4.12</i>	<i>Sources of Webmasters’ Website Design Knowledge</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Table 4.13</i>	<i>Software used by Webmasters for Website Support</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Table 5.1</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Domain Names</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>Table 5.2</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Keywords</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Table 5.3</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Searching</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Table 5.4</i>	<i>Search-Engine Performance</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Table 5.5</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Literature Promotion</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Table 5.6</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Browser Compatibility</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Table 5.7</i>	<i>Browsers used to access TheCounter.com in February 2004</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>Table 5.8</i>	<i>Significant Factors for Browser Compatibility</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Table 6.1</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Fonts</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>Table 6.2</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Tables</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Table 6.3</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Text Content</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Table 6.4</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Colour</i>	<i>125</i>
<i>Table 6.5</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Graphics</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>Table 6.6</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Sound</i>	<i>135</i>
<i>Table 6.7</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Menus</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>Table 6.8</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Simple Animations</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>Table 6.9</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Flash® Animations</i>	<i>143</i>
<i>Table 6.10</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Video Presentations</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>Table 6.11</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Documents</i>	<i>148</i>
<i>Table 6.12</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Email</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>Table 6.13</i>	<i>Websites using Blogs</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>Table 7.1</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Aesthetics</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>Table 7.2</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Intuitiveness</i>	<i>170</i>
<i>Table 7.3</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Consistency</i>	<i>176</i>
<i>Table 7.4</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Compactness</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>Table 7.5</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Completeness</i>	<i>183</i>
<i>Table 8.1</i>	<i>Branch / Leaf Nodes for Fully-Populated Trees</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>Table 8.2</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Tree Complexity</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>Table 8.3</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Hyperlinks</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>Table 8.4</i>	<i>Conformity to Design Principles for Website Mapping</i>	<i>197</i>
<i>Table 9.1</i>	<i>Importance of Aspects of Worship, with Weighted Scores</i>	<i>224</i>
<i>Table 9.2</i>	<i>Importance of Aspects of Learning & Caring, with Weighted Scores</i>	<i>225</i>

LIST OF TABLES (2)

<i>Table 9.3</i>	<i>Importance of Aspects of Service, with Weighted Scores</i>	<i>226</i>
<i>Table 9.4</i>	<i>Importance of Aspects of Evangelism, with Weighted Scores</i>	<i>227</i>
<i>Table 9.5</i>	<i>Potential Number of Webpages if related to the Priority of Mission Areas</i>	<i>231</i>
<i>Table 9.6</i>	<i>Mission Priorities for Churches and Local Church Webpages</i>	<i>233</i>
<i>Table 9.7</i>	<i>Types of Feedback and how Webmasters use them</i>	<i>237</i>
<i>Table A5.1</i>	<i>Adobe UK (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing</i>	<i>337</i>
<i>Table A5.2</i>	<i>Macromedia UK (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing</i>	<i>338</i>
<i>Table A5.3</i>	<i>Namo (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing</i>	<i>339</i>
<i>Table A5.4</i>	<i>Serif (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing</i>	<i>339</i>
<i>Table A5.5</i>	<i>Microsoft UK (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing</i>	<i>340</i>
<i>Table A5.6</i>	<i>Cute FTP (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing</i>	<i>340</i>

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is the nature of the relationships between Websites – which enable global access to data and interaction – and local churches – which are congregations whose core focus is on particular, geographically-located, communities. Thus, in considering the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites for local Methodist churches,¹ this thesis brings together two seemingly dissimilar disciplines – Christian mission studies and information technology – as well as incorporating insights from other disciplines, such as media studies, marketing, economics and the social sciences.

This work finds its primary focus in addressing the thesis that there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. The argument of this thesis plays a part in the integration of the fields of missiology and information technology, making an original contribution to knowledge because of the way in which macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology are considered along with the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. In conjunction with the gathering of new data about local church mission priorities and Websites and the production of original statistical information, new insights are revealed concerning the deployment of information technology in the context of Christian mission and, in particular, new insights into the deployment of Website technology in the context of local Methodist churches.

By way of further introduction to this work, brief consideration will now be given to the development of Website technology and to the way in which local church Websites relate to mission. The research rationale and assumptions will then be outlined, the thesis will be more fully explained and, finally, an outline of the contents of each of the parts of this study will be given.

1 Although the term ‘local Methodist churches’ is used in this thesis, it must be noted that the churches under consideration include a number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships with participating denominations including Methodists.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WEBSITE TECHNOLOGY

In the 21st Century, the Internet is so integral to many people's lives that many companies and organisations not only use Websites and email for internal purposes, but also promote the use of these technologies by using them to provide information and services for their clients. And yet in the mid-1980s – just two decades earlier – it was only possible for a few people to access computers in different physical locations around the world using networking technologies – such as those people with access to the facilities of universities and government departments. The idea of a 'Web' of human relationships far predates the advent of the World Wide Web; it is mentioned, for example by Arendt (1958, 183) in the context of the interaction between people by action and speech. However, the development and improvement of the technology underlying the phenomenal growth of the World Wide Web in recent years has resulted in Websites now existing for all sorts of reasons and in many different languages. Thus, the Defense Advanced Projects Research Agency (1997), originator of the ARPANet, claims that it has been involved in the "development of technologies that stimulate revolutionary changes in the commercial market" – a claim that seems to be substantiated by the way in which the ARPANet technologies have spawned what is known today as the Internet.

The availability of the Internet, coupled with the development of Website design languages and software, has enabled Website design to be undertaken not only by trained information technology personnel, but also by self-taught 'amateurs'. At the same time, the increasingly widespread availability of personal computers – perhaps driven by the reduction in the actual and relative cost of these machines – has seen Websites being created for all sorts of reasons, including data access, commerce and banking, video game playing, 'blogging', online 'chat rooms' and for religious purposes. In describing the Internet Archive project based in San Francisco, Huberman (2001, 1) noted that "as of July 2000, they had collected one billion Web pages ... and the collection keeps growing at a rate of 10 percent per month." Although that growth rate has not been sustained in percentage terms,² it was still possible in January 2008 for the Internet Archive (2008) to give people the opportunity to access "85 billion web pages archived from 1996 to a few months ago."

2 By January 2008, sustained growth in percentage terms would yield over 5.3 trillion Webpages, whereas sustained numerical growth (i.e. 100 million pages per month) would yield about 10 billion Webpages.

This numerical growth in Webpages might not be felt to be relevant to local churches if there was no evidence of people using the Internet for purposes other than work. However, Vogel (2005, 41) revealed that research had “found that more than 80% of a 1500-strong research sample trawled the Internet or sent text messages as part of their working day ... almost 20% of people had taken part in online auctions, with 27% doing personal shopping and 30% using search engines for personal reasons ... over a third of respondents said they averaged 15 to 30 minutes a day on such activities.” When private use of the Internet is considered alongside the culture of Internet usage during the working day, there is a clear suggestion that the Internet is a medium with which many people engage and that it is therefore a medium through which Christian organisations and local churches – including, of particular relevance to this work, local Methodist churches – could potentially relate to very large numbers of people. Indeed, with the increasing availability of the Internet through wireless networking and on mobile phones such as the Blackberry® series and the Nokia N95, it is possible to foresee a situation in the not-to-distant future where the accessibility of the Internet reaches a point which makes it possible for people to use it wherever and whenever they wish to.

LOCAL CHURCH WEBSITES AND MISSION

There is great diversity in the nature of local churches, of their associated communities and of what they would see as their mission priorities; Jackson (2002, 87) notes that “society is fragmenting fast, the number of sub-cultures is multiplying”. Faced with such diversity, if the Church is to seem relevant to people immersed in these sub-cultures, it would arguably be sensible for each of these local churches to have a specific mission, which is part of the wider mission of the wider Church, yet is related not just to the doctrines and traditions of the wider Church, but also to the individual congregation and to the context within which the local church is situated. This seems to be what Kirk (1999, 24) had in mind when he suggested that: “mission is quite simply, though profoundly, what the Christian community is sent to do, beginning right where it is located”. There is much evidence of this approach being used in contemporary Christian endeavours – for example in the ‘Fresh Expressions’ initiatives (freshexpressions.org.uk, 2007).

Despite the diversity of mission initiatives, there is still a lot of commonality of approach among local churches – whether in using traditional or more recent techniques for mission – and a large number of local churches now have in common the fact that they have Websites.

This is a remarkable situation because the relatively recent development of Website technology means that, even just over a decade ago, there was not even a suggestion of the possibility of local churches having Websites. Indeed, Hardcastle (1993, 12), when listing his “Top Five Main Uses of Computers” for churches suggested that computers can be used for word processing, desk top publishing, databases, accounting and biblical processing, but made no mention at all of the possibility of Internet access, email communication or local church Websites. A few years after Hardcastle’s appraisal of the uses of computers for churches, the Internet began to be accessed by more and more people at home – albeit initially with slow data rates of 28kbps – so that it was therefore possible for Morgan (1996, 204-205) to observe that “the use of IT in churches ... has increased greatly in the last 12 years ... (but) ... the patterns of use in churches can seem extremely primitive ... at the more advanced end ... some churches are using facilities for external data communications by access to electronic mail facilities through Internet providers.” However, the situation has changed again in the last ten years – perhaps driven initially by the availability of free Web authoring packages such as Microsoft® Frontpage® and the enthusiasm of individuals within local churches; there is increasingly widespread adoption of Website technology in local churches in the form of an increasing number of local church Websites and many people within church communities routinely use email for communication purposes.

The impact of the Internet on contemporary culture has developed to the extent that Boardman (2005, 21) was able to assert that “the Web is now so well developed as a mainstream communication medium that most organisations are considered foolish if they do not have a presence on it.” The growing use of technology by Christians has not, however, been universally acclaimed. Steele (2001, 27) sounds a warning for Christians who are attracted into using new technologies for mission: “The result can be that you start buying ‘toys’ that may not actually serve to advance the Kingdom or even your specific ministry.” Nevertheless, although Christians belong to a tradition which values as scriptural St. Paul’s assertion that “what seems to be God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what seems to be God’s weakness is stronger than human strength”,³ it is clearly the case that, reflecting the trends of Website usage in the secular world, Christians are learning to use Websites for applications as diverse as information sharing, chat rooms, ‘Blogs’ and e-

3 The Bible – 1 Corinthians 1:25.

commerce.

The recent developments in Internet and Website technology certainly give the Church new opportunities for mission – and might even ultimately lead to the Church, or to parts of it, being redefined altogether. Indeed, Ward (2002, 87) suggests that the future of the Church lies in it being a ‘liquid church’ in which a “networked church would connect individuals, groups and organizations in series of flows ... (using) Internet connection, email communication, or personal contact and localized gatherings ... (so that) action could be planned and then completed.” The current situation, however, is one in which many of the traditional practices of the Church continue whereas, at the same time, some Christians have seized upon the developments in Internet technology as creating ideal opportunities for aiding the Church – and their own local churches – in mission. Ashworth (2004) reported on the Church Times Website that the Oxford Diocese was setting up an Internet church which would be called i-church, would be organised through a Website (i-church, 2004), and would be led by a lay or ordained Web pastor. The initiative was said to be in response to research that had identified a need; Ashworth (2004) reported that the community’s “rule of life will reflect a commitment to prayer, study and social action. Visitors to the site will also be able to use its spiritual, worship and information resources.” The i-church’s originator was reported by Ashworth (2004) to have no idea whether it would work, so that only time would tell whether this Internet-based approach to being Church was a viable one. The Net (2006) suggested a degree of success for i-church in terms of the number of people using the Website, as well as a potential difficulty in getting people to engage with the community: “i-church seems to me to be growing from strength to strength with more people joining each month and a steady flow of people deciding to join the i-church community as well. We must be doing something right, with 3-4,000 people visiting our web site each month. We now need to figure out how we can attract those 3,000 or so visitors enough to want to join us!” In 2004, a Website called Ship of Fools was sponsored by the Methodist Church to set up what it claimed to be “the UK’s first web-based, 3D church, which opened as a three-month experiment on May 11th” (Church of Fools, 2004a). However, Church of Fools (2004b) claimed phenomenal success: “It’s been an extraordinary week for Church of Fools. Since last week’s launch, the church has been welcoming, on average, 8,000 visitors per day. But on Wednesday, over 41,000 visitors crammed into the church in one 24-hour period, exceeding all expectations for congregational size.” Despite – or perhaps because of – its

success, Church of Fools, (2004c) also experienced problems with mischievous people: “Anyway, back to Satan. Disguised as a normal worshipper, I came across him ranting in our pixellated pulpit.” Another Christian Website that is well-known, much-used and often referred to with Hyperlinks from church Websites is Rejesus (2005) which promotes itself on its Homepage as follows: “Two thousand years after he walked the earth, Jesus of Nazareth remains one of the most talked-about and influential people who has ever lived. In the pages that follow, we explore his life, character, teaching and followers.” Ireland (2003, 176) noted that the Rejesus Website was getting a million hits a year and noted that “the most visited part of this site, *which is designed for non-Christians*, is the daily prayer space, where people can light a virtual candle, read a verse and say a prayer online.”

The examples quoted above suggest that Websites have a lot of potential for helping national and local churches to promote themselves and to share the gospel message with the Internet community. Furthermore, there is the possibility that the Internet will actually enhance the Church’s ability to reach people because of its uniqueness as a communication medium; e-vangelism.info (2002) claims that: “We have found that the anonymity that the Internet provides enables people to feel more at liberty to open up and talk about Jesus in a way that they would never think of doing face to face. People feel free from pressure and embarrassment and can stay and talk or leave whenever they want to.” The proliferation of Christian Websites would seem to indicate that the opportunity to use Websites is proving, to some extent, to be beneficial for Christian mission – a view which Roxborough (1999, 117) supports: “the Internet has facilitated Christian mission by providing fast, cheap, secure global communication and information access.” Roxborough (1999, 118) also gives more specific details of ways in which the Internet has proved to be beneficial, for example by saying that “it is easy for churches partnered to churches in other countries to learn about one another’s cultures and keep in communication. Potential missionaries can learn about where they expect to serve and about job opportunities.”

The examples given above are by no means exhaustive, but they suggest that, as with people working in many different organisations, Christians are able to produce excellent Websites. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Norved and Barry (2002, 19) observed that “a myriad of Christian websites proliferate on the web ... many of these actually contain fabulous content”. It is also important to note that there are other potential benefits of Websites, such

as the ability to transcend geographical barriers; Roxborough (1999, 120) suggests that “The Internet offers another level of publishing alongside that of books and journals. Geographical isolation may not be removed, but it is greatly ameliorated.” However, today’s Websites have far exceeded the simple amelioration of geographic limitations. It has become possible, especially as the technology underlying Websites has improved, for people to gain a sense of close community which was previously only possible by personal contact. Internet interactivity features of programs like Windows® Messenger and chat rooms now give users the ability to ‘talk’ to other users in ‘real-time’. Features such as microphones and webcams have added sound and vision to these experiences and the advent of Broadband technologies means that both the sound and vision can now be received with reasonable quality. These developments give even more weight to an argument used by Lochhead (1997, 66-67) in a time when the communication provided by Websites was far less interactive, yet still very intimate: “Any medium of communication has the power to form community ... Unlike the anonymous ‘communities’ created by the mass media, the communities made possible by computer communications tend to be small and intimate.” Some of the positive benefits of using the Internet and Websites for Christian mission are therefore very clear; it is with this in mind that the research into the provision, design and effectiveness of local church Websites was conducted.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

In undertaking this research, the methodology was carefully considered in order that the results of the research would be both academically valid and academically valuable. Robson (2002, 19) suggests that “it is valuable to have ... a ‘scientific attitude’ ... that the research is carried out *systematically*, *sceptically* and *ethically* ... to seek the ‘truth’ about whatever is the subject of the research” and this is the approach that has been adopted in the research and in writing this thesis. Nevertheless, such an approach does not preclude an acknowledgement that the researcher’s participation in the research will affect it in some way; indeed, May (2001, 2) argues that “our very membership of a society ... is a necessary condition for understanding the social world of which we are a part, as well as being a fact of life from which we cannot escape.” Therefore, it must be acknowledged at this point that the author of this thesis was keen to undertake research that would link his background in computer science with his ministry in the Methodist Church and his enthusiasm for mission. Given the developments in Internet and Website technology within the Church community that have

been noted above, a study of Website provision, design and effectiveness within the Methodist Church seemed to be a good area on which to focus. A further driver behind the research was that although many local Methodist churches do now have Websites, these can be expensive to provide and – in terms of both financial and human resources – expensive to maintain; it is not immediately clear simply by accessing local church Websites whether these Websites are ‘toys’ or are essential tools for mission. In addition, the fact that many local churches do have Websites leads to the question as to why some local churches do not have Websites; if Websites are considered to be a useful tool for Mission, but there is a lack of resources or expertise to implement them for all local churches, then it can be argued that this shortfall needs to be understood and – though outside of the scope of this thesis – that action needs to be taken in order to remedy the situation. Thus it can be seen why this research, having been carried out by a Methodist minister, has specifically studied the Websites of local Methodist Churches.

Acknowledgement of the researcher’s background has had a number of beneficial effects for the research: 1) the scope of the research was tightly defined, thus making data gathering manageable; 2) the research dataset – being limited to one Christian denomination – could be tailored so that it would be possible to collect and analyse the data using a denominational framework; 3) access to the community of people needed for the research – Methodist ministers and local church Webmasters of the London North West District of the Methodist Church – was aided by the researcher belonging to that community. The wide range of economic and social conditions embraced by the Methodist Church’s London North West District, which included areas of central London and the suburbs of London, as well as much of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire,⁴ also gave the possibility that the outcomes of the research might be applicable in a wider context academically, as well as to the Methodist Church in other parts of the country, or to other churches or organisations.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

In carrying out the research and evaluation described in this thesis, it has been necessary to make a number of assumptions in order to focus the work. It is important that these

⁴ From 1st September 2006, the four Methodist Districts covering areas in and around London and, to some extent, the surrounding Districts, were reshaped to enable there to be one London District. The London North West District therefore no longer exists.

assumptions are noted in order that the way in which conclusions are drawn within this thesis is fully understood; except for the first assumption, this introduction simply notes the assumptions and explains where the reasoning behind them will be given.

Mission Priorities

The first assumption – that each local church has a set of mission priorities – is related to understanding the missions of the local churches under consideration in this study, and especially to chapters 1, 3 and 9 of this thesis. The local churches which have either chosen to provide Websites, or to provide information about their churches for publication on other Websites, are operating in a very diverse set of communities and contexts. Such diversity makes it hard to define, in a way which is robust and yet open to examination, exactly what is involved in the mission of each local church. Thus, in order to evaluate the mission of each local church being studied, this thesis assumes that each local church has a set of mission priorities; inherent in this assumption is an understanding that such mission priorities may be recorded in written ‘mission statements’, but may also be implicit in what is done by the congregation of the local church and, of particular importance for this study, should be reflected in the content of the corresponding local church Website.

Missiological Significance of Website Design Quality

The second assumption – that Website design quality has missiological significance – is related to the ways in which the experiences of local church Website users can affect their engagement with Websites and can therefore affect their engagement as subjects of the mission of the corresponding local churches. This assumption is especially relevant to Part 3 (chapters 5 to 8) of this study, which considers Website design quality. The rationale behind this assumption is therefore given in the introduction to Part 3.

Applying Commercial and Secular Standards to Church Websites

The third assumption – that it is not problematic using the values and standards of Website design that are used to assess commercial and secular Websites to assess Websites for local churches – is related to the way in which the local church Website designs are perceived by their users. This assumption is especially relevant to Part 3 (chapters 5 to 8) of this study, which considers Website design quality. The rationale behind this assumption is therefore given in the introduction to Part 3.

Websites as Neutral Tools

The fourth assumption – that local church Websites are essentially neutral in their effect on the mission of a local church – is related to the effects that the deployment of local church Websites might have on the mission of the corresponding local churches and especially to the exploration of Website effectiveness for mission in chapter 9 of this study. The rationale behind this assumption is therefore given in the introduction to Part 4.

THE THESIS BEING ADDRESSED

Having studied a number of local church Websites before undertaking the research, the researcher had formulated a working hypothesis that such Websites could be more effective for mission purposes with the aid of: improved capabilities for Website provision; improved Website design quality, better relationships between Websites and churches' mission priorities; and better use of feedback and/or statistics to improve existing Websites. Therefore, as has already been stated, the thesis underlying this work is that there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. In the context of considering macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, the focus of this study in terms of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches is therefore on three areas: i) the provision of local church Websites, including the factors behind Website deployment; ii) the design of local church Websites – i.e. Website promotion, individual Website design features, layout and style, and structural complexity; and iii) the effectiveness of local church Websites as tools for mission in terms of relating to their churches' mission priorities and employing the feedback that is received by Webmasters from users and statistics.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

In order to address the thesis that there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design, this study has been divided

into four principal parts:

- Part 1 addresses macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining missiological and methodological considerations – thereby placing into their theoretical context the empirical studies in Parts 2 to 4 that will address micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. In order to do this, chapter 1 derives a framework for studying the mission priorities of the local churches under consideration, chapter 2 considers implications of the relationship between technology and Christian mission – particularly the technologies of the Internet and Websites – and chapter 3 summarises the methodology employed for the research into the mission of local Methodist churches and the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites, as well as explaining the design and trialling of the Research Questionnaire.
- Part 2 – chapter 4 – begins to address the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by addressing Website provision for local Methodist churches. This work entails examining government-produced socio-economic information relating to the local churches under consideration and the information returned in the Research Questionnaires about the provision of local Methodist church Websites in order to determine the factors which affect Website provision.
- Part 3 continues to address the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by examining the design quality of the local churches' Websites with respect to 'best practice'. In order to do this, chapter 5 focuses on the techniques employed for Website promotion, chapter 6 focuses on the use of Website design features, chapter 7 focuses on the layout and style of Websites and chapter 8 focuses on Website structural complexity – i.e. the way in which the Website structures are designed and the techniques that are used to facilitate access to Webpages within, and external to, the Websites under consideration. Where applicable, there is also a consideration of the socio-economic data gathered in conjunction with the Research Questionnaires.
- Part 4 – chapter 9 – completes the work of addressing the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by evaluating whether the Websites of the local churches under consideration are effective in terms of the churches' mission priorities and then evaluating whether the

feedback that is received by Webmasters about their local church Websites is used effectively.

After Part 4, the key conclusions drawn about the macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and the micro-missiological issues related to the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites are briefly summarised in the concluding chapter.

PART 1 – MISSIOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Part 1 of this thesis addresses macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining missiological and methodological considerations – thereby placing into their theoretical context the empirical studies that will address micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches in Parts 2 to 4.

The first chapter of this part of the thesis – chapter 1 – derives a framework for studying the mission priorities of the local churches under consideration by considering in turn: the use of the word ‘mission’ in the local church context; the nature of mission in the universal Church; and the nature of mission in the local church context. Finally, a framework for the study of mission in the local church context is derived.

The second chapter of this part of the thesis – chapter 2 – situates the empirical studies of Websites in this thesis within their missiological context. This is done by first considering the missiological significance of strategies and techniques as tools employed in mission, next considering implications of the relationship between technology and Christian mission, moving on to consider key missiological themes and issues relating the mission of God to ecclesiology and information technology and finally considering mission in the context of the Internet and Websites.

The third chapter of this part of the thesis – chapter 3 – describes the methodology employed for the research into the mission of local Methodist churches and the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites, as well as explaining the practical aspects of the research work, such as the design and trialling of the Research Questionnaire.

By thus addressing the macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, this part of the thesis lays the groundwork for the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches which, in turn, will enable the thesis to play a part in the integration of the fields of missiology and information technology and make an original contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER 1 – MISSION AND LOCAL CHURCHES

This chapter begins the work of addressing macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining missiological and methodological considerations in order to place into their theoretical context the empirical studies that will address micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches in Parts 2 to 4 of this thesis.

Since all local churches are located in a particular context by virtue of their physical dependence upon buildings, in a particular context, their mission priorities should, if they are truly to be called local churches, relate primarily to the people within that context – even if some churches do engage with mission projects outside of their local area. Thus, Van Engen (1991, 31) notes how David Moberg in 1962 “insisted that, because of their essential identity, churches are agents of mission in their environment.” However, Van Engen (1991, 33) also notes that it is “precisely because of being part of the universal *Church* that the local congregation is in *mission*” and the starting point for deriving an understanding of the concept of ‘mission’ as it applies to local churches must therefore be an understanding of the mission of the universal Church. In order to derive an understanding of the mission of the universal Church, this chapter will therefore begin by considering contemporary concepts of ‘mission’, along with concepts of the mission of God in order to derive an understanding of the use of the word ‘mission’ in the local church context. Then, having considered the meaning of the concept of ‘mission’ as it applies to the universal Church, this chapter will go on to consider the nature of ‘mission’ in the local church context before arriving at the framework that will be used for studying the mission of local churches in this thesis. In conjunction with the study of the use of technologies for Christian mission undertaken in chapter 2, it will then be possible, in chapter 9, to use the data gathered in the Research Questionnaires in order to examine the mission priorities of the local churches under consideration.

1.1 Towards an understanding of ‘Mission’ for Local Churches

In contemporary society, not only are terms developed in one sphere of society sometimes used in other spheres, but the meaning of certain words and concepts has actually changed to some degree over time. In terms of the use of language, this can be illustrated by the different meanings of ‘wicked’ which, according to Chambers Reference Online (2005b) can now not

only mean “evil or sinful; immoral”, but also “excellent or cool; admirable”.¹ In a similar way, terms that have traditionally been used in certain ways in the life of the Church are also now being used in other ways; although Chambers Reference Online (2005a) defines an ‘evangelist’ as “a person who preaches Christianity, especially at large public meetings”,² Careerwise UK Ltd (2005) advertised in December 2005 for a “Technology Management Evangelist ... (to) lead the shaping of a project or programme”. Also, many organisations – ranging from multi-national businesses employing thousands of people around the world, to small charities working in particular local contexts – now have a ‘mission statement’ and Armstrong (1990, 198), whose book suggests ways of being a successful manager, says that a mission statement “defines the business the organization is in and where it is going.” Although it could be argued that the nature of mission in the Church was never entirely clear – an obvious early illustration of which is the difference of opinion in the early church between those, such as Paul, who wanted to take the Gospel to the gentiles and those, such as James, who did not³ – the widespread contemporary use of the concept of mission in organisations outside of the Church could potentially make it even harder for people to understand the exact nature of the mission of the universal Church and of particular local churches. In particular, it may be difficult for those who do not practice the Christian faith to understand that, whereas many businesses or charities would determine their own mission statement and implement this with the resources at their disposal in terms of assets and personnel, no definition of the mission of the Church can be complete without reference to God’s mission and a sense of the way in which the Church’s mission priorities might be an outworking of God in mission in particular times and places.

It has been suggested by the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council (2004, 85) that a way of defining the mission of God – or *missio Dei* – is: “the mission of God as creator, through Christ, in the Spirit, is to bring into being, sustain and perfect the whole

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- 1 The full definition of ‘wicked’ in Chambers Reference Online (2005b) is: “**wicked** *adj* (**wicked**, **wickedest**) 1 evil or sinful; immoral. 2 mischievous, playful or roguish. 3 *slang* excellent or cool; admirable. Also *as exclamation*. 4 *colloq* bad • *wicked weather*. 5 (**the wicked**) wicked people as a group (see [the](#) 4b). **wickedly** *adverb*. **wickedness** *noun*.”
 - 2 The full definition of ‘evangelist’ in Chambers Reference Online (2005a) is: “**evangelist** *noun* 1 a person who preaches Christianity, especially at large public meetings. 2 (*usually* **Evangelist**) any of the writers of the four Biblical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. **evangelistic** *adj*.”
 - 3 In the New Testament, Galatians 2:11-14ff explains something of the controversy as to whether or not the Gentiles could benefit from salvation by Christ.

creation.” The focus of many Christians on the specific saving power of Christ for human beings⁴ means that this definition of mission can be challenged, but it still serves the purpose of making it clear that the mission of the Church must be set in the context of God’s own mission (*missio Dei*), with the implication that the Church should therefore be working as God’s mission partner, under his authority and direction. Perhaps this is the understanding of Thangaraj (1999, 66) who, in describing the mission of the Church (*missio ecclesiae*), suggests that “we may say that missionary responsibility is an act of prayer in which we willingly accept the relativity of our responsibility and join hands with God in the *missio Dei*.” Of help in defining where the Church’s mission sits in relationship to God’s mission is the assertion of Bosch (1991, 10) that: “We have to distinguish between mission (singular) and missions (plural). The first refers primarily to the *missio Dei* (God’s mission) ... *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people. Missions (the *missiones ecclesiae*: the missionary ventures of the church), refer to particular forms, related to specific times, places, or needs, of participation in the *missio Dei*.” This distinction between the mission of God and the missions of the churches is apparent in this thesis where, in looking at local churches, it is clear that there are many local church missions (the *missiones ecclesiae*) in progress, each of which forms but a part of the mission of God (the *missio Dei*), which is much wider-ranging, and far greater in scale. Therefore, as is the case with many of the works on Christian mission that have been consulted in producing this thesis – including Bosch (1991), Couturier (1960), Dorr (2000), Glasser and McGavran (1983), Ireland (2003), Kirk (1999), Newbiggin (1995), Stott (1975) and Thangaraj (1999) – the term ‘mission’ will be used in this thesis in relation to the Church, or to local churches (i.e. *missiones ecclesiae*), rather than in relation to God (i.e. *missio Dei*). This is because this thesis is about mission in the context of local churches, rather than about the mission of God.

1.2 Mission in the Universal Church

As each local church is a part of the universal Church, it is necessary to derive an understanding of the nature of mission in the universal Church before considering the nature of mission in the context of local churches. Much has been written about Christian mission and there is a good deal of debate as to exactly how the mission of the Church, and of its

⁴ An illustration of the focus of Christians on the specific saving power of Christ for human beings is the way in which scriptures such as John 3:16 (“whoever believes in God’s Son may have eternal life”), and the associated theology of personal salvation, can have a more central focus in the life of the Church than scriptures such as Revelation, which suggest the perfecting of creation in a new heaven and a new earth.

constituent churches, might be defined. A reader of popular fiction might find a picture of Christian mission that is about missionaries taking the gospel to people in distant lands: Kingsolver (2000) describes a family of Southern Baptist missionaries from Bethlehem, Georgia, travelling to the Belgian Congo in 1959 to work with the African peoples there; Grisham (1999) paints a picture of a lone missionary working with South American Indians in Bolivia at the end of the 20th Century. Christian mission cannot, however, be so simply defined; this section therefore looks at assertions made about Christian mission by some authors and arrives at an understanding of the nature of mission in the universal Church.

In considering the nature of Christian mission, one key factor that needs to be considered is the way in which the Christian Church has grown over a period of nearly two thousand years since the death of Jesus; a small group of people affected by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus have transmitted their faith down through the ages – albeit with some refinements as theology has developed and changed – so that the Church is now a multi-national, multi-denominational organisation with substantial financial and material assets and many millions of adherents. With this in mind, it would be easy to assume that the Church is the key force in the endeavour of Christian mission. With what might be seen at the beginning of the 21st Century as misplaced faith in the abilities of the Church and of its congregations, Couturier (1960, 3) asserts that “the church brings the effective antidote to sin, and to the disunity which is its consequence.” With similar confidence in the Church, Couturier (1960, 6-7) also suggests that “drawing near to God, confessing Christ, entering the Church, are one and the same thing ... no one can be saved without belonging to the Church.” Such a view of the Church and of its mission seems difficult to defend when one considers the internal bickering, schisms and ineffectiveness that have affected many parts of the Church through the ages. Indeed, Cotterell (1990, 187) argues that “The Church envisaged in the New Testament is a radical new community, within which the meaningless of life is marvellously resolved. The contemporary reality, and especially the European reality, is vastly different: an institution, locked into its past, preoccupied with arcane irrelevancies, yet perennially confronted by a hurting, helpless world, its fundamental questions unanswered and its meaninglessness unresolved.”

In the 21st Century world, where the incredible diversity of faiths and spiritualities is made very clear by modern forms of communication such as television and the Internet, Couturier

might also be accused of making the assumption that God cannot be found outside of the Church of Christ. Kirk (1994, 5) challenges this assumption, asking “can it still be asserted, even in a revised form, that extra ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the church there is no salvation)? Or, does such a belief reflect a kind of ecclesiastical (sic), colonial mentality that has no place in a world striving to encourage the mutual acceptance of one another by different religious groups?” Nevertheless, according to the Christian evangelistic tradition, the Christian faith does have something unique to offer the world in the belief that Jesus Christ offers salvation because of his divine-human nature and his atoning sacrifice on the cross; a central task of the Church has arguably, therefore, to be the proclamation of the Christian faith in Jesus to the wider world whilst, at the same time, acknowledging that there are things of value to be found within the non-Christian faiths and communities.

Ramachandra (1996b, 265), writing from an Asian context where different faiths have co-existed for many centuries, brings the focus of Christian mission to the work of Christ, suggesting that: “It is at the foot of the cross that all human beings, without exception, are exposed as sinners deserving of God’s wrath. But it is also at the foot of the cross, that all human beings, without exception, are revealed as the objects of God’s forgiving and re-creating love.” Ramachandra (1996b, 274) goes on to suggest that “questions of the final destiny of people who, through no fault of their own, have never had a chance to hear the good news of Jesus Christ, can safely be left in the hands of a God who the gospel reveals to be both just and gracious in his dealings with humankind.” This might be taken to suggest that those who have been exposed to the Christian gospel in some way are damned if they reject it, but because people’s experience and their attachment to a particular set of ideas, or to a particular faith community, can cause them to reject ideas as being irrelevant to them, ‘hearing’ the good news might involve an ability to take the good news of the gospel to heart, rather than just being able to hear or read the gospel message. In looking at mission across cultures, Gittins (2002, 152) seems to recognise this need to help people to take the gospel to heart, suggesting that “Christians must be in the business of constantly trying to read the signs of the times ... Unless we are close to people, our work is in vain and our words are hollow.”

Couturier (1960), does seem to recognise that the Church is imperfect, but does not acknowledge to any great extent the treasures that might exist within the world’s non-Christian faiths; the Church’s duty, as described by Couturier (1960, 9) is therefore “to

establish itself, not only where it has never been before, that is among non-Christian peoples, but also where it exists in an incomplete state, as among heretical and schismatic Christians.” In other words, Couturier’s view seems to be that the Church, as God’s agent, should see its mission both as its own perfection and as the bringing to itself – and thus to God – of those who are outside of its ranks. Perhaps, though, a better attitude towards those who are not in agreement with the Church’s doctrines would be to try to get to know them well, approaching them with an enquiring mind. It might thus be possible to perceive ways in which God is working among and through them and thus meeting with those people who might not meet with him through hearing and responding to the Christian gospel. Something of this attitude seems to be displayed by Ireland (2003, 180), who asserts that “the challenge for evangelists, therefore, in today’s multi-faith pick ‘n’ mix culture is to exercise the gift of discernment, affirming those things in other spiritualities that are not contrary to the gospel, whilst at the same time witnessing to the Christian revelation that prayer to the one true God is made possible only through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.” This thinking is akin to that of ‘mission in reverse’, which Gittins (1993, 58) associates with a number of missionary dilemmas: “how to follow the command to go and preach the Good News, yet at the same time be sensitive to the presence of the Spirit of God who arrived before us; how to respect the integrity of the people to whom we go, yet at the same time announce the news that really is new; how to minister by being ministered to, yet also bring healing and hope.”

About a decade after Couturier was writing, the Evangelical Alliance Commission on World Mission (1971, 15-16) described mission as “a response of the Church to the call of Christ to proclaim the whole counsel of God ... carried out in the power of God ... a mission of reconciliation ... a form of service ... concerned with building up the body of Christ ... it looks also towards a final consummation when all will acknowledge the lordship of Christ and when the Kingdom is finally delivered to the Father and evil overcome and judged.” This definition of the Church’s mission is fairly comprehensive, but it is problematic not only in terms of the sheer size of its scope, but also in that, by essentially suggesting that mission is the task of bringing people in to the body of Christ and building that body up, this model of mission could be said to be failing to encompass many of the activities that routinely happen in the life of many local churches. With that in mind, is fixing a light in a church a missionary activity? Is environmental campaigning a missionary activity? Is looking after a church’s finances a missionary activity? Such tasks may not instinctively be said to be at the

forefront of missionary activities, yet they are part of what is needed to maintain the Church and to care for God's creation. A few years later, Stott (1975, 11) acknowledged that "there would be a wide divergence in our understanding of what 'mission' is, of what part 'evangelism' plays in mission, and of what part 'dialogue' plays in evangelism." Helpfully, though, Stott (1975, 34) went on to define a "broader concept of mission as Christian service in the world comprising both evangelism and social action." The Church was thereby given permission to engage in activities that do not explicitly result in people coming to faith, resulting in potential models of mission that might involve the taking-out of kingdom values to the secular community, as well as the bringing-in of people to the kingdom community. Such a model of mission is not supported by Glasser and McGavran (1983, 27), whose definition is that "mission rejects any activity, even that of verbal proclamation of the name of Jesus, which does not unshakably intend that the unredeemed should choose to become disciples of Christ, bound together in congregations, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and resolved to live the corporate life as Christ would have them live it". Nevertheless, both of these views sit well with the assertion of Newbigin (1995, 2) that "separation of church from mission is theologically indefensible. More and more Christians of the old churches have come to recognise that a church that is not 'the church in mission' is no church at all."

Given the diverse ideas about Christian mission that have already been shown to exist by the relatively short exploration in this section, it is perhaps not surprising that recent thinking about mission has expressed sentiments such as those of Ramambason (1999, 161) – who suggests that "mission is what a mission-doer thinks it is" – and of Dorr (2000, 10) – who suggests that we have "a richer meaning for the word 'mission' today". However, such suggestions have not really helped to make the concept of mission any easier to define than it was before and have, if anything, made it harder to define exactly what 'mission' means. Nevertheless, the wider nature of what is now perceived as mission has meant that publications about Christian mission in recent years have expounded a plethora of different models and aspects of mission: Bosch (1991) described a number of missionary paradigms and also the thirteen elements of what he calls the 'Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm'; Thangaraj (1999, 77-99) looked at mission with respect to evangelism, conversion, transformation and dialogue; Kirk (1999) looked at the role of mission with respect to culture, justice for the poor, other faiths, peacemaking, the environment and partnership; Morisy (2004) built upon Bosch's thinking about holistic mission in making ten

propositions to commend community ministry as a model for mission. Such thinking gives a richness of possibilities for an exploration as to what the nature of mission might be in the local church context.

1.3 *Mission in the Local Church*

Given the diversity of the communities and contexts within which local churches are located, the leaders and congregations of local churches have to face the challenge of translating the missiological thinking that has developed from the doctrines of the universal Church into their own local situations. A definition of mission that can be applied to the local church is that of Kirk (1999, 24), who suggests that: “mission is quite simply, though profoundly, what the Christian community is sent to do, beginning right where it is located”.

The simplicity of Kirk’s description of local church mission – which resonates with that of Ramambason (1999, 161), who suggests that “mission is what a mission-doer thinks it is”, masks the complexity of translating missiological thinking into local church situations; much of what has been written about mission is either too abstract and too detailed for direct application to the context of local churches, or relates to concepts which can rarely be fully-embraced by any individual local church. It has sometimes been the unfortunate case that the application of missiological thinking to the local church context has resulted in views about the nature of the mission of the local church that are explained with words and concepts that are potentially incomprehensible to the very congregations of local churches they are aimed at. As an example, Van Engen (1991, 73-84) gives a five-fold description of the missionary intention of the local church comprising: “being for the world”; “identification with the oppressed”; “mission”; “proclamation witness”; and “yearning for numerical growth”. Van Engen then goes on (1991, 87-99) to describe the purpose of the local church using four words from New Testament Greek: ‘Koinonia’ – loving fellowship of the disciples; ‘Kerygma’ – confessing Jesus as Lord; ‘Diakonia’ – serving the needy; and ‘Martyria’ – witnessing to Jesus in “tangible, real, visible and effective” ways. Van Engen’s work has many good points, but a local church mission statement which used either his five-fold missionary intentions, or his description of mission as Koinonia, Kerygma, Diakonia and Martyria, would probably be far too abstract for many local congregations to easily apply in their own contexts.

An alternative view of the local church, as given by the Church of England Archbishops' Commission on Urban Priority Areas (1985, 74-80), is of a church that is local in the sense that it is committed to relating to the community and its neighbourhoods and to the groups, networks and organisations therein. This means that a local church should be: "sensitive to local cultures and life-styles in its leadership, worship and manner of operating" (1985, 75); outward-looking so as to "take seriously the local realities of life" (1985, 75); able to "recognize that God at work in society" (1985, 76); able to give time for occasional offices, develop community centres and get involved in political life (1985, 76-77); participate by collaborating, contributing, listening and being an ecumenical partner (1985, 77-80). This view of the local church came from work in Urban Priority Areas, but many of its aspects are more widely applicable. Indeed, the Church of England Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas (1990, 255-256) notes that the Parish Audits⁵ suggested for Urban Priority Areas have also been done in rural localities, but that the outcomes have reflected the different nature of the rural communities. Clearly, then, 'mission' is a subjective concept; so that even within a particular local church, opinions may differ – sometimes significantly – as to what that church's mission is, or should be, and how the Church's mission might therefore be expressed in terms of what the local church should be or what the local church should do.

Inevitably, as much of what happens in the context of local churches involves doing things – e.g. coffee mornings, worship, mums & toddlers, prayer, homelessness projects – many people might perceive that mission in the local church context is essentially about what local churches do. This 'doing' can be described in many different levels of detail and one suggestion for the church's mission in the first two decades of the 21st century is that of Willmer (1992, 152): "Christianity carries the story of Jesus: that is above all what it has to offer". In attempting to convey the story – or 'good news' – of Jesus, however, there is a danger that the ways in which local churches reach out to their communities in mission might be perceived as irrelevant or inappropriate by those very communities. Perhaps it is not, therefore, too surprising that Frost and Hirsch (2003, 63) concluded that "much of what we do in church ... often feels like an artificial experience". Similar conclusions may have been reached by those who have then arrived at models of mission which are about 'being' as well as 'doing'; countering a feeling of artificiality by bringing Christian presence to bear within

5 A 'Parish Audit' is another way of describing a local church mission audit.

communities in order that local churches may engage the members of those communities with the gospel message in relevant ways. Thus, Sutcliffe (1974, 20) suggests that “the church community must always be engaged with the issues that arise in living in the world or the socialization process of a withdrawn community will teach that the Christian faith is about withdrawal from the world”; Cotterell (1990, 267) suggests that “in mission the Church through its members brings into the situation of meaninglessness the power and authority of the Kingdom of God ... to give to us and to all who will have it a resolution of the human predicament”; Beeby (1999, 109-110) suggests that “The canon and its contents come to us as the answer to all our seeking. It witnesses to the whole truth of God. It carries the whole story that is necessary for all humankind at all times. It carries the variety that is necessary to meet all eventualities in all ages ... It bears the story that gives life and provides survival and continuity. It carries the power and authority that challenge the destructive forces about us.”; Jackson (2002, 87) suggests that “churches that engage with a variety of cultures are more likely to grow today than those dominated by just one culture of type of person”; the Methodist Church Communication Office (2004, 14-15) suggests that “effective Christian presence may or may not be building centred and may or may not be a Sunday presence ... effective Christian presence will be one in which a priestly, prophetic and evangelising ministry is exercised”.

What must, therefore, be of key importance in terms of the mission of the local church is an understanding of the situations in which the people of the local community find themselves – in order that the good news of the gospel can, with God’s help, be introduced to those people in meaningful ways. In particular, this means that the mission of a local church is not only a part of the mission of the universal Church, but that, for any given local church, it is grounded within that church’s peculiar context. This local church mission must therefore be focused on relaying the gospel story in ways that are relevant to the circumstances, needs and aspirations of the people who engage with the local church through living, working, recreating or even passing through the places where the particular local church operates.

1.4 A Framework for Studying Mission in the Local Church

As has already been shown, there is not only a great diversity of thinking about the nature of Christian mission, but also a great diversity of the contexts in which local churches seek to engage in mission. This diversity meant that a simple – yet all-encompassing – model of

local church mission was needed in order to help the local church ministers completing the Research Questionnaire to adequately express the mission priorities of their churches in whatever context they might be situated. The fact that this research was conducted among Methodist churches and ecumenical churches with Methodist participation, suggested that a suitable structure for assessing the churches' mission priorities would be the Methodist Church's 'Our Calling' document (Deeks et al, 2000) because 'Our Calling' was adopted by the Methodist Conference of 2000 and has been publicised well to Methodist ministers and used widely in local Methodist churches since its publication. 'Our Calling' structures the mission of the local church into four areas: Worship, Learning & Caring, Service and Evangelism, each of which has a statement associated with it so that they combine to form a mission statement as follows:

- ***Worship***: The Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love;
- ***Learning & Caring***: The Church exists to help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care;
- ***Service***: The Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice;
- ***Evangelism***: The Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ.

The model of mission encapsulated in 'Our Calling' was therefore used in constructing the Research Questionnaire and will also, therefore, be used in chapter 9 in order to facilitate the study of the data submitted in the Research Questionnaire about the mission priorities of the local churches which have Websites.

CHAPTER 2 – MISSION AND TECHNOLOGY

In the study of the nature of Christian mission in chapter 1 of this thesis, a distinction was made between *missio Dei* – the mission of God – and *missio ecclesiae* – the mission of the Church. In making this distinction, it was noted that the mission of the Church must be set in the context of God's own mission. This assertion naturally leads to questions as to the relevance and effectiveness of particular strategies, techniques and technologies that are employed by the Church as tools in mission and, of particular importance for this thesis, questions as to the relevance and effectiveness of employing new technologies such as the Internet and Websites for the purposes of Christian mission. Therefore, to further situate the micro-missiological empirical studies in Parts 2 to 4 of this thesis related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches within their theoretical missiological context, this chapter will address macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining the following missiological considerations: the missiological significance of strategies and techniques as tools employed in mission; implications of the relationship between technology and Christian mission; key missiological themes and issues relating the mission of God to ecclesiology and information technology; the issues raised by mission in the context of the Internet and Websites. Thus, the theoretical missiological foundations will be laid down for the subsequent parts of this thesis to build upon.

2.1 *Missiological Significance*

With the seemingly ever-faster changes to global, national and local cultures in recent years – many of which have, arguably, been driven by the advent of technologies that have improved transportation and communication links around the world – the question as to the significance of particular strategies, techniques and technologies as tools for mission demands more attention than it did when change happened at a slower pace. Bosch (1991, 4) notes that “for centuries, Western theology and Western ecclesial ways and practices were normative and undisputed, also in the ‘mission fields’ ”, yet history suggests that missionary endeavours that are successful at some point will not always continue to be so. Thus, thinking particularly of overseas missions, Bosch (1991, 365) notes that “many of the grand institutions erected by mission agencies, often at great cost and with tremendous dedication – hospitals, schools, colleges, printing houses and the like – have turned out to be impediments rather than assets to the life and growth of the younger churches.”

Over the centuries, the Church permeated British society in significant ways, such as with the

Church of England becoming the established Church, yet Ustorf (2001, 144) suggests that: “the church inculturated too well. The job was done so thoroughly that Christianity exhausted itself ... different segments of culture were able to appropriate it, reformulate it and continue perfectly well without it.” The role of the Church has also changed as a result not only of the significant ethnic, demographic and cultural changes in Great Britain since the Second World War, but also of more recent societal changes which have been driven more recently by factors such as fast-moving technological developments and shifting migration patterns due to regional conflicts and the expansion of the European Union. The impact of such changes has been such that it could be argued that British culture has moved into a new phase of post-Christianity whereby people’s sense of the synergy between their own culture and the culture of Christianity is now becoming reduced. Clearly, then, it is vital that the Church continues to identify how best to engage in mission.

What, then, in general terms, might make a strategy, technique or technology missiologically significant? One aspect of missionary practice that is relevant to the question of missiological significance is that of contextualisation, which Whiteman (1999, 42) suggests is “concerned with how Gospel and culture relate to one another through geographic space and down through time.” The suggestion is that, for Christian missionary endeavours to be fruitful, the ways in which the gospel message is conveyed in the context of a given culture should enable people to follow Christ whilst, at the same time, being able to retain a sense of belonging to their own culture. In order to determine what might make a strategy, technique or technology significant in missiological terms, it is necessary to understand that in many contexts – and particularly in the British context in which this research is grounded – the gospel is not totally alien to the indigenous culture, even if certain sections of the population are less familiar with it; despite Ustorf’s assertion about culture moving away from Christianity mentioned earlier, National Statistics (2007) notes that: “Christianity is the main religion in Great Britain. There were 41 million Christians in 2001, making up almost three quarters of the population (72 per cent). This group included the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Church in Wales, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations.” (The actual data shown on the Webpage relates to April 2001, when there were 41,014,811 Christians – 71.8% of the population.) The suggestion is therefore that the legacy of Christian activity through the ages in Great Britain has led to a culture within society that facilitates the spread of the gospel by making people open to its message because they do not

have to stop belonging to their own culture in order to embrace Christianity.

Despite the opportunities that the Church has in Great Britain, some observers have noted the churches' failures to adapt to change and to new technologies: Ogbonda (2005, 19) suggests, in the context of an examination of decline in the Methodist Church, that "one of the reasons for the decline in the church is that churches are slow in adopting changes"; Stephenson (2006, 15) notes: "it was clear to me that a church website was far from a priority at our church". However, there are also those who warn about becoming so engrossed in using new technologies that the reason for using them is lost; Babin (2002, 28) suggests that "knowing how to express the Gospel on TV is a secondary, if not mistaken, strategy. The real question is this: how can we make an impact?" As society embraces new technologies such as Websites and the Internet, the Church needs to assess how these impact on its mission and Davie (1994, 198) suggests that "religious life – like so many other features of the post-industrial or post-modern society – is not so much disappearing as mutating, for the sacred undoubtedly persists and will continue to do so, but in forms that may be very different from those which have gone before." The deployment of new strategies, techniques or technologies for the purposes of mission is part of the evolution of the mission of at least some parts of the Church as attempts are being made to engage in mission with people immersed in evolving cultures. The adoption of an evolving model of contextualisation is therefore especially important in terms of thinking about technology and mission because it enables a refutation of the idea that new strategies, techniques and technologies are somehow incompatible with mission. Furthermore, Morisy (2004, 107) notes that "the more a business can create an experience that engages people in a personal and memorable way, the more a business will be successful ... The shift from preoccupation with consumer goods to engaging experiences really does make church-going an activity whose time has come." Therefore, despite the pessimism of some observers, it would seem to be the case that the Church does still have opportunities to succeed in mission, but that it needs to recognise how best to link in with the prevailing cultural trends. Indeed, with contextualisation in mind, the question to be asked about mission and technology is not 'Why use this technology?' but 'How can this technology be used in mission to those who are already comfortable with its use?' The next section of this chapter will therefore consider the use of technology for the purposes of Christian mission.

2.2 *Relating Technology to Mission*

The advent and evolution of techniques and technologies invented by human beings has led to philosophical questions as to the consequences of these developments for human society and for spirituality. Heidegger (1977, 37) asks whether “man, for better or worse, is helplessly delivered over to technology” and Ellul (1965, 418) asks: “into what has technique transformed man’s efforts towards the spiritual?” Those who pose such questions often do so in order to answer them; Heidegger (1977, 39) suggests that there must be “an essential relationship between technology and man in respect to their essence” and Ellul (1965, 420-423) suggests that increased spiritual expression in technical societies is a means of human beings coping with these societies. Ellul (1990, 396-399), also accuses the churches of technocratic terrorism, being “the privileged agent of technological enthusiasm ... It is much more important for them to preserve contact with their contemporaries than with God, to talk as society does than to listen to God’s word.” Ellul’s warning is sobering in that a Church that is preoccupied with technology might end up concentrating more on the projection of its own image to the wider world than on the substance of what it is about; just as spending a fortune on advertising a poorly-performing product will not make that product any better, so the presence of an excellent local church Website is no guarantee that the local church itself will be one in which people will connect with God or grow in faith. Nevertheless Ellul, writing from a non-Christian perspective, may have failed to see the possibility of the Church harnessing technology in mission as a tool to enable people to encounter God; this possibility is the underlying theme of this section.

The notion of technology being, in some way, involved in the mission of God – the *missio Dei* – might be hard for many Christians to grasp. It is not generally believed that God advertises himself on television or develops Websites that people can access in order to relate to him; how, then, is the use of technology related to the mission of God? Frost and Hirsch (2003, 150) argue that “when one considers the electronic media like television, radio and the Internet, it’s not difficult to see that they are extensions of the human capacity for thinking.” Thus, as the Christian tradition suggests that God is at work in the world and in the lives of human beings by his Holy Spirit, from a Christian perspective the answer to this question is that God relates to the world by various means in order to achieve his mission priorities; in doing so, God has created a world lending itself to the development and use of various technologies. It is therefore possible to find numerous Christian Websites and it is interesting

to note that there are also Websites related to many other faiths and spiritualities including those for Hindus, Sikhs and numerous other religions and sects; Bunt (2003, 5) notes, for example, that “a broad range of Muslim expressions can be located online.”

If, as Kirk (1999, 29) suggests, “God is in himself mission through and through ... No one falls outside its compass” and, as Stacey (1987, 86) asserts, “though God cannot be confined within personality, the nature of his relationships with human beings is never less than personal”, then a fundamental attribute of God’s mission must surely be that it is about God relating to human beings in ways that will bring them into a relationship with himself. The Bible asserts that “no one has ever seen God”¹ and suggests that God’s nature is distinctive in that, as Stacey (1987, 91) asserts: “God is spirit”. With these differences between God and human beings in mind, it becomes less difficult to see how technology might be perceived as playing a part in the mission of God; Arthur (1993, 1) states that “every expression of human religiousness is, inevitably, a *mediated* expression, which comes to us in a variety of means of communication: words, symbols, music, dance, architecture, and so on.” Nevertheless, the experience of many people is that God does not directly employ the technologies that human beings employ to communicate with each other – people would not expect to speak to God on a mobile phone, or to find a Website designed by God at <http://www.God.org.heaven>. There is, however, the possibility that if, in order to communicate with people in a relational and personal way, God was understood to have employed techniques appropriate to societies and cultures of particular times, then the use of technology could be seen as an essential component of the mission of God, enabling the bridging of the gap between God and human beings – albeit with the caveat that if technologies such as the cyber-church discourage or reconfigure inter-personal and God-personal relationships in a very profound and detrimental way, then they might ultimately not be approved of by God.

Bearing in mind the very different natures of God and of the Church, along with the distinction that was made in section 1.1 between the wide-ranging mission of God and the more specifically-focussed mission of the Church, perhaps the use of technology to further the mission of the Church might seem to be a more intuitive idea than the use of technology to further the mission of God. Years before the advent of the Internet and Websites, Verkuyl

¹ John 1:18.

(1978, 211) suggested that “technologically and scientifically speaking, the world is daily growing closer together. Industrial civilisation is now global. ... Therefore it is incumbent on sociologists of the church, missiologists, and administrators of the respective ecumenical organizations to put their heads together and come up with a global strategy for communicating the gospel today.” Given the complexity and fragmentation of the world’s societies, despite technologies that bring people closer in some ways, the development of a global strategy for communication of the gospel may not be entirely realistic, even though – as will be further discussed in section 9.1 – local church Websites do have the potential to reach a global audience. Nevertheless, the technologies are still able to be used in mission and Jewell (2004, 24) suggests that “with the help of God and the abiding presence of the Spirit of God, we can make use of the powerful potential of new technologies in the cause of ministry.”

The Church clearly needs to have the means of facilitating its mission and these means could clearly include the technologies that are available to the world’s peoples and cultures. The nascent Church developed ways of working in mission and it began to use a variety of ways of attempting to accomplish its missionary goals. One of the strategies employed by the Church which had already been used in the Jewish context prior to the establishment of the Church was baptism; Jones (1994, 175) suggests that “the task of making disciples includes two particular responsibilities. One is ... teaching what Jesus taught. The other, given pride of place, is that of baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Another strategy that has been used by the Church for the purposes of mission has been to teach people the Christian faith – which is perhaps why Luz (1995, 140-141) suggests that “mission means ‘teaching’, passing on what the sole teacher, Jesus, did for his disciples. The substance of the mission is Jesus’ commandments ... the ‘God with us’ will remain with his community always, to the end of time, helping it, teaching it, and standing by its side as it faces new challenges.” It is, of course, possible to disagree with such assertions, but through successive generations people have continued to be convinced that God is with them and is interacting with them. From a Christian perspective, the Christian faith is transmitted by a combination of the effects of the mission of God and the mission of the Church; in the case of the Church, it is the employment of various strategies, techniques and technologies by the Church, as the purveyor of the Christian faith, which would be understood to have helped people to grow in faith and to feel that they had encountered God.

Thus, throughout the ages, the Church has employed, to various degrees, the available technologies in order to facilitate its mission. Both art and music are technologies that have been used for many centuries – both for corporate devotional purposes and for personal devotions. More recently, electricity has led to the invention of a number of new technologies that have been employed in the services of the Church’s mission, such as: radio broadcasts, with potential for use as a missionary technology being greatly enhanced by the ability of radio to transmit mission-related material or events not just in new ways, but over a wide geographical area; film, which offers a way of showing sound and picture presentations to people that, since the advent of DVD players and small, portable, MP4 players such as the latest iPod® systems has provided opportunities for the delivery of mission-related material into the private personal spaces of billions of people worldwide; television, with Keith (2002, 125) noting how “televangelists mimicked broadcasting corporations in constructing religious networks ... growing over time into national and then international cable and satellite-based 24-hour evangelical enterprises” and the United Methodist Church (2005, 43) reporting in relation to Christian television broadcasting in Poland that “the preaching of the gospel can suddenly, in ideal circumstances, reach up to 250 times more people than in normal services”. All of these technologies – and others – have had the benefit of enabling the Church to engage with greater numbers of people in mission, yet they are by no means panaceas; the United Methodist Church (2005, 45) also suggests that the potential for the development of Christian communities through such work is limited, quoting Superintendent Edward Puslecki, overseer of the broadcasting work: “No broadcasting technique can ever replace the meeting together and community of living people. We dare not stop emphasizing the value of personal contacts and the blessing of really being together ... the Church cannot divide itself into two worlds: a virtual and a real one.”

The experiences and observations noted in this section about the use of technologies in the context of Christian mission are important to bear in mind as the use of Information Technology, with its more powerful and immediate interaction dynamics, is now considered.

2.3 *Mission, Ecclesiology and Information Technology*

A number of issues have already been highlighted in this chapter’s examination of the use of strategies, techniques and technologies as tools for mission but, given the increasing availability and use of information technology – and, in the context of this thesis, specifically

of the Internet and of Websites – it becomes important for those using, or considering using, these technologies to understand how they relate to God’s mission, the *missio Dei*, and to the mission of the Church, the *missio ecclesiae*. Barbour (1990, 215) notes that “*information technologies, communications, computers, and new forms of artificial intelligence will have major impacts on society and on our self-understanding.*” Given the subject matter of this thesis, it is important to understand the issues related to the use of these technologies in the context of the mission of the local church. It is these issues that will now be explored with particular reference to: the perceived need to use technologies; potential side-effects of using technologies; technologies and change; and the ecclesiological implications of information technology.

The Perceived Need to use Technologies

Over the years, though often with a degree of resistance, the Church has managed to embrace new technologies as tools to help to facilitate the achievement of its mission priorities, examples of which include: new construction methods and styles; mass-production of literature and Bibles through printing; musical instruments such as pipe organs, electric organs and guitars; new lighting techniques such as gas and electric lighting; electronic media such as radio, film and television. Thus, the Internet is one of a succession of new technologies which have impacted upon the societies of the world and to which the Church in mission has had to respond. Redford (1999, 220) argues that “as a segment of society chooses to exist in virtual worlds, Christian mission will need to enter this context to introduce Christ to those living there.” Therefore, if the Church is to continue to work with God in mission – and if people are to see the Christian faith as being relevant to contemporary life – there would seem to be good reasons for the Church to embrace not only new and emerging cultural trends, but also new technologies such as the Internet and Websites in order to do so. Redford (1999, 221) also argues that “our missional approach must match the context in which we minister. ... We will need virtual tools and virtual communication to witness to those in a virtual context.” However, such enthusiasm does not necessarily mean that there really is a need to employ Internet and Website technologies, so the case for employing them will now be examined.

In comparison with the Church, the Internet is so recent a phenomenon that it might be tempting to discount its use or potential effectiveness as a tool for mission; arguably, if God

has managed in his mission for so long, then the Internet would be of little use to him and, when the Church has grown so much over the centuries without the Internet, it might survive perfectly well without employing the new Internet and Website technologies. Or, as Jewell (2004, 43) asks: “What does all of this talk of Christian community have to do with ministry and technology?” One key reason for employing Internet and Website technologies is that they are qualitatively different from other technologies that have been employed in the context of the mission of the Church. The impact of the Internet and of Websites is described by Berners-Lee (1999, 217) as having “pulled us out of two-dimensional space” – a concept that can be better understood with some examples related to local churches: whereas distribution of a printed church newsletter is limited by the costs of printing and may sometimes rely upon the presence of people at worship, or the goodwill of volunteers, the distribution of a newsletter via the Internet is limited by factors such as the availability of computers to people who wish to read the newsletter and the availability of the Internet itself; whereas printed matter is fixed in content and often black and white, Websites can easily be updated and can include colour, video, sound and music; whereas the accessibility of worship in church relies upon the presence of people in a certain building, the accessibility of ‘virtual’ worship is not limited by physical presence; whereas the a key part in developing a sense of community in a local church is the physical interaction of people, the sense of community generated on the Internet is of a very different nature, but does not depend to the same extent, if at all, upon people’s ability to physically meet each other.

Clearly, then, a vital question to be answered when churches consider deploying Internet or Website technology is that of whether the qualitative differences inherent in these technologies will enhance or hinder the mission opportunities of the church. Simply adopting new technologies for the purposes of mission is not all that needs to be done; the use of technology must have specific aims and clear results. Indeed, Jewell (2004, 43) suggests that “if our ministry with all of its technological resources is to bring about the building up of the body of Christ, success will be measured by the quality of Christian community. The deepening of Christian community and the formation of Christian persons require more than enthusiasm for technology.” This is a theme that will be revisited when the effectiveness of Websites in supporting the mission of local churches is considered in Chapter 9 and, in particular, in section 9.4.

Potential Side-Effects of using Technologies

Alongside the debate about the perceived need to employ technologies in mission sits the question as to the side-effects of such use. If the Church in mission is to employ new technologies such as the Internet and Websites, it may not safely assume that this may be done without some sort of impact upon its theology, upon the way in which people perceive its message, or even upon its future viability. As Houston (1998, 46) notes: “technological solutions can lead to goods or harms; therefore when considering whether or not to develop a particular technology, we need to pay full attention to its social implications.” For example, when decisions were made leading to the building of churches, they may have seemed to be good decisions in terms of giving congregations permanent bases, yet these decisions have sometimes eventually had the negative impact of saddling congregations with overwhelming demands in terms of maintaining the fabric of their buildings,² or in churches being located away from the main communities that they serve³ because those communities have relocated and the church buildings could not be similarly moved.

Despite the enthusiasm of those such as Malphurs and Malphurs (2003, 130), who speak of “more effective missions and evangelism ministries”, the possibility that the introduction of new technologies will hinder the mission of the Church should not be underestimated; Franklin (1990, 102) warns that “many new technologies and their products have entered the public sphere in a cloud of hope, imagination and anticipation” but Franklin (1990, 103) goes on to observe that “major facets of technology are related to prescriptive practices and thus to the development of instruments of power and control.” Power and control, though seen negatively by Franklin because he perceives them as being wielded to oppress people, have been significantly devolved to individuals by the ease of accessibility of Internet and Website technologies; far more people have opportunities through these technologies to share information and opinions with other people quickly and irrespective of geographical limitations – for example using email and Websites like Facebook (2007), Wikipedia (2005), and YouTube (2007). Some of the problems inherent with the ability of individuals to communicate freely have been evident with incidents such as the sharing of inaccurate information and of video footage showing bullying yet, having made his fortune from the

2 For example, Kinsbourne Green Methodist Church in Hertfordshire, which has now closed.

3 For example, Folly Methodist Church in Hertfordshire, which has now closed, and St. Mary’s (Anglican) Church, Kensworth in Bedfordshire which is still open but outside of the village.

growth of Microsoft®, Gates (1996, 291) is “surprised by the pessimism many people feel about the future ... the computer should be a source of optimism for the foreseeable future”.

As new technology has brought the possibility of forming virtual Internet communities of worshippers and of accessing Christian resources via Websites, it would seem to be a natural progression for there to be at least some ways in which these technologies could be used successfully by the Church in mission, though it is important to take note of not just the potentially positive implications of these technologies, but also of the ways in which they could be detrimental to the Church. Indeed, it is possible to postulate seemingly-harmful effects of technology on society, and on the Church in particular, which could lead to very different forms of church to those presently in existence – such as when Haraway (1991, 172) envisages: “electronic fundamentalist ‘super-saver’ preachers solemnizing the union of electronic capital and automated fetish gods”. Although the potentially harmful effects of technology could be diminished by ensuring that people are warned against them, such warnings – for example about the harmful effects of smoking, or of using mobile phones when driving – have not always deterred people. The impact of technologies on churches is therefore hard to predict; as has already been shown in this chapter, the Church has embraced many of the technologies available to it, yet it is still possible to find churches that have existed for many years and that do not seem to be engaging at all with the certain technological developments. The Church may choose to embrace or ignore technologies, but neither decision can be seen as neutral in that both have implications in terms of the way in which the Church is perceived by those who belong to it and by those who do not.

Technologies and Change

In choosing to use technologies, people open up the possibility of transforming society, in both positive and negative ways, to a point that was not foreseen, as well as the possibility of ultimately replacing particular human activities with machines. An example of the first possibility – the transformation of society – is that of transportation: human beings have invented a succession of technologies which have arguably been good for society in terms of enhancing communications and transport, but there have also been harmful effects such as the climatic effects of carbon emissions. An example of the second possibility – the replacement of human beings – is the way in which automated telephone exchanges have replaced human operators and, in so doing, have enabled almost instantaneous connection to people around

the world. The consequences of these changes can be far-reaching, such that Ellul (1990, 284) suggests that “we have to pay for the gain in efficiency with the risk of enslavement on the one side and actual vulnerability on the other.” An example of such vulnerability was reported by Bale and Richard (2007): “The discount fashion retailer TK Maxx is facing a possible prosecution after the theft of credit card details from its systems. ... The theft affects all customers who shopped at TK Maxx’s 210 British stores between January 2003 and June 2004”. Confidential data held by government agencies or their contractors has also been reported missing in recent years but, despite the drawbacks of change, there are those who argue that technological development is crucial if the human race is to survive; Moravec (1988, 101) suggests that “if, by some unlikely pact, the whole human race decided to eschew progress, the long-term result would be almost certain extinction ... an unstoppable virus deadly to humans will evolve, or a major asteroid will collide with the earth, ...”.

Although such arguments do not seem directly relevant to local church Websites, changes which affect society in general also affect the Church. The Church has a track record of resisting change and holding on to traditions – the continuing use of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer in the Church of England and the predicted authorisation for wider use of the Latin Mass, known as the Tridentine Mass, by Pope Benedict for use in the Roman Catholic Church (Westcott, 2007) being just two examples. Nevertheless, as has already been shown in this chapter, the Church has also been embracing new technologies; as the Church grapples with new technologies, of which Websites and the Internet are just two, there are those who would resist the adoption of such technologies and those, like Dixon (1997, 160), who would embrace them: “Christians tend to be naturally conservative and cautious about change, but it would be tragic if we saw beyond 2000 a growing anti-technology movement which discouraged millions of believers from playing their part in shaping cyberspace.” The introduction of any technology into the Church will, at the very least, have the effect of changing the way in which things related to the use of that technology are done, although the wider effects in terms of the impacts on theology, on the way in which people perceive the Church’s message, and on the future viability of the Church are hard to foresee. Nevertheless, history suggests that it is likely that the introduction of technologies into the life of the Church

may be resisted by those who feel comfortable with the status quo,⁴ but may prove to be attractive to those who long for change, or to those who see the Church's resistance to new technology as an anachronistic deterrent to involvement with the Church. The Church may therefore find itself in a dilemma: over-keenness in employing such technologies might serve to alienate established church members because of the change to what they are used to happening in church yet, as contemporary culture embraces new technologies such as Websites, the cultural shift might seem to suggest that there is little choice but for the Church to embrace them and any resistance or slowness in the Church employing them might be interpreted as a sign of the irrelevance of the Church and of its message to contemporary society.

Ecclesiology and Information Technology

What, then, are the implications for the Church of the use of Websites and the Internet? Clearly, other recent technologies have changed the way in which the Church engages in mission – such as the way in which churches now use video projection, recorded music and electronic musical instruments – but might the use of the Internet ultimately make local churches unnecessary and might the introduction of Websites for the purposes of mission ultimately result in a self-service church which sees its primary mission endeavour as the maintenance of its Websites? With a view to the future, Glover (2004, 58) suggests that “ahead is the very real prospect of a much more proactive collaboration and integration in terms of interactive meetings and mass worship on-line ... we are almost certainly close to seeing mega and parachurch ministries vastly expanding their horizons and membership, through the coming cyberchurch revolution”. Such developments are becoming more possible as the rollout of Broadband Internet access continues, yet there are still questions as to the potential effectiveness of ‘virtual’ churches. Can people really engage with the Church as meaningfully online as they can by meeting with other people to worship? Would a fully-‘virtual’ Church ultimately be less effective in mission than a Church with a physical presence? What would happen when the technology failed and people could not get online? Would it be wise to rely on Internet Service Providers to facilitate worship?⁵ The Intern for

4 Davies (1985, 122) notes that “in 1827 ... trustees of Brunswick Chapel, Leeds, had decided to put an organ in. This, in the judgement of many Methodists, was a dreadful thing to do”.

5 Countries such as China and Myanmar have censored internet content and other countries, even those such as Great Britain which are currently not doing so, might do so in the future.

Public Life and Social Justice at Methodist Church House, Lambert (2007), suggests: “online churches are a good idea mainly because they offer some kind of church experience for people who find it difficult to go to an actual church for whatever reason. ... I wouldn’t go as far as to say, however, that online churches should be regarded as a substitute for actual churches.” Even before the advent of Internet technology and ‘virtual’ churches, the Church was known for its diversity and it is likely that such diversity will continue, embracing the physical and ‘virtual’ worlds so that people have a greater choice as to when and how to engage with the Church and with Christian communities.

2.4 *Mission in the Context of the Internet and Websites*

It is clear, from the studies of mission and technology in sections 2.2 and 2.3, that new technologies have had a significant part to play in the area of Christian mission, though the success or failure of the Church’s missionary endeavours can never be entirely dependent upon the technologies in play. Thus, Verkuyl (1978, 224) warns that “in spite of all the means and instruments, programs and projects, the attitude of the men and women who discharge them is still so crucially important. To vary the words of I Corinthians 13: ‘even though I had tremendous expertise, could work with all sorts of media and had mastered the most advanced communication techniques, but had not love, I would be nothing.’ ” Given that it is possible to harness information technology for the purposes of mission, some of the issues that this new missionary activity raises will now be explored.

Enthusiasm about Internet and Website Technology

In the life of the Church, as in other human communities, different people have different enthusiasms. In the field of Christian mission, some missionaries will be very enthusiastic about the need to evangelise all of the ‘unreached’ peoples of the world and others will be more enthusiastic about reaching the peoples of the developed world. There are also varying degrees of enthusiasm about the Church’s engagement with Internet technology or the need for, or deployment of, local church Websites; as will be seen in the following paragraphs, some people are enthusiastic about these technologies and others are more cautious.

One enthusiastic advocate of the engagement of Christians with Internet technology is Careaga (2001, 23-24) who suggests that “the traditional church must do the following three things. 1. ... enter the world of ... cyberseekers ... learn about them and from them to

understand how they respond to the workings of this new medium. 2. ... strive to understand the medium itself and its place and influence in our culture. 3. ... consider how (the) church should respond to the Net's growing influence in society." Careaga's enthusiasm seems to stem from his own encounters with young Christians using the Internet, from his assertion (Careaga 2001, 23) that "more people – both young and old alike and both Christian and non-Christian – are logging on to the Net in their quest for meaning" and from some examples and observations (Careaga 2001, 23-24) about the way in which people are being affected by Internet technology. Careaga (2001, 31) also quotes some research by George Barna predicting that in the early years of the 21st century, "millions of people will never travel physically to a church." The focus of Careaga (2001) is intentionally mainly on what he calls the 'Net Generation' – teenagers – and the way in which they use Internet technology and are "poised to transform society in ways even their ... parents could not imagine" (Careaga 2001, 63). As Careaga (2001) only makes a few references to those in older generations, his work is essentially an argument for the Church to engage with young people through Internet technology, rather than an argument for the Church to engage with all generations through Internet technology. Among his concluding remarks, Careaga (2001, 170) argues that "the Internet ... is not the complete answer. ... We should not allow cybercommunities to replace the existing Christian communities of the church, but they *can* become extensions of the church into the online world." Careaga's argument is helpful not only because it suggests that the Church is a dynamic organisation which will facilitate change through the assimilation of technology and the integration of cybercommunities with the existing physical church communities, but also because it points to the need for the Church to embrace both the real and the virtual world, rather than simply seeking to transform itself from a real to a virtual community. Careaga's argument does, however, have a potential weakness in seeming to assume that there are sufficient people within the existing Church who are in touch with the culture of those who use the Internet in order to successfully engage with them and that there is sufficient desire on the part of those within cybercommunities to relate to the existing Church.

Turning to enthusiasm for Website technology, it is notable that whereas Stephenson (2006, 177) suggests that "in time, all ministries in a church will include a web component of some kind, and we won't think much about it", others are more cautious; Glover (2004, 82) notes difficulties "over the nature of church and church worship itself; over the administration of

sacraments, and the whole nature of what it means to experience true fellowship” and Jewell (2004, 32) notes that “the reality is, most congregations do not have the kind of economic muscle that is required to develop sophisticated technology-driven ministries.” Although it is true that there is the potential for all ministries in a church to be linked in some way to Websites, it is easier to see how some of these will work than others; setting up a church Blog for young people may prove to be a good mission resource for youth work in a relatively affluent place where many families have computer access, but the same facility in a very deprived area where computers can largely only be accessed in schools or libraries could prove to be of limited value. Nevertheless, Glover’s and Jewell’s reservations would seem to be less significant when it is realised that not all Website deployments need to be very sophisticated. Although Zukowski (2002, 167) suggests that “a place must be cleared within this new cyberculture for the preaching of the gospel”, the reality is that the local context will indicate the needs for Website deployment and the available local resources, combined with the presence or absence of local enthusiasm for the provision of Websites, will determine the ability of local churches to respond to those needs. The latter point will be examined in Chapter 4, which will study factors associated with Website provision for local Methodist churches.

Positive and Negative Aspects of Internet and Website Technology to Mission

Section 2.2 began by examining comments from Heidegger (1977) and Ellul (1965) about technology and spirituality. Both were writing before the advent of the technologies underlying the Internet and the World Wide Web and, despite Ellul’s assertions about spiritual expression in technical societies and the Church’s technological enthusiasm, the notion of technology being employed as a tool for the mission of the Church may not come naturally to all Christians. Although the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility (1999, 59) suggests that “aspects of cyberspace certainly reflect the call to respond to the God who spoke and created the world and to Jesus who is the Word”, Careaga (2001, 31) suggests that “not many churchgoers are prepared to give up stained-glass windows for Windows 2000 and the whirl of a modem”. Nevertheless, the presence of numerous Websites related to churches and Christianity suggests that Internet and Website technology can be harnessed in the service of mission. Indeed, Malphurs and Malphurs (2003, 130) suggest that “Internet technology will strengthen the church family ... (it) provides for more effective missions and evangelism ministries ... to reach those who otherwise would be unreachable.”

The experiences of those working in the field of mission and information technology suggest that there are positive and negative aspects of maintaining Christian communities in Cyberspace. The worldwide Internet community has its strengths in terms of transcending the limits of geographical location, but Lochhead (1997, 103) notes that “a world in which every voice can be heard is not an unmixed blessing. Communication does not always promote understanding.” Furthermore, the virtual community that develops through the Internet is very different to, even though it may relate to, the community that exists outside of Cyberspace; Dixon (1997, 159-160) argues that “the Internet can never be a proper substitute for a local community of believers, a living witness to the power of Christ ... We are called to serve God together, not to isolate ourselves into little islands of our own.” Positives and negatives can be seen with regard to Blogs, a specific form of internet interaction, observations on emergingchurch.info (2006) suggest that a number of people find the alt.worship email group (‘Blog’) helpful – “I mostly like the list because it expects nothing of me”; “from time to time someone posts something that I find useful or stimulating” – but that there are also drawbacks – “in times past (but not of late) we sounded a bit like a stuck record”; “personally, I much prefer to spark off people – I’m an extrovert. It’s only the introvert shadow in me that does the blogging”. Again, in the area of the virtual Church, there are positives and negatives, so that when Wright (2006) reflects about his i-Church experiences he notes mostly positive, but also some negative, aspects: “as a business traveller I find i-church an excellent replacement for my bricks-and-mortar church. While I am at work I am not able to join in Live Chat thanks to the corporate firewall security and I have to rely on the forums alone. Despite this, two parts of my personal rule of life are well catered for: prayer and study. The third element, action, is down to me. I have always felt that my best opportunity for mission is in the workplace and I try to take every opportunity that comes along – many unexpected. I have already been able to recruit one of my Johannesburg team into i-church, so that’s a pretty good start!” There is also the question of the effectiveness of Internet and Website ministry, where freshexpressions.org.uk (2007) notes that “there are thousands of pages of web content created by blogs and online communities such as MySpace. While some disappear into the ether unnoticed, others have been highly effective in spreading the word about everything from rock bands to the award winning Church’s Advertising Network campaigns.” Thus, the Internet and Websites are technologies which have many potential positive benefits for mission as well as some potentially negative effects. In the context of the local church, it could be vitally important to temper the

enthusiasm of those who advocate the adoption of these technologies by listening to the voices of those such as Jewell (2004, 34-35): “the Internet is *not* a missiological cure-all ... The addition of a website to the local church’s ministry will not suddenly produce scores of visitors in worship.”

A Case Study – ‘Cyber Evangelism’ and the Methodist Church

In order to examine one author’s view of the potential implications of the use of Website Technology in the context of the Methodist Church, the work of Ogbonda (2005) will now be considered. Ogbonda (2005, 12) says that her book “will look at using the internet and other multimedia information systems to help alleviate the problems facing the Methodist Church.” After briefly considering a number of ways in which the Methodist Church has engaged in evangelism through the ages, Ogbonda (2005, 31-92) considers what she calls ‘Cyber Evangelism’ in some depth. Ogbonda (2005, 31) suggests that “churches and evangelists are beginning to shift from traditional evangelism to ‘cyber evangelism’ (because) the internet is a powerful communication and evangelistic tool”. Then, without quantifying its effects, Ogbonda (2005, 33) suggests that “the world wide web has become a strong channel of evangelism and conversion”. Ogbonda (2005, 34-45) then enthuses about a number of benefits of the Internet such as: the use of email to replace personal faith-sharing and visitation; the use of cyber-conferencing to replace open-air preaching; the savings to be made on printing costs and the freedom of speech facilitated by the Internet. Although Ogbonda (2005, 45-49) does then mention some pitfalls of using the Internet such as problems with data security, lack of information control and difficulties with social bonding, she still fails to quantify the benefits of cyber evangelism. Problems with the internet’s availability are also overlooked – not just issues to do with server performance, but also the potential for governments to block access to Websites that they do not wish people to see or to close down the Internet. The recent troubles in Myanmar/Burma show that this is not limited to censorship of the content available; Denby (2007, 6) noted: “the internet, conduit for so much of the truth of what has happened here, appears to have been shut down completely”. It was hoped that Ogbonda’s work would give some useful data about the quantitative effects of the Internet and Website technology in the context of the Methodist Church but, apart from in its earlier pages, the work fails to focus sufficiently on the Methodist Church to be helpful for this work. Furthermore, although Ogbonda (2005) does give a lot of suggestions about cyber evangelism, her main purpose seems to be to encourage

the use of the Internet for evangelism, rather than offering firm evidence as to the benefits or the effectiveness of employing the Internet for the purposes of Christian mission; for example, Ogbonda (2005, 75) suggests “there is the need to carry out aggressive advertisements for cyber evangelism and the cyber church ... churches can promote their sites by placing their evangelistic icons on popular web pages like universities, and local government authorities’ web pages”.

Linking with the Work Ahead

The data collection for this thesis and the analysis of the data contained in this thesis were intended to enable both positive and negative aspects of the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites to be determined in a quantifiable way. With this in mind, chapter 3 will describe the research methodology used for gathering data about local Methodist churches and their Websites. The rest of this thesis will then examine the specific areas of the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites in local Methodist churches. In particular, picking up on the theoretical work in this chapter, chapter 9 will consider the relationship between the mission of local churches and the Internet and will then evaluate the effectiveness of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration for mission.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Of key importance to any research that is undertaken is the methodology adopted. In order to enable the research that was to be undertaken into the use of information technology in Christian mission – and in particular the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites – to play a part in the integration of the fields of missiology and information technology as an original contribution to knowledge, the research process had to be designed in order to allow information to be gathered about the perceived mission of churches in a variety of contexts and to enable the resulting data to be analysed effectively. For those churches with Websites, the research process also had to be designed in order to allow meaningful information to be gathered about Website design and effectiveness. Robson (2002) and other authors such as De Vaus (2002) have outlined a number of methods that are available to researchers when gathering and analysing data. Having explored these methods, it was felt that the research into the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites in supporting the mission of local Methodist churches should be conducted via the ‘social survey’ technique (i.e. by designing a questionnaire posted out to churches), but with some additional information from documentary research (e.g. assessment of website designs) and official statistics (e.g. measures of deprivation). The following sections of this chapter describe in more detail the research methodology adopted by considering the means used to research the mission of the local churches, local church Website design and local church Website effectiveness. The practical aspects of the research work, comprising questionnaire design, piloting, mailing and responses, as well as data verification, are then explained. Thus, this chapter completes the work of addressing macro-missiological and methodological issues related to the use of technology in order to place into their theoretical context the empirical studies in Parts 2 to 4 of this thesis that will address micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches.

3.1 *Researching the Mission of the Churches*

In order to relate the Websites of local Methodist churches to the mission of those local Methodist churches under consideration, a key aspect of the research would be the gathering of information about the context and mission priorities of local Methodist churches.

Socio-Economic Information

In order to enable the mission of the local churches under consideration to be put into context, it was felt to be necessary to gather some information about the social and economic settings of the churches under consideration. Therefore, in order to make it possible to relate official statistics to information about the churches under consideration, it was felt to be necessary to find out the address, local government district and local government ward of the churches being studied by asking about these on the Research Questionnaire.

When the Research Questionnaires were sent out, it was thought that one important source of information would be official statistics in the form of the 'Indices of Deprivation 2000' (DETR, 2000) – a set of data that would have allowed for analysis at Local Authority District and Ward levels. However, as the writing up of this thesis neared completion, newer official statistics in the form of 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised)' (ODPM, 2004) became available.¹ In deciding which of these sets of statistics to employ in this thesis, it was noted that neither set of government statistics relates to the actual time of data collection for the churches,² that the English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised) do not enable Ward-level analysis and – ODPM (2004, 126) – that “comparisons show a marked degree of similarity between the relative positions of local authorities”. However, the later set of statistics was used because there were some differences in the rankings of the local authorities and of the relative rankings of churches with and without Websites and it was therefore felt that the results using the English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised)' (ODPM, 2004) would better reflect the socio-economic conditions at the time of the local church data collection.

Although official statistics relating to the location of a church might give helpful insights as to the church's possible opportunities for mission and social action, they would not necessarily be representative of the church's congregation, which might be gathered from a different area and might therefore be very different in social and economic makeup to the population of the local area in which the church was located. It was therefore felt to be

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- 1 'The Indices of Deprivation 2000' and 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised)' give useful insights about the socio-economic factors affecting particular geographical areas.
 - 2 ODPM (2004, 126) notes that data for the Indices of Deprivation 2000 was gathered in 1998 and data for the English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised) was gathered in 2001. No later data was available at the time of submission of this thesis.

important to gather information about the congregations themselves, not just about their local areas. In particular, it was necessary to ask questions about the size and context of the churches under consideration, as well as whether their congregations were felt to be representative of the local area. In addition, where local Methodist churches did not have Websites, it was felt important to gather information about the possible reasons for this in relation to the resources available to the congregation.

Information about Mission Priorities

In order to come to an understanding of the mission priorities of the churches under consideration, it was felt to be necessary to determine whether the relevant Church Councils had adopted a specific mission statement (or similar document) and to find out about the perceived mission, i.e. the mission priorities as understood by the congregations, of the churches under consideration. Given the variety of areas in which local churches are located and the large number of possible activities in which local churches might engage, it was likely that local church mission statements – even if Church Councils actually had adopted them – would differ greatly. It was therefore felt to be necessary to structure the possible responses to questions about mission. A structure which the Methodist Church adopted at its Conference in 2000, and which has been publicised widely among ministers and local churches in recent years, is ‘Our Calling’³ (Deeks et al, 2000). It therefore seemed sensible to structure the questions about mission around ‘Our Calling’, as the structure should be familiar to Methodists and the results of the research would then be more readily understood within Methodist circles. In addition to this structured mission information, information about any mission statement in existence for the churches was also requested. The methodologies of researchers into the mission of local churches such as Hadfield (1999) gave helpful insights here.

3.2 *Researching Website Provision and Design*

Churches have been creating increasing numbers of Websites and Webpages in recent years, so that Kellner (1996, 9) observed that “online services and the Internet are worth more to

3 ‘Our Calling’ structures the mission of the local church into four areas: Worship, Learning & Caring, Service and Evangelism. See section 1.4 for more details.

religious-minded individuals than a crisis intervention service or a neat way to receive a daily spiritual vitamin ... these services have also linked members of large and small churches in ways previously unimaginable". A search of the 'Yahoo!' internet directory for the word 'Methodist' – Yahoo! (2002) – returned some 44,800 results for UK sites alone, of which many seemed, at first glance, to be local church Websites. A study of a random selection of five of these Websites⁴ showed that local Methodist church Websites vary greatly in quality, number of pages and content.⁵ Some of the content items were common to all of the Websites, but others were not, so there are clearly differences of opinion between those responsible for deciding about Website content as to the content that is felt to be important for local Methodist church Websites. There is also the issue of the elements of the design: the five Websites surveyed at random all had relatively simple layouts; there were some graphics, photos and even some simple animations, but no complex animations using software like Macromedia® Flash®. The research into local Methodist church Websites therefore needed to consider the factors which relate to Website provision, the nature of the Website content and the design quality of the Websites under consideration.

Factors in Website Provision

Although the number of Websites available has increased substantially in recent years, there could be factors which assist or inhibit Methodist churches when they consider having a Website. Lawrence et al (1998), in investigating the take-up of information technology by academics, note the following factors that may affect this: attitudes, organizational ethos, self-interest, incentives & disincentives, access, compatibility and support. Lawrence et al (1998, 126) conclude that "there are general problems relating to new technologies and their deployment which, though they will manifest themselves in different guises, are unlikely ever to go away". These factors might also have an impact on the provision of local Methodist

4 The five sites sampled were: Epsom Methodist Church (2002); Lichfield Methodist Church (2002); Paignton, Palace Avenue, Methodist Church (2002); Samares Methodist Church, Jersey (2002); Selly Oak Methodist Church (2002).

5 The content found in the five Methodist Church Websites included: local church history; vision / mission statements; ministers' messages; preaching information; information about activities – general and dated; notices, newsletters and church news; church location maps; pictures; graphics (some animated); prayers; church officers; details of rooms and letting costs; contact details; visitors' books; Bible search tools; links to other Websites (many and varied – religious and secular); links to booksellers; Website indexes.

church Websites.

There are a number of options for producing a local church Website⁶ and Blackmore (1999, 56) notes that Website design software is becoming more accessible, with most word processors now having the ability to create HTML so that it is possible for most people who have access to a PC to design Web pages. Nevertheless, Blackmore (1999, 56-57) also points out that “word processors will only create basic sites, and are not designed to help a complete novice create his or her first Web Site. You may also be stuck for the software needed to transfer your creation to your web server.” An important area of the research was therefore to attempt to determine whether there were any factors which affected local Methodist churches’ ability to have Websites, such as cost, availability of the necessary skills and software, or even the perceived necessity of having a Website. It was therefore important to be able to determine whether particular local Methodist churches had Websites and, if so, how they were created. The Research Questionnaire was designed to extract this information in a form that could easily be analysed for the number of churches involved and so that it would be possible to cross-refer to official statistics, and particularly to the ‘Indices of Deprivation 2000’ (DETR, 2000).

The Nature of Website Content

The nature of a local Methodist church’s Website content could be determined in a number of ways.⁷ Of particular note is a point made by Millon (1999, 143): “just as the purpose of a site and a target audience have an impact on the style of writing on a Website, so do they equally help to determine the overall approach to design, structure and navigation. ... A knowledge of the target audience, moreover, can help to define design parameters”. Millon was perhaps understating the importance of understanding the target audience, for without an understanding of the target audience of a Website, it is likely that the whole Website will be

⁶ Options for getting a local church Website up and running include: signing up for a free web community; finding an organisation providing free, or cheap, Website design for churches; finding an online Web design site; buying an ‘off-the-shelf’ Website with a standard design and some user-specific information; paying for professional Website design; using Website design software to produce the Website.

⁷ Referring to church Website design, Blackmore (1999, 60) suggests that “there will need to be articles from a number of people: the youth club may want a regular list of events, and the minister may want to place a weekly sermon on the site”. Millon (1999, 141-159) gives a number of guidelines on Web page design; many of these are to do with the layout and attributes of Web pages. Websites might also be produced in different ways: one designer might simply ‘put up the pages’, a church committee might vet content or a consultancy might work with the church to produce the pages.

of little worth – or of less worth than it might otherwise be – simply because the Website features that would be most relevant to the target audience might only be partially provided, or might be omitted altogether. Consideration of these factors raises issues of design and editorial control; what some people think should go onto a local Methodist church Website might not be felt to be suitable by others. One solution is for the local Methodist church congregations to agree corporately to the general principles of the Website's content and to who should contribute to the Website, so that the Webmaster is then only responsible for the design of the Website, rather than its content. However, many church Webmasters seem to have a large amount of control over what goes onto their churches' Websites, so the research needed to find out who was responsible for implementing and maintaining the churches' Websites. Once again, the Research Questionnaire was designed to extract this information.

Website Design Quality

The design quality of a local Methodist church's Website could have a significant impact on those who use it⁸ and the design quality, being an aesthetic attribute, is an aspect of Websites that might be thought to be difficult to assess. However, there are certain principles of Website design that are suggested by those who specialise in this area. For example, Blackmore (1999, 59) gives ten design tips for church Webpages which might be used to assess how well such pages have been designed.⁹ These design tips are rather specific in their advice, but they relate to more general principles about Webpages being easy to find, easy to use and understandable, as well as being up-to-date. Kerr (1999, 12) also lists some design principles, noting that "there are some aspects of creating and developing a Web site that

8 Kerr (1999, 3) suggests that "Investment of time and resources can be justified by high usage of the resulting resource." Kerr (1999, 11-12) goes on to suggest that "promoting a Web site ... includes ensuring that an initial visit becomes a regular event ... by ensuring that the content and design of the site is such that it becomes an essential part of the information resource collection of the desired visitor."

9 Blackmore's 10 church web page design tips are: 1) "If the site is for the faithful, make sure there's also a clear introduction relevant for new people"; 2) "Watch out for jargon or making assumptions about what your audience believes or understands"; 3) "Keep the pages as clean and uncluttered as possible"; 4) "Use a contrasting page background (or white) that makes the text very easy to read"; 5) "Try to keep blocks of text to a minimum, as people's attention span is far shorter when reading from a screen"; 6) "Decide on a font (or maybe two) and colour scheme to use and then stick to that theme throughout the pages"; 7) "Don't load your pages with unnecessary images as they will slow down the speed of the page"; 8) Pay attention to navigation buttons: is it simple to browse from page to page without getting lost?"; 9) "Don't forget to submit details of your site to search engines, Christian directories and local community directories"; 10) "Update it. Update it. Update it".

contribute greatly to its usability, and consequently its success.”¹⁰ The Research Questionnaire was designed to elicit some information about the principles and practice of Website design, but the only way of effectively studying the design of Websites is to look at them, so it was also necessary to download copies of each of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration in order to study and grade them for their design quality – such assessment clearly being subjective, but nevertheless giving valuable insights.

3.3 *Researching Website Effectiveness*

Although many local Methodist churches do have Websites, these may not all be effective in terms of realising the mission priorities of their churches. A key aim of the research was therefore to assess how effective local Methodist church Websites really are. In order to do this, it was necessary to consider the way in which the Websites relate to their respective churches’ mission priorities, along with the use that is made of feedback that the Webmasters get about their Websites.

Relating Websites to Mission Priorities

Website designers must beware of focusing on the design and content of the Webpages without first considering the reasons for having a Website. Lemay et al (1996, 23), for example, at the beginning of a chapter headed “Designing an Effective Web Site”, seem to assume that having a well-designed Website is what really matters.¹¹ But local church Webmasters also need to know how the design and content of the Website complement and assist in the mission of the local church by relating to the church’s perceived mission priorities. The work of Lynch & Horton (1999, 1) is helpful here because they begin with some questions about the purpose of Websites which they say need to be addressed at the start of Website development.¹² The implication is that a Website which is designed and

10 The Website aspects that Kerr (1999:12) claims contribute greatly to usability are: accuracy (of links, text and content), topicality (up-to-date pages with information about when they were created and/or updated), accessibility (clear design of content, images and links), completeness (no empty pages or pages which say something like ‘under construction’) and compatibility (with popular browsers for Mac® and PC).

11 Lemay et al suggest that “effective Web site design begins with effective navigational design” and they consider many of the details of Web page and Website design without considering how the purpose of a Website might affect its design.

12 Lynch & Horton’s questions are: “What is the mission of your organization? How will creating a Web site support your mission? What are your immediate goals for the site? What are your long-term goals for the site? What Web-related strategies will you use to achieve these goals? How will you measure the success of your site?”

implemented without the consideration of its purpose is likely to be useless. Indeed, Lynch & Horton (1999, 1) go on to say that “if you cannot confidently answer all of these questions, then no amount of design or production effort can guarantee a useful result.”

Perhaps what is most important in relation to mission priorities is the design process. Kerr (1999, 13) suggests that objectives must be set when designing a Website, but notes that “these may be very general, and possibly difficult to measure: supporting your central mission; raising the Web site or information service’s profile; improving access to your information resources.” However, Kerr (1999, 13) goes on to say that objectives “may be very specific and quantifiable: achieving a certain number of daily or weekly site ‘hits’; generating enquiries, bookings, membership subscriptions; revenue targets for priced services a reduction in telephone enquiries.” Although some of the information about Website design was obtainable from the Research Questionnaire, it was also going to be necessary to study the actual local Methodist church Websites in order to better assess the processes involved in producing particular churches’ Website designs. The study would take into account techniques from areas such as management and marketing in order to determine whether mission priorities were effectively being reflected in Website design.

Website Feedback and Statistics

Feedback and Statistics about how local church Websites are being used would also be useful as a way of helping Webmasters to assess the effectiveness of what they are producing. Lee (2000, 137) notes that “data on computer usage, patterns of networking, communication processes and the content of electronic messages are all available to the researcher with little effort.” What it was necessary to discovered for this thesis was whether those who implement local Methodist church Websites have access to such data and, if so, whether the data proves useful to them in Website design. Feedback is an important way of finding out how effective a Website is, so that Kerr (1999, 82-84) suggests “building in a route for feedback – with email comment forms, customer satisfaction surveys and full server statistics are all useful sources of information.” Testing is also an important way of determining whether potential users might find the Website helpful, so Cato (2001, 191) writes: “I strongly advocate testing from the very earliest stages of prototype delivery through to the end of development”. The research therefore aimed to determine whether the local church Webmasters gather such feedback and, if so, what they do with it. Webmasters are able to

gain feedback from ‘Web Counters’¹³ or by the use of feedback forms or other input from the Website, or even by information gleaned in other ways from the Website’s users, so the research also needed to determine whether this information is gathered and, if so, whether it has any impact on Website design decisions. Such information was to be gleaned through questions added into the Research Questionnaire.

3.4 Questionnaire Design

A key criterion for the process of getting people to complete the Research Questionnaires was to maximise the potential number of questionnaires returned by making them seem as easy to complete as possible. An initial possibility was to ask ministers to fill out one questionnaire for each of their churches in order to attempt to get a complete picture about churches with and without Websites. Initially, it was felt that this would work if a short questionnaire of, say, 4 pages, was used, but this approach was rejected for two reasons: 1) some ministers work with sections of a Circuit which comprise five or more churches and it was felt that the prospect of completing forms for this number of churches – and of perhaps repeating the information given on all of the forms – would be off-putting, perhaps dissuading ministers in such positions from returning any information at all; 2) it proved impossible to design a 4-page questionnaire that was flexible enough to cater for churches with and without Websites, but which also allowed for the collection of data that was sufficiently detailed.

It was therefore decided that only one questionnaire should be sent to ministers, constructed as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| • Cover | 1 page |
| • Part 1 – About the Section; | 1 page |
| • Part 2 – Church WITHOUT a Website; | 2 pages |
| • Part 3 – Church WITH a Website; | 4 pages |
| • Part 4 – About the Website. | 4 pages |

¹³ Web Counters are online services which gather statistics about Website usage. An example is TheCounter.com (2003) which, when accessed, allowed subscribers who paid a fee of \$17.95 to view statistics for a year about their Website including: unique visits, total visits, daily and monthly visits, browsers used, operating systems, colour depth and resolution of displays, search engines used for access, countries of access and ways of access (referrer or direct).

The resulting twelve-page Research Questionnaire was comprehensive, yet still quite easy to complete. The intention was then that all ministers would be asked, if possible, to complete all of the parts of the questionnaire (with part 4, being of a technical nature, being passed to the Webmaster for completion). In doing this, it was to be stressed that information was needed both about churches with Websites and about churches without Websites, so that if ministers had churches in both categories, then they would be asked to respond for one church in each category by completing the relevant parts of the Research Questionnaire. This method would have the drawback of relying upon ministers choosing which churches to submit data for – with the risk that the information returned would be biased in some way – but it was felt that this was preferable to the researcher choosing churches for the ministers because this might have resulted in fewer churches with or without Websites being chosen, whereas ministers could make sure that one church of each type was chosen if possible and it was hoped that any biases introduced by the ministers' choices of churches would be offset by an increase in the total amount of data gathered.

3.5 *Piloting the Questionnaire*

May (2001, 101) notes the need to test questionnaires before they are actually used for research, suggesting that “the questionnaire needs to be piloted on a subsample before it reaches the full sample”. Therefore, in order to see how ministers might react to receiving a questionnaire about local Methodist churches and their Websites, it was decided to undertake a process of piloting the questionnaire. The aim of the piloting exercise was to obtain feedback about: a) the time needed to complete the questionnaire; b) the length, layout, language and clarity of the questionnaire; c) the positive features of the questionnaire; d) any problematic questions; e) any other things that might help to improve the questionnaire.

If a questionnaire is well-designed, then the piloting process might only result in a few minor modifications, such that the pilot questionnaire and the final Research Questionnaire could be very similar. The adoption of May's suggestion of piloting the questionnaire on a sub-sample might therefore lead to problems because those people who were asked to complete both questionnaires might decide not to complete the Research Questionnaire after completing the pilot, might return different data on the two questionnaires, or might misunderstand some of the differences between the pilot questionnaire and the Research Questionnaire. Therefore, at the end of October 2003, questionnaires were sent to ten ministers outside of the planned

research area – the London North West District of the Methodist Church – in order to avoid the potential problems of asking people to complete both the pilot and the Research Questionnaires. The people who were sent the pilot questionnaires were given a deadline to return it by – 29th November 2003 – as if they were participating in the actual research. An additional form was enclosed with the pilot questionnaire in order to get feedback about the questionnaire and the recipients were also asked to indicate the time needed to complete each section of the questionnaire. In all, 4 of the pilot questionnaires were returned – a response rate of 40% which was perhaps higher than it might have been because the researcher personally knew all of the ministers who were sent the pilot questionnaire.

Three of the respondents gave assessments of the pilot questionnaire as shown in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1

	<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very Poor</i>
<i>Length</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>Layout</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>Language Used</i>	2	1	0	0	0
<i>Clarity of Questions</i>	1	1	1	0	0

Pilot Questionnaire Assessments

Robson (2002, 249) suggests that “the appearance of the questionnaire is vital ...it should look easy to fill in ... clarity of wording and simplicity of design are essential.” Feedback about the positive features of the questionnaire suggested that it was compliant with this advice in that it was: “reasonably quick to fill in ... Webmaster found the questions straightforward and easy”;¹⁴ “excellent – very easy to understand”;¹⁵ “useful in that it made us think more clearly about how we were using our website & why we did what we did. I liked the range of (mission) aspects”;¹⁶ “mostly completed with ease & clear”.¹⁷

¹⁴ Comment by Rev. Helen White.

¹⁵ Comment by Rev. Ian Pruden.

¹⁶ Comment by Rev. Val Spencer.

¹⁷ Comment by Rev. Ruth Whittard.

Feedback about the problematic questions led to some minor improvements in the design of the Research Questionnaire, including the clarification of a few questions, the deletion of a duplicate question, the correction of a typographical error and the inclusion of more space for comments in response to some questions.

Feedback about timings showed averages of 4 minutes for Part 1, 6 minutes for Part 2, 11 minutes for Part 3 and 19 minutes for Part 4. The time required of both the minister (Parts 1 to 3) and the Webmaster (Part 4) would thus be around 20 minutes.

It was therefore concluded that, after the above improvements had been made, the resulting Research Questionnaire (Appendix 1) would be good enough to use in the intended research.

3.6 *Questionnaire Mailing and Responses*

Robson (2002, 249-250) suggests a number of ways in which it is possible to secure a good response rate to a postal questionnaire.¹⁸ A number of devices were therefore employed to encourage ministers to return the Research Questionnaires: a) an endorsement of the research by the Chair of the London North West District of the Methodist Church and inclusion of the District name on the covering letter (Appendix 2) and Research Questionnaire in order to encourage ministers to see the value of the research to themselves and to their District of the Methodist Church; b) the use of coloured ink on the logos on the covering letter and on the front of the Research Questionnaire in order to give them a professional appearance; c) the inclusion of indicative times for the completion of the four parts of the Research Questionnaire¹⁹ in order to convince the ministers that they would only spend a relatively short time completing them; d) the pre-completion of some of the data about the ministers and their churches on the Research Questionnaires using “mail-merge”²⁰ so that only incorrect data needed to be written in; e) the inclusion of a post-paid envelope which was pre-addressed for return to the researcher; f) clear marking of the date by which the forms were

18 Robson’s suggestions for securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire address a number of areas, including design and layout, wording of questions, mailing tips, the covering letter, follow-up and the use of incentives.

19 The indicative times for the completion of the four parts of the questionnaire were derived by averaging, and rounding up to the nearest minute, the times for completion given by those who trialled the questionnaire.

20 The information that was pre-completed was the Circuit name and the minister’s name, address, telephone number and email address and the names of the minister’s churches.

due to be returned – on the covering letter, the first page of the questionnaire and the last page of the questionnaire – so as to encourage return by the requested date; g) the offer of some feedback about the findings of the research.

As the piloting of the questionnaires was completed in November 2003 and some small changes were made as a result of feedback that was received from this process, it would have been possible to have posted out the Research Questionnaires before Christmas. However, this seemed to be a bad time to send out a Research Questionnaire because it is a busy period for ministers and there is then a time after Christmas when many ministers take time off of work, so the time available for completing and returning the Research Questionnaires would have been limited. In the light of these considerations and because Robson (2002, 250) suggests that researchers should “avoid a December mailing”, a decision was taken to send out the Research Questionnaires towards the end of January 2004 and to give a deadline for their return of 29th February.²¹ The Research Questionnaires were therefore posted on Saturday 24th January and were expected to arrive on Monday 26th January or Tuesday 27th January – the earlier part of the week being a better time for many ministers to receive and action administrative requests of this nature.

Robson (2002, 250) suggests that more responses might be obtained by the use of follow-up letters. Although no follow-up letters were sent out before the deadline for responses, two additional further questionnaires were sent out after the original batch, both to Anglican ministers in Local Ecumenical Partnerships that were known to the researcher. Both of these questionnaires were sent to churches which were known to have Websites – one of which the Methodist minister seemed not to know about and the other which had an Anglican minister who was known to be proud of his Website. Both of these additional questionnaires resulted in a response after the deadline of 29th February.

As has already been mentioned, the pilot study was outside of the Methodist District being considered in the research, which meant that there was a smaller incentive for a response,

21 Although 29th February 2004 was a Sunday, it was given as the deadline for the return of the Research Questionnaires because it was felt to be a distinctive date which might stick in the minds of those ministers who had been asked to return the questionnaires, hopefully prompting them into action if they had not already returned their Research Questionnaires when they thought about Sunday 29th February being such a rare date to worship on.

though 4 out of 10 questionnaires were still returned. It had been hoped that a greater response would be seen for the actual Research Questionnaires, but May (2001, 97) suggests that “the figure of 40%, or four out of every ten people sent a questionnaire is not uncommon”. By the deadline of 29th February 2004, a total of 43 responses had been received which, as 96 questionnaires had originally been sent out, represents a response rate of 44.8%. However, a further 9 responses were received after the deadline, bringing the total number of responses to 53 and the response rate to 54.6%.²² This response rate suggests that the strategies employed in piloting, constructing and sending out the Research Questionnaire did increase the response rate.

The responses that were received comprised 52 Research Questionnaires and 1 letter. The information about particular churches was as follows:

- Questionnaire Part 1 (and letter): of 125 churches for which information was returned, 32 had Websites and 93 did not have Websites – meaning that, of the churches for which information was returned, only 25.6% had Websites;
- Questionnaire Part 2 was completed for 40 churches without Websites;²³
- Questionnaire Part 3 was completed for 24 churches with Websites;²⁴
- Questionnaire Part 4 was completed for 23 churches with Websites.²⁵

Apart from following up the Research Questionnaire of one church that was known to be in the process of making a response, it was decided not to follow up any other unreturned Research Questionnaires after the response deadline as enough data had been received by then.

In January 2004, some feedback about the preliminary findings of the research was sent to the

22 This percentage equates to 53 questionnaires returned out of 97, as an additional questionnaire had to be sent to an Anglican priest in an LEP because the Methodist minister did not report that the church had a Website.

23 There were actually only 35 completed Part 2s of the Research Questionnaire returned, but 3 of these gave data for 2 churches without Websites. This happened despite people being asked only to give data on one church without a Website and despite the form having been designed to make it easy to give data for one church, but hard to give data for more than one church.

24 One of the forms gave information on Part 4 of the Research Questionnaire, but Part 3 was mostly not completed for this church.

25 One of the forms gave information on Part 2 of the Research Questionnaire about two churches that have Webpages on a Circuit Website, but Part 4 was not completed for these churches.

ministers and Webmasters who had returned the pilot questionnaires. Ministers were sent some feedback about Website provision and Webmasters were sent some feedback about Website design. The covering letters explained the types of feedback that were being sent out, as well as directing the recipients to the Methodist Church (2004) Website for further information on Website design. This was done for two reasons: a) some feedback had been promised as an incentive for completing and returning the pilot questionnaires; b) by encouraging Webmasters to look at the feedback and to think about good practice in Website design, it was hoped that some improvements would be made.

3.7 *Data Verification for Social Statistics*

In chapter 4 of this thesis, a study is made as to whether socio-economic factors seem to be having an impact on the existence or non-existence of local Methodist church Websites. This study employs official statistics – The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised)’ (ODPM, 2004) – which are related to the areas in which Methodist churches are located. As the official statistics to be used were likely to be related either to Local Authority Districts or Wards, the Research Questionnaire asked for the addresses and postcodes of churches, as well as the Local Authority Districts and Wards in which they were located. However, Robson (2002, 253) suggests that “it is virtually impossible to determine whether or not the respondent is giving serious attention to the questions”, so it was not assumed that the location data returned on the Research Questionnaires was accurate. It was therefore important to verify the information provided about the location of the churches in order to ensure that the correct social statistics would be accessed for each church. Three steps were necessary to verify the data that was supplied: 1) postcodes that were given were checked for accuracy the Post Office Address Finder (2004); 2) where there was no postcode given, the postcode was found using the Post Office Postcode Finder (2004) Website; 3) the church postcode was used to determine the Local Authority District and Ward with the assistance of the Neighbourhood Statistics (2004) Website. This data verification process addressed the problems of missing or incorrect Local Authority Districts and Wards.

PART 2 – WEBSITE PROVISION

Part 2 of this thesis, building upon the examination in Part 1 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, begins the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by focusing on Website provision. In conjunction with Parts 3 and 4 of this thesis, which focus on the design and effectiveness of Websites respectively, this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

It has already been noted in this thesis that the use of the Internet has increased greatly in recent years; Austin (2003, 8) suggests that “the Web is really just another way in which millions of people the world over can connect, communicate, learn, and do business.” More significantly, Austin (2003, 148) goes on to note that Broadband households rose from 12 million in 2001 to 43 million early in 2003 and that the total number of Webpages rose from 6 billion in 2001 to 16 billion in 2003. And yet, as has already been noted in Chapter 3, of the local Methodist churches for which information was returned on Research Questionnaires, only 25.6% had Websites.

In an age where many people routinely use Websites for information gathering and commerce, such a low rate of Website provision might be thought to be an indication of a lack of resources within the churches concerned – whether in terms of money to finance the provision of Websites, or in terms of personnel to implement and maintain Websites. This part of the thesis contains one chapter – chapter 4 – which considers whether there are significant inequalities in the provision of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church. This will be done by examining information returned on Research Questionnaires about the provision of local Methodist church Websites, in conjunction with government-produced socio-economic data related to the churches under consideration, in order to determine the factors which affect Website provision.

CHAPTER 4 – LOCAL CHURCH WEBSITE PROVISION

Building upon the examination in Part 1 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, this chapter begins the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by focusing on Website provision. This chapter therefore considers whether there are significant inequalities in the provision of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis and with Parts 3 and 4 of this thesis – which focus on the design and effectiveness of Websites respectively – this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

As local Methodist churches are a particular type of voluntary organisation, this chapter is about equality of provision between local Methodist churches, rather than equality between local Methodist churches and other churches, other voluntary organisations or commercial organisations. Therefore, the possible factors affecting Website provision are studied by evaluating the information that was provided in Part 1 (section B), Part 2 (sections A to C), Part 3 (sections A to C) and Part 4 (sections A and B) of the Research Questionnaires. In addition, some government-produced socio-economic data related to the areas in which the local Methodist churches concerned are located – principally those in ODPM (2004) – are also used in order that conclusions can be drawn about Website provision.

4.1 Government-Produced Socio-Economic Data and Website Provision

To begin the process of examining the provision of local Methodist church Websites, one of the first questions that needs to be answered is that of whether socio-economic factors have an impact on the existence or non-existence of local Methodist church Websites. May (1997, 71) notes that “the amount of material routinely collected by the government and its agencies provides a rich source of data for the social researcher”, so it was felt that it could be useful to see how the presence, or absence, of local Methodist church Websites relates to government-produced socio-economic data.

One useful set of government-produced socio-economic data that was available when the

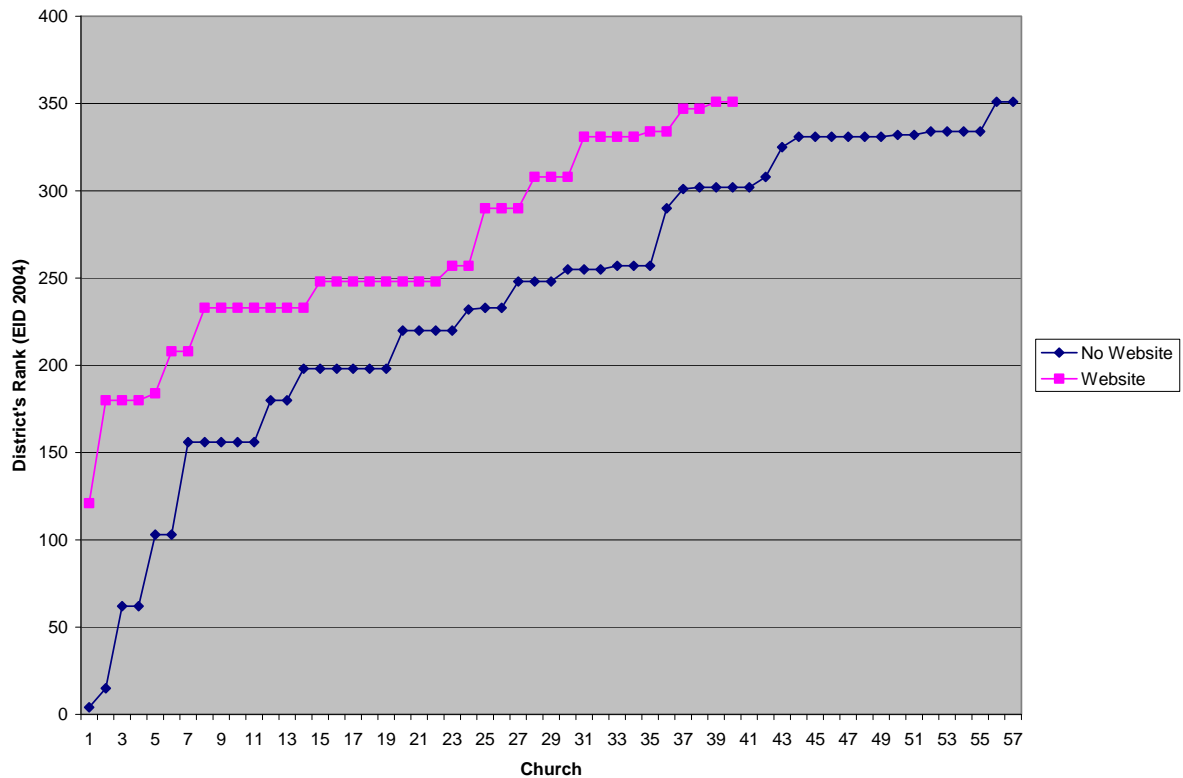
Research Questionnaires were sent out was the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (DETR, 2000), which covers the whole of England at Local Authority District and Ward level. The data which was gathered in questions 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1, 3.2, 3.6 and 3.7 of the Research Questionnaire was intended to be used in conjunction with the Indices of Deprivation 2000 in order to assess the impact of socio-economic factors on Website provision. However, as this thesis neared completion, The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (Revised) (ODPM, 2004), henceforth referred to as 'EID 2004', became available. As has already been noted in Chapter 3, the choice was made to use the EID 2004 data because, although it does not allow data analysis at Local Authority Ward level, it is more recent and should therefore give the most accurate comparative data and insights for local Methodist churches located in different areas.

Graph 4.1 (overleaf) plots the EID 2004 Ranks¹ of all of the Local Authority Districts within which the local Methodist churches under consideration are located, showing both churches which do have Websites and churches which do not have Websites.² What is interesting about this graph is that it suggests that there is an issue of inadequate resources for those churches which are located in the Local Authority Districts which are most deprived according to their EID 2004 rankings. Indeed, the lowest EID 2004 ranking of a church with a Website is 121, but 6 churches with lower EID 2004 Rankings (in the range 4 to 103) do not have Websites.

1 The EID 2004 Ranking for a Local Authority District in England is in the range 1 to 354, with 1 being the most deprived and 354 the least deprived. The EID 2004 Ranking was constructed by combining seven transformed domain scores, using the following weights: Income (22.5%); Employment (22.5%); Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%); Education, Skills and Training (13.5%); Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%); Crime (9.3%); Living Environment (9.3%).

2 Graph 4.1 may seem to omit some churches for which data was received, but this is not the case; ministers were asked about all of their churches, but only to give detailed information for one with and one without a Website, so the churches for which no location information was given are not shown.

Graph 4.1



Website Availability vs. District Rank

The information plotted in Graph 4.1 cannot, by itself, be taken to indicate a lack of resources within the local Methodist churches located in deprived Local Authority Districts. Indeed, the data returned in response to question 2.8 of the Research Questionnaire indicates that four of those local Methodist churches without Websites in the six most deprived Local Authority Districts actually have people with Website design skills. Furthermore, the responses to question 2.9 of the Research Questionnaire indicate that two of these local churches with web designers had not thought of having a Website and the other two had not got round to producing one (stating either that a Website would be too costly or that a Website was being designed). Although three of these local Methodist churches reported that their congregations did not reflect the socio-economic makeup of their communities, the reason that two of the respondents gave was that their area was becoming increasingly Muslim and the other said that the church was more middle-class than working-class; none of the three were reported as being “gathered” churches (which might have implied that personnel and skills were being drawn from outside of the immediate area). The respondents for the other two local Methodist churches of those located in the six most deprived Local Authority

Districts³ stated that their church had not thought of having a Website, so the fact that they did not report having any Website designers had not been a problem for them. In addition, though it is difficult to see on Graph 4.1, 9 out of 13 (69.2%) of the Local Authority Districts within which churches having Websites were located also had churches without Websites, which is strong evidence that Website provision is not strongly linked to deprivation as indicated by the EID 2004 Ranks.

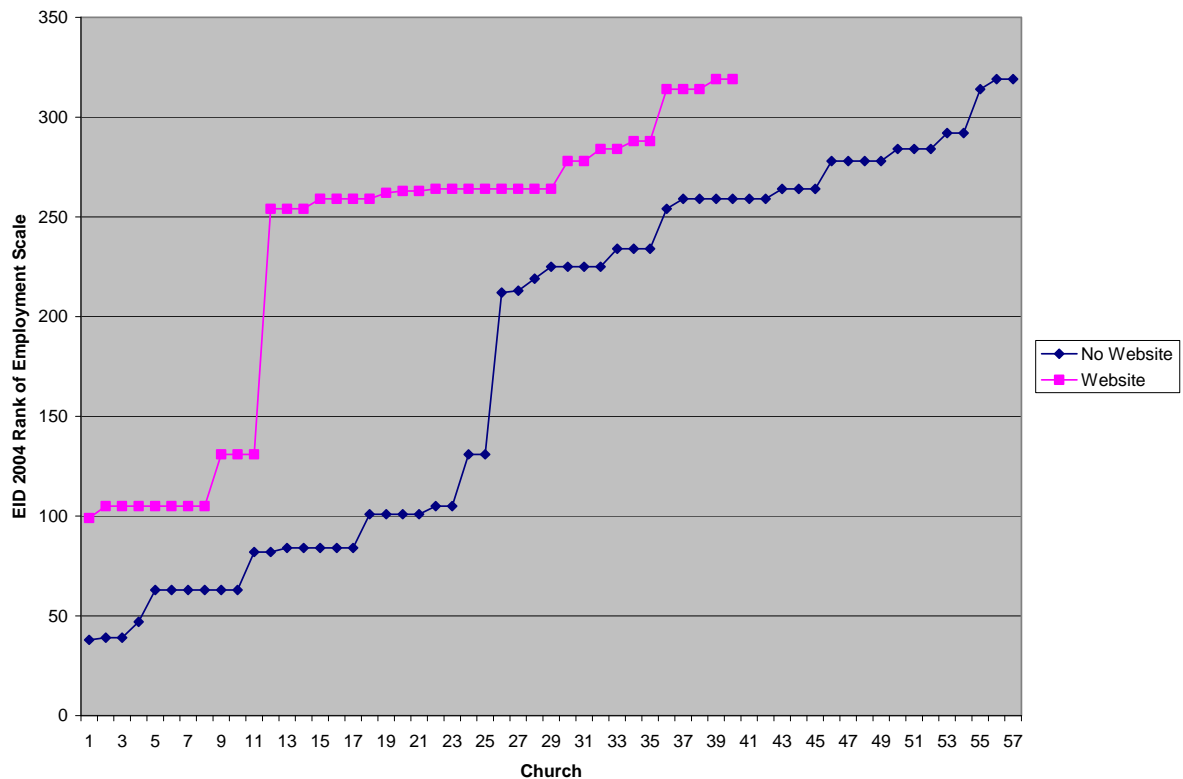
The EID 2004 data allows for a more detailed study of socio-economic factors in that it consists of seven weighted domains: Income (22.5%); Employment (22.5%); Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%); Education, Skills and Training (13.5%); Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%); Crime (9.3%); Living Environment (9.3%). There is therefore a possibility that the pattern of local Methodist church Website provision might correspond more closely to the individual domains than to the EID 2004 Rankings. In particular, the indices relating to Employment and to Education, Skills and Training might be related to Website provision which, by its nature, is dependent upon people having the necessary Website design skills. Therefore, to see whether particular indices of deprivation might be related to Website provision for local Methodist churches a further graph was also plotted using the available data – Graph 4.2 (overleaf).⁴

It is notable that Graph 4.2 shows that none of the 17 churches with the lowest District Employment Ranks actually have Websites. It would be tempting to conclude from Graph 4.2 that there is a link between employment deprivation and lack of Website provision in local Methodist churches. However, the fact that district-level information covers relatively large areas, combined with the fact that 12 of the respondents for the churches with the 17 lowest rankings actually claimed to have Website designers in their congregations and only 2 of respondents for the other 5 local Methodist churches cited people-related obstacles to Website provision, such as lack of expertise. Once again, though it is difficult to see on Graph 4.2, 9 out of 13 (69.2%) of the Local Authority Districts within which churches having Websites were located also had churches without Websites, which is strong evidence that Website provision is not strongly linked to deprivation as indicated by the EID 2004 Ranks.

3 According to the EID 2004 data, these two churches were located in the two most-deprived Local Authority Districts of all of the churches under consideration.

4 There is no EID 2004 data for Education, Skills and Training at Local Authority District level.

Graph 4.2



Website Availability vs. District Employment Rank

It is not, therefore, possible to conclude from the data summarised in Graphs 4.1 and 4.2 that the government-produced socio-economic data suggests that a lack of resources is affecting Website provision. Indeed, the socio-economic data which has been examined has given no clear-cut relationship between deprivation levels and the availability of local Methodist church Websites. Nevertheless, because the local Methodist churches under consideration are situated in communities with a broad range of deprivation levels and local Methodist churches can be found across most of those levels of deprivation – both with Websites and without them – the possibility of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church cannot be ruled out.

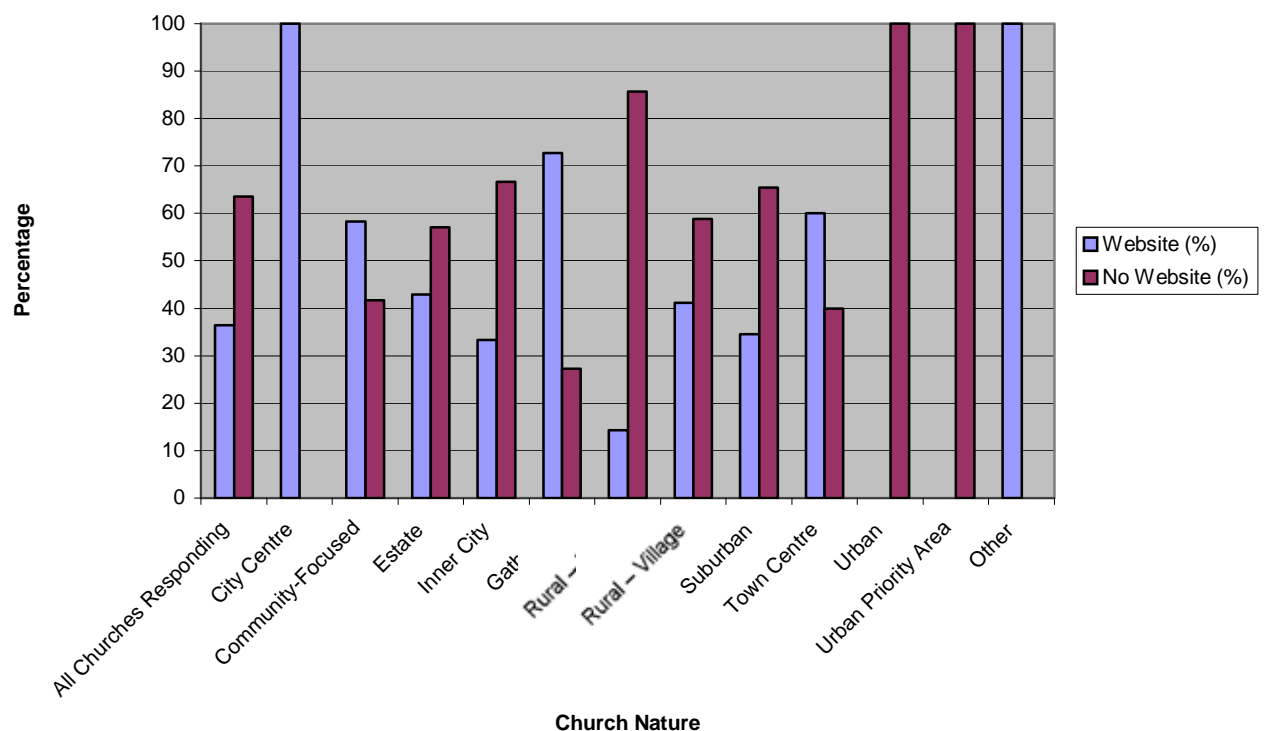
4.2 The Nature of the Churches

A different way of considering whether there is inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church is to examine the nature of the local Methodist

churches as they were described in questions 2.4 and 3.4 of the Research Questionnaire and to look at whether the local Methodist churches are thought to reflect the areas in which they are situated (questions 2.5 and 3.5 of the Research Questionnaire).

As a first step in analysing the descriptions of church nature provided in the questions 2.4 and 3.4 of the Research Questionnaire data, Table 4.1 (overleaf) shows the proportions of all of the local Methodist churches under consideration and of local Methodist churches with and without Websites which were allocated the descriptors available to the respondents.⁵ Also, Graph 4.3 plots the data from Table 4.1 in two columns indicating the percentage of local Methodist churches of each nature which do have Websites and which do not have Websites:

Graph 4.3



Website Provision vs. Church Nature

⁵ It was possible for the respondents to select multiple descriptors for a local church in order to more accurately define the locality in which the church was situated.

Table 4.1

Church Nature	Website Provision		
	Website	No Website	Total
All Churches Responding	23 (36.5%)	40 (63.5%)	63 (100%)
City Centre	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Community-Focused	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)	12 (100%)
Estate	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)	7 (100%)
Inner City	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	2 (100%)
Gathered	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	11 (100%)
Rural – Town	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	7 (100%)
Rural – Village	7 (41.2%)	10 (58.8%)	17 (100%)
Suburban	9 (34.6%)	17 (65.4%)	26 (100%)
Town Centre	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)	5 (100%)
Urban	0 (0%)	6 (100%)	5 (100%)
Urban Priority Area	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)
Other	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)

Website Provision and Church Nature

It can be seen from Graph 4.3 that the local Methodist churches which used ‘Urban’ and ‘Urban Priority Area’ to describe their nature were significantly different from other local Methodist churches because none of them had Websites. There were 6 local Methodist churches described as ‘Urban’ and 2 described as ‘Urban Priority Area’, so there could possibly be a common factor preventing these urban local Methodist churches from having Websites. Having said that, only 3 of these 8 local Methodist churches did not have any Website designers in their congregations and a number of diverse reasons were given for these urban local Methodist churches not having Websites, including 4 that ‘hadn’t got round to it’, one that ‘hadn’t thought of it’, one that used a Circuit Website and one that had no expertise. There does not, therefore, seem to be a common factor related to the nature of the local Methodist churches and their communities that prevents urban churches having Websites.

It can also be seen from Graph 4.3 that the local Methodist churches for which respondents used ‘Other’ and ‘City Centre’ to describe their nature were significantly different from other churches because all of them had Websites. There was, however, only one church in each of these categories, which makes the sample sizes too small for effective conclusions to be drawn from them. Furthermore, the ‘City Centre’ church, being located in St. Albans, is perhaps better equated to a ‘Town Centre’ church because St. Albans is more like a town than a city in terms of the size of its population – though, having a cathedral, it arguably has more Christian resources at its disposal than many towns do.

Another noticeable thing about Graph 4.3 is that ‘Gathered’, ‘Community-Focused’, ‘Town Centre’⁶ and, to a lesser degree, ‘Estate’ and ‘Rural – Village’ local Methodist churches have proportionately more Websites than the level reflected for all of the churches in the sample under consideration. The sample sizes for churches described in these ways are larger, so there might well be discernible factors that lead such local Methodist churches to have proportionately more Websites, though the data does not enable any causal conclusions to be drawn.

Another noticeable thing about Graph 4.3 is that the local Methodist churches that the respondents described as ‘Inner City’ and ‘Suburban’ have roughly the same proportion of Websites as the level reflected by all of the local Methodist churches under consideration. It could be argued, then, that any conclusions drawn about this sample relating to the nature of the ‘Inner City’ and ‘Suburban’ local Methodist churches and their communities might be applicable to all of the local Methodist churches. However, the sample size for the ‘Inner City’ local Methodist churches was only 3, so it is not really possible to draw conclusions from those churches’ data, especially as only two of the congregations were claimed by the respondents to reflect the areas in which the churches were situated. The sample size for the ‘Suburban’ local Methodist churches was 26, which gave more data from which to draw conclusions. However, of the 17 ‘Suburban’ churches which did not have Websites, 13 actually had Web designers in their congregations and, of these, 5 congregations were

6 It was stated above that the “City Centre” church was in St. Albans and so was more like a “Town Centre” church. But even if the additional “City Centre” church was re-labelled “Town Centre”, it would only change the proportion of churches from 60% with Websites and 40% without Websites to 66.7% with Websites and 33.3% without Websites. Therefore, the “Town Centre” group of churches would still have proportionately more Websites than the level reflected by all of the churches that responded.

claimed by the respondents to reflect the area and 7 were not (with 1 unknown). Also, of the 8 'Suburban' local Methodist churches which had both Websites and Web designers, 6 of these were claimed by the respondents to have congregations that did not reflect the areas in which the churches were situated. The nature of the data therefore makes it difficult to draw any causal conclusions as to the level of Website provision for 'Suburban' churches and dangerous to draw any definite conclusions as to whether the level of Website provision and nature of the communities of the full set of local Methodist churches under consideration is similar to the 'Suburban' churches.

Finally, it is noticeable that 'Rural – Town' local Methodist churches have proportionately fewer Websites than the level reflected by all of the local Methodist churches for which there were responses, so there could possibly be a common factor preventing local Methodist churches of this type having Websites. There were 7 'Rural – Town' churches, of which it was said that 6 of the congregations reflected the local area, but 4 of these did not have Web designers. As the reasons for the churches without Web designers not having Websites were varied, it does not seem, therefore, that there is a common factor related to the nature of the churches and their communities which is preventing most of the 'Rural – Town' churches having Websites.

The data about Website provision for churches situated in communities of different natures has shown some interesting relationships between Website provision and the situations in which the local Methodist churches find themselves. Although the analysis of the information about church nature has not shown any clear causes of inequalities in Website provision, the different levels of Website provision for churches of particular natures are, in themselves, evidence of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church.

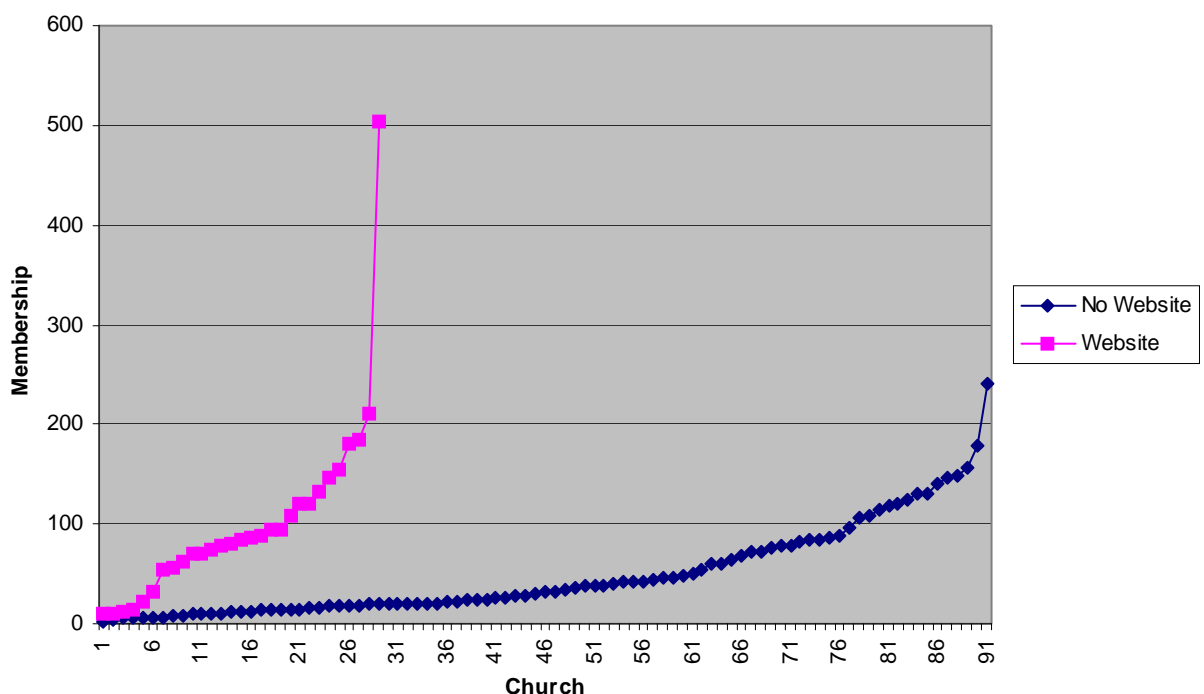
4.3 *Church Membership and Attendance*

As with any field in which particular skills are required, it is clear that the 'people resources' that are available to local Methodist churches could have a bearing on the Website expertise that is available 'in-house' in order to produce and maintain Websites. As there might be thought to be a greater chance of larger churches having the necessary skills for Website provision, question 1.1 on the Research Questionnaire asked about church membership and

average Sunday attendance. This question was asked for all churches, so a lot of data was returned by the respondents who completed the Research Questionnaires.

Graph 4.4 plots two lines, showing the membership of the 29 local Methodist churches with Websites and 91 churches without Websites for which data was returned. It can be seen from this graph that local Methodist churches both with and without Websites have a wide range of membership figures, so that there seems to be no correspondence between local Methodist church membership and Website provision.

Graph 4.4

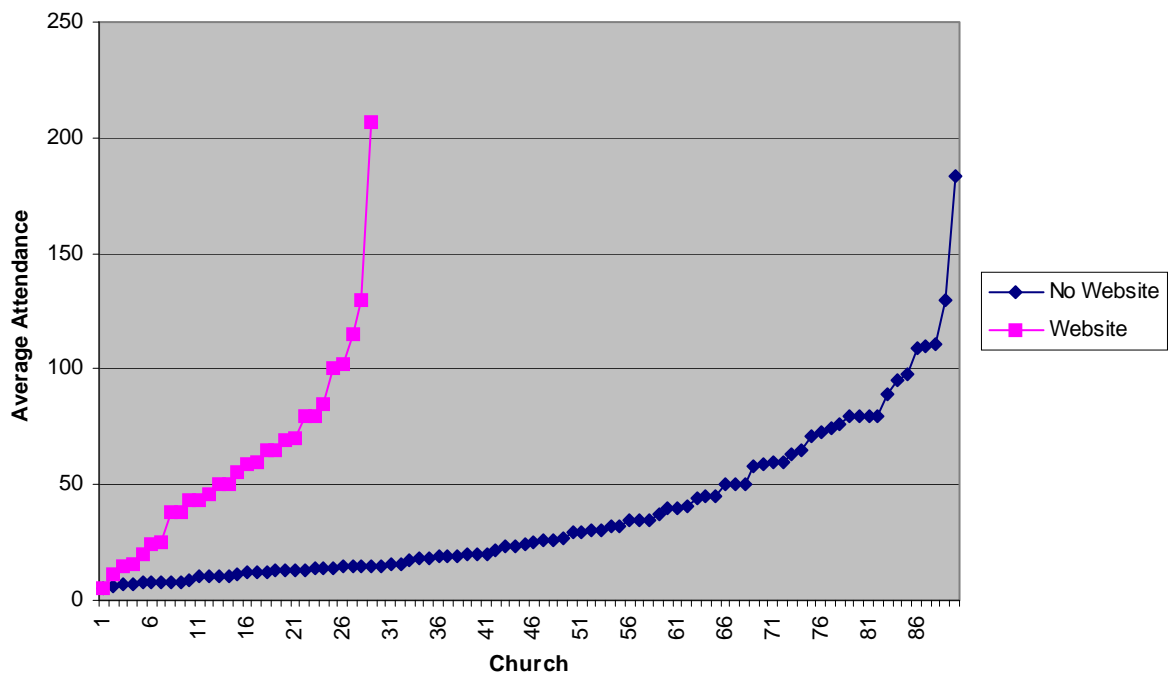


Membership vs. Website Provision

As some local Methodist churches have membership figures which do not reflect the involvement of people in the life of the church – either being too high for reasons such as people on the membership role having moved away or ceased being actively involved in the life or the church, or too low for reasons such as people seeing themselves as Christians and not seeing the value of ‘joining’ a church – a better measure of the personnel resources available to a local Methodist church might be thought to be the average adult attendance at Sunday worship. Graph 4.5 (overleaf) therefore plots two lines, showing the average Sunday

adult attendance of the 29 local Methodist churches with Websites and 90 local Methodist churches without Websites for which data was returned.

Graph 4.5



Worship Attendance vs. Website Provision

What can be seen from Graph 4.5 is that local Methodist churches, both with and without Websites, have a wide range of Sunday attendance figures, so that there seems to be no correspondence between local Methodist church attendance and Website provision.

The data which has been studied in this section concerning local Methodist church membership and adult attendance at Sunday worship has given no clear-cut relationship between either local Methodist church membership or adult attendance levels and the availability of local church Websites. However, the fact that local Methodist churches have a broad range of membership and attendance levels and that local Methodist churches can be found across most of those levels both with Websites and without them is, in itself, evidence of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church.

4.4 Possible Ecumenical Influences

Another factor which might affect the provision of local Methodist church Websites is whether the churches are constituted solely as Methodist churches, or as Local Ecumenical Partnerships consisting of Methodists along with Christians with other (or no) denominational backgrounds. In order to address this possibility, questions 2.3 and 3.3 on the Research Questionnaire asked how local Methodist churches would be described by the respondents in denominational terms.

Table 4.2 shows the proportions by denominational mix of: all churches; churches with Websites; and churches without Websites. The figures show that, with data for nearly six times as many Methodist churches as Local Ecumenical Partnerships, nearly a third of the local Methodist churches which reported having Websites were Local Ecumenical Partnerships, yet only 5% of the local Methodist churches which reported having no Website were Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

Table 4.2

	<i>Methodist</i>	<i>Ecumenical</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>All Churches Responding</i>	57 (85.1%)	10 (14.9%)	67 (100%)
<i>Churches WITH Websites</i>	19 (70.4%)	8 (29.6%)	27 (100%)
<i>Churches WITHOUT Websites</i>	38 (95.0%)	2 (5.0%)	40 (100%)

Churches by Denominational Mix

To explain the data in another way, Table 4.3 (overleaf) shows the proportions of Methodist, Ecumenical and All Churches with and without Websites. The figures show that there are proportionately far more Local Ecumenical Partnerships with Websites (80%) than without them (20%), whereas there are far more Methodist churches without Websites (66.7%) than with them (33.3%).

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 therefore clearly show that Local Ecumenical Partnerships have proportionately more Websites than Methodist Churches. However, in noting this conclusion, it should be borne in mind that ministers in Local Ecumenical Partnerships do have to relate to more than just the Methodist Church and so had a smaller incentive to

respond to the Research Questionnaire, especially if the ministers receiving the Research Questionnaires were not themselves Methodist ministers – which might have distorted the ecumenical response by, for example, discouraging a response from ecumenical churches without Websites. Although, it is unclear whether or not this is the case, there is a clear indication from the available data that Local Ecumenical Partnerships do have proportionately more Websites than Methodist Churches.

Table 4.3

	<i>Methodist</i>	<i>Ecumenical</i>	<i>All Churches</i>
<i>Churches WITH Websites</i>	19 (33.3%)	8 (80.0%)	27 (40.3%)
<i>Churches WITHOUT Websites</i>	38 (66.7%)	2 (20.0%)	40 (59.7%)
<i>TOTAL</i>	57 (100.0%)	10 (100.0%)	67 (100.0%)

Churches With and Without Websites

The data about church denominations is, therefore, evidence of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church. This is because there is a clear difference between the proportion of local Methodist churches which have Websites and the proportion of Local Ecumenical Partnerships with Methodist participants which have Websites. The reason for this difference is unclear, though it may be related to the fact that 8 of the 9 Local Ecumenical Partnerships for which data was returned happen to have Website design capabilities within their congregations; this aspect of the data collected through the Research Questionnaires will now be examined.

4.5 Website Design Capabilities

As has already been hinted at in the concluding remarks of section 4.4, a further factor which might affect the provision of local church Websites is whether, or not, the local Methodist churches have people with Website design capabilities in their congregations. Questions 2.8, 3.8 and 4.8 on the Research Questionnaire therefore asked about this.

For the 63 churches for which Part 2 or Part 3 of the Research Questionnaire was completed, Table 4.4 (overleaf) summarises the answers that were given to questions 2.8 and 3.8 which asked whether any people in the church's congregation had Website design capabilities.

Table 4.4

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
<i>All Churches Responding</i>	38 (58.5%)	22 (33.8%)	5 (7.7%)
<i>Churches WITH Websites</i>	19 (76.0%)	5 (20.0%)	1 (4.0%)
<i>Churches WITHOUT Websites</i>	19 (47.5%)	17 (42.5%)	4 (10.0%)

Website Design Capabilities

The data in Table 4.4 clearly suggests that a large number of the local Methodist churches – some 41.5% – either do not have, or had respondents who did not know whether they have, people in their congregations with Website design capabilities. In addition, it can be seen that, of the 25 churches that reported having Websites, only 20% said in response to question 3.8 that they did not have anybody in the congregation with Website design capabilities (one said “don’t know”, but as a Webmaster then completed Part 4 of the Research Questionnaire, this was taken to have been a misinterpretation of the question).

The answers given for the 40 local Methodist churches that reported not having Websites are intriguing because, despite 47.5% of local churches without Websites having Website design expertise available, these potential Webmasters have still not set up Websites for their churches.

Interestingly, 4 of the 5 local Methodist churches with Websites, but without Website design capabilities in their congregation, had Websites which were part of another Website (and all 4 of these were on Circuit Websites) and the fifth had paid for Website design – suggesting that these churches had all found creative ways to circumvent their shortage of skills.

Responses to question 4.8 of the Research Questionnaire highlighted more creative ways of Website design: two local Methodist churches using commercial companies for Website design; one church using the Circuit Website as a starting point for design purposes; one church enlisting the help of a ‘Friend of the church’; and one church enlisting the help of Junior Church teenagers.

The data about Website design capabilities is evidence of inequality in the provision of local

Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church. This is because, although the majority of the local Methodist churches have Website design capabilities in their congregations, but the presence of such capabilities does not always mean that a local Methodist church will have a Website and, conversely, the absence of such capabilities does not always mean that a local Methodist church will not have a Website.

4.6 *Reasons Given for Not Having a Website*

As well as studying possible factors that might affect Website provision, it was felt to be important to examine the reasons why the ministers completing the Research Questionnaires believed that local Methodist churches did not have Websites. The reasons for local Methodist churches not having Websites, as described in the responses to questions 2.8 and 2.9 on the Research Questionnaire, will therefore now be explored. These responses will help to explain why so many local Methodist churches that have Website design capabilities available still do not have Websites.

Of the 4 local Methodist churches without Websites reporting in question 2.8 that they did not know if they had any Website designers in the congregation, 2 said that they did not have a Website because there were other priorities and the others said that the church ‘hadn’t got round to having a Website’ or that they ‘had not thought of having one’.

Of the 17 local Methodist churches without Websites reporting in question 2.8 that they did not have any Website designers in the congregation, the reasons quoted in question 2.9 for not having a Website were as shown in Table 4.5 (overleaf).

The figures in Table 4.5 suggest that, for local Methodist churches without Website designers in the congregation, the lack of expertise is a key reason for the churches not having Websites. However, with 29.4% of the respondents from local Methodist churches reporting that they hadn’t thought of having a Website and 29.4% of the respondents from the local Methodist churches reporting that they hadn’t got round to setting up Websites, there may be a need to actively promote and encourage the setting up of Websites for local churches which do not already have them.

Table 4.5

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<i>Hadn't thought of having one</i>	5
<i>Church hasn't got round to it</i>	5
<i>Church uses another Website</i>	3
<i>No Website thought to be needed</i>	2
<i>No expertise</i>	12
<i>Too costly</i>	1
<i>Other⁷</i>	2

No Website Designers – Reasons for not having a Website

Of the 19 local Methodist churches whose respondents reported in question 2.8 that they did have Website designers in the congregation, the reasons quoted for not having a Website were as shown in Table 4.6:

Table 4.6

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<i>Hadn't thought of having one</i>	3
<i>Church hasn't got round to it</i>	9
<i>Church uses another Website</i>	1
<i>No Website thought to be needed</i>	3
<i>No expertise</i>	0
<i>Too costly</i>	1
<i>Other⁸</i>	11

With Website Designers – Reasons for not having a Website

-
- 7 The 'Other' reason was a church's respondent reporting both that the Website was not felt to be needed yet and that time input would be required for the Website.
- 8 The 'Other' reasons included: 5 churches' respondents reporting that a Website was under investigation or in the process of production; 5 churches' respondents reporting that the people with the skills were too busy doing other things; 1 church's respondent reporting that an organisation linked to the church had a Website; and 1 church's respondent reporting both that the Website was not felt to be needed yet and that time input would be required for the Website.

The figures in Table 4.6 suggest that, for local Methodist churches with Website designers in the congregation, the lack of expertise is not felt to be a problem. However, with half of the churches reporting that they hadn't got round to setting up Websites, the "other" reasons for not having Websites become important. Half of these reasons were that a Website was being investigated or was under construction, but the other half were to do with the people who had the skills being too busy doing other things. Therefore, even with Website designers on hand in local Methodist churches, there may still be a need to find other ways of helping churches which do not already have Websites to set them up.

Both of the above sets of data give evidence of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church. This is because:

- for local Methodist churches without Website designers in the congregation, the lack of expertise is a key reason for the churches not having Websites, along with the fact that many respondents reported either that they hadn't thought of having a Website, or that they hadn't got round to setting up Websites;
- for local Methodist churches with Website designers in the congregation, many of the respondents reported that they hadn't got round to setting up Websites and some reported that the people who had the skills were too busy doing other things.

4.7 *Causes for Having a Website*

As well as looking at possible factors that might adversely affect Website provision, it was felt to be important to examine the reasons why the respondents believed that local Methodist churches did have Websites. The reasons for local Methodist churches having Websites will therefore now be explored. The responses to question 3.9 on the Research Questionnaire, which asked about the impetus behind the setting-up of the local Methodist church Websites, help to explain why some local Methodist churches do have Websites and some do not. The information given in response to this question will now be examined.

For the 23 churches with Websites for which data was provided in Part 3 of the Research Questionnaire, Table 4.7 (overleaf) summarises the roles of the people who suggested having

the Website.⁹

Table 4.7

Answer	Frequency
<i>Present Minister</i>	7
<i>Former Minister</i>	2
<i>Church Council Member</i>	6
<i>Member of Congregation</i>	9
<i>Person from Another Church</i>	0
<i>Person within Circuit</i>	1
<i>Person within District</i>	0
<i>“Friend” of the Church</i>	0
<i>Other</i>¹⁰	3

People who suggested having a Website

This data is perhaps better understood when re-formed into Table 4.8, which shows the types of people who were influential in local church Websites being provided:

Table 4.8

	<i>Churches Affected</i>
<i>Minister attached to local Church</i>	9 (39.1%)
<i>Lay People in local Church</i>	12 (52.2%)
<i>People within the Circuit</i>	3 (13.0%)

Types of Influence in having a Website

The figures in Tables 4.7 and 4.8 suggest that most of the impetus for the development of local Methodist church Websites (i.e. in 91.3% of the churches) comes from lay people

9 It should be noted that one church’s respondent ticked three of the options, one church’s respondent ticked two of the options and two churches’ respondents ticked none of the options.

10 The ‘Other’ options included two churches’ respondents reporting that a previous Superintendent had the idea of setting up the Website and one church reported that an ongoing Circuit initiative was the reason for setting up the Website.

within those churches or ministers attached to those churches, with the only reported outside influence being from people within the Circuit. This information is evidence of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church. This is not only because there was no common cause or influence reported by the churches that led them to set up Websites, but also because most influence comes from within local churches, yet outside influence also occasionally happens.

4.8 Webmasters

As has already been mentioned in this thesis, there are a number of ways of producing a local church Website; Blackmore (1999, 56) notes that Website design software is becoming more accessible, with most word processors now having the ability to create HTML so that it is possible for most people who have access to a PC to design Webpages. A further set of factors that might therefore affect Website provision is the availability and skills of Webmasters. The responses to questions 4.1 to 4.5 on the Research Questionnaire, give insights into the Webmasters' personal qualities, so the information given in response to these questions will now be examined.

4.8.1 Webmasters' Gender

Question 4.1 on the Research Questionnaire asked for the sex (i.e. the gender) of the Webmaster to be recorded. Of the 20 Webmasters who responded to the question, 19 (95%) of them were male and 1 (5%) was female. In order to show how the gender profile of the Webmasters compares to the gender profiles of the congregations of the Methodist Church and of other churches, Table 4.9 compares the Webmasters' gender profile to that reported by Escott & Gelder (2002, 3) in their data gathered from churches in 2001.

Table 4.9

	<i>Webmasters</i>	<i>Methodist Church</i>	<i>Other Churches</i>
<i>Female</i>	5%	69%	65%
<i>Male</i>	95%	31%	35%

Gender of Webmasters and Church Congregations

Table 4.9 clearly shows that the gender profile of the Webmasters as reported in the Research

Questionnaire is very unlike the overall gender profiles of the Methodist Church and of other churches. Although the two sets of data were gathered approximately three years apart, the figures in Table 4.9 are so different that there is a clear suggestion from the data that females are very under-represented as Webmasters in the local Methodist churches being studied; if the national gender profile for the Methodist Church was reflected in the gender profile for Webmasters, the expectation would be for approximately 13 to 14 times as many female Webmasters and approximately a third as many male Webmasters.

4.8.2 Webmasters' Age

Question 4.2 on the Research Questionnaire asked about the age of the Webmaster. Again, 20 Webmasters responded to the question and Table 4.10 (overleaf) compares the Webmasters' age profile to that reported by Escott & Gelder (2002, 3) in their data gathered from churches in 2001. Graph 4.6 (overleaf) plots three lines and clearly shows the differences in the age profiles of Webmasters, of people in Methodist church congregations and of people in the congregations of other churches.

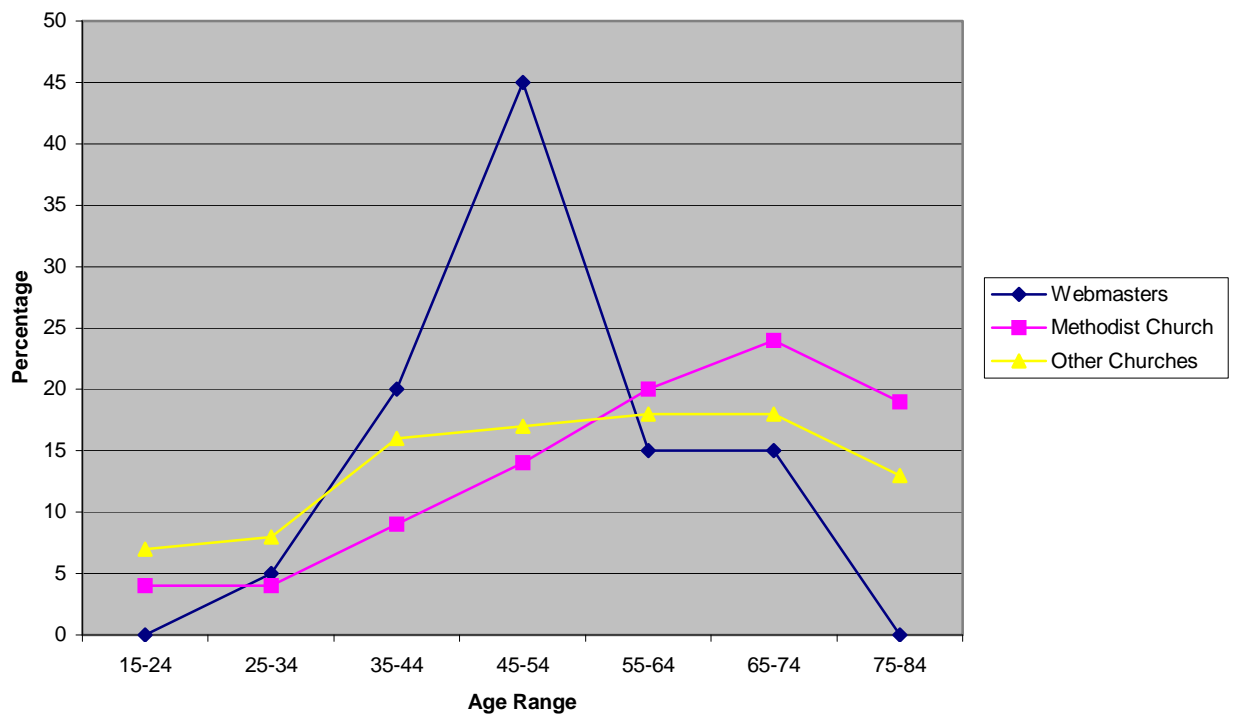
Although the two sets of data were gathered approximately three years apart, the figures in Table 4.10 as illustrated in Graph 4.6 are so different in some age groups that the age profile of the Webmasters, as reported in the responses to the Research Questionnaires, suggests that younger people (i.e. 15-24 years old) and older people (i.e. 55+ years old) are under-represented as Webmasters in the local Methodist churches being studied. It was found that 80% of Webmasters are in the 35-64 age bracket whereas only 43% of Methodists and 51% of people in other churches were reported by Escott & Gelder as being in this age bracket. The most frequently reported age of Webmasters (45%) was 45-54 years old, but Webmasters are very much over-represented in this age group because only 14% of Methodists are in this age group only 17% of people in other churches are in this age group. These statistics relating to Webmasters in the 35-64 age group suggest that there may be a national shortage of Webmasters to design local Methodist church Websites. The statistics also suggest that more needs to be done to encourage the (admittedly small number of) people in the 15-24 age group in the Methodist Church to become Webmasters – on the assumption that people in this age group are likely to learn more quickly and to be more comfortable with new technology than older people.

Table 4.10

	<i>Webmasters</i> (%)	<i>Methodist Church</i> (%)	<i>Other Churches</i> (%)
15-24	0	4	7
25-34	5	4	8
35-44	20	9	16
45-54	45	14	17
55-64	15	20	18
65-74	15	24	18
75-84	0	19	13
85+	0	6	4

Age of Webmasters and Church Congregations

Graph 4.6



Age Profiles of Webmasters and Churches

4.8.3 Webmasters' Expertise

Question 4.3 on the Research Questionnaire asked the Webmasters to describe their level of

Website expertise. Again, 20 Webmasters responded to the question and Table 4.11 shows the frequency and percentage rates of the responses:

Table 4.11

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Beginner</i>	2	10%
<i>Basic Skills</i>	5	25%
<i>Average Competence</i>	7	35%
<i>Advanced</i>	5	25%
<i>Expert</i>	1	5%

Webmasters' Expertise

The data in Table 4.11 shows that the Webmasters claim to have a wide range of skills, though this data should be treated carefully as each of the Webmasters may have had different perceptions of the levels of skill which each answer implied. Of particular note is the fact that 70% of Webmasters claim to have a level of skill which is average or below – which might be taken to suggest that 70% of the local Methodist church Websites that the Webmasters have produced will be of a quality that is average or below. However, the large number of Webmasters (35%) claiming to have average skills means that 65% of Webmasters claim to have a level of skill which is average or above, so that it could also be suggested that 65% of the local Websites that the Webmasters have produced will be of a quality that is average or above. Perhaps more meaningful is therefore to note that 35% of Webmasters claimed to have skills below average, 35% of Webmasters claimed to have average skills and 30% of Webmasters claimed to have skills above average, so that it might be expected that similar numbers of Websites implemented to these standards might be found.

4.8.4 Webmasters' Knowledge

Question 4.4 on the Research Questionnaire asked the Webmasters to give the main source of their knowledge of Website design. 19 Webmasters responded to the question, but some of the Webmasters gave more than one answer. Table 4.12 (overleaf) shows the responses.

Table 4.12

<i>Source</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
---------------	------------------	-------------------

<i>Self-taught</i>	19	100%
<i>Evening Class (or similar)</i>	1	5.3%
<i>GCSE / O-Level</i>	0	0%
<i>A/S-Level</i>	0	0%
<i>A-Level</i>	0	0%
<i>NVQ</i>	0	0%
<i>BTEC</i>	0	0%
<i>HND/HNC</i>	0	0%
<i>Bachelor's Degree</i>	0	0%
<i>Postgraduate Studies</i>	0	0%
<i>Training at Work</i>	3	15.8%
<i>Experience at Work</i>	4	21.1%
<i>Other</i> ¹¹	3	15.8%

Sources of Webmasters' Website Design Knowledge

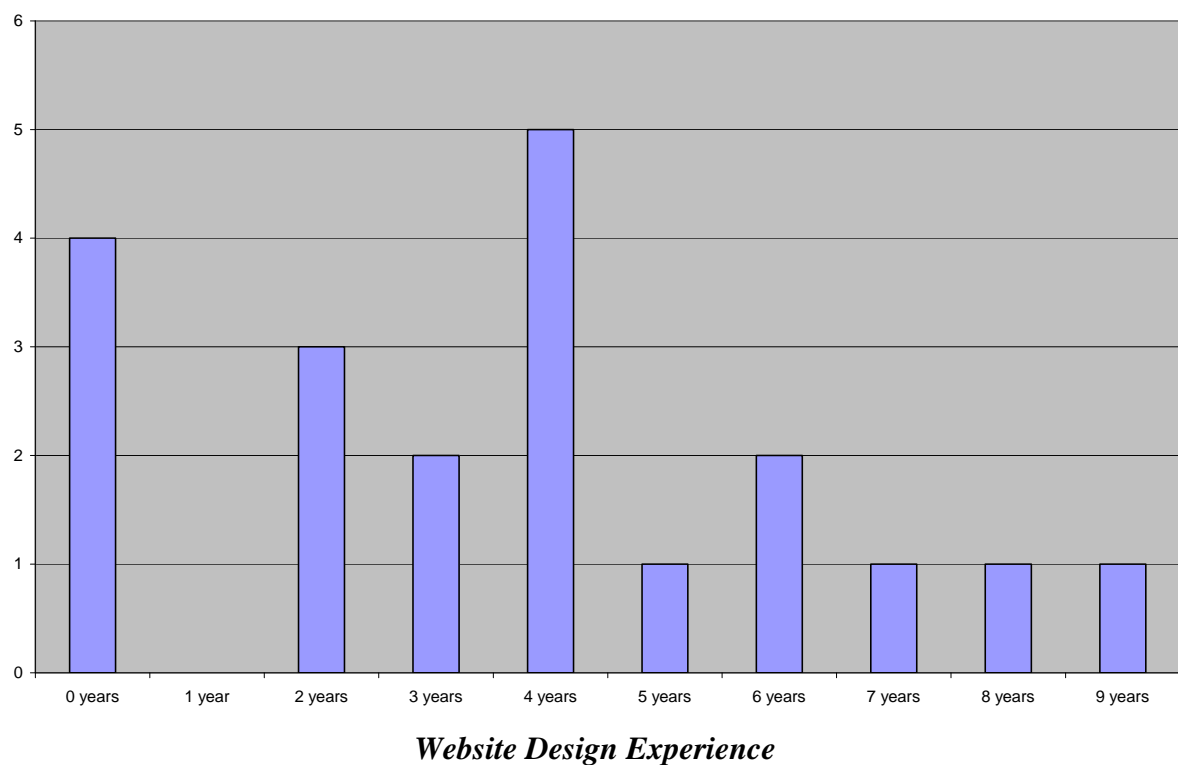
The data about the source of Webmasters' knowledge is very striking as it shows that none of the Webmasters have received Website design knowledge on the way to achieving any recognised qualifications ranging from GCSE through to postgraduate level. Although a small percentage of the Webmasters have picked up Website design skills from work, all of them see themselves as self-taught, which suggests that, in order for Websites actually to be implemented, people need to be in local Methodist churches who have both the inclination to implement Websites and the ability to teach themselves the necessary skills. The fact that so many of the Webmasters are self-taught and that such a small percentage have learned any Website design skills at work is of concern because it is possible that the Webmasters may not have learned the best ways of designing Websites. Garrett (2003, 13) suggests that "it is user experience that forms the customer's impression of the company's offerings ... it is user experience that determines whether your customer will ever come back" so, for local Methodist churches, it might be the user experience that determines whether a person comes to church, or even whether a person comes to faith. Surely then, with the faith of people at stake, and perhaps also the sustainability of local Methodist churches, Webmasters should be

encouraged to receive at least some formal training in Website design.

4.8.5 Webmasters' Experience

Question 4.5 on the Research Questionnaire asked the Webmasters to state how many years' experience of Website design they had. Graph 4.7 shows this information. The mean number of years of Website design experience, expressed as an integer, was 4. The median was also 4.

Graph 4.7



These findings are encouraging in some ways, in that to be designing Websites for 4 years or more suggests a reasonable level of experience. However, experience in itself may not be adequate to result in sufficient expertise to ensure the design of Websites that are effective for mission, so there is a need to consider these findings along with those about Webmasters' expertise (section 4.8.3) and knowledge (section 4.8.4).

11 Of those who responded 'Other', two mentioned managing Website designers at work and the other one used notes from his daughter's degree course.

4.8.6 Conclusions about Webmasters

The data returned by the Webmasters have highlighted a number of factors that suggest that there is inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church:

- The prevalence of male Webmasters, despite a much larger proportion of females generally being present in the Methodist Church – suggesting that Webmasters will often only be present when suitable males are present;
- The prevalence of Webmasters in the 35-54 (and especially 45-54) age bands, despite fewer people in these age groups generally being present in the Methodist Church – suggesting that Webmasters will often only be present where people in these age groups happen to be in particular churches;
- The significant numbers of Webmasters claiming less than average, or only average, competence – suggesting that many Websites will not be of better than an average standard;
- The presence of self-taught Webmasters in 100% of the churches examined – suggesting that Websites will only appear where people have an inclination not only to design Websites, but also to teach themselves the necessary skills.

4.9 *Financial Cost of Website Provision*

Some local Methodist churches may find that there is a financial cost involved in producing a Website; Blackmore (1999, 56-57) points out that “word processors will only create basic sites, and are not designed to help a complete novice create his or her first Web Site. You may also be stuck for the software needed to transfer your creation to your web server.”

Therefore, whichever route a local church takes in order to design and support a Website, it is likely that some degree of investment will be required in terms of Website design software and Website designer expertise. These items may be obtained in a variety of ways, including the purchase of software, manuals or Website design services, but the financial cost of such Website provision could well affect Website provision for local Methodist churches is. The responses to questions 4.9 and 4.12 on the Research Questionnaire give insights into the costs of Website provision, so the information given in response to these questions will now be examined.

4.9.1 Website Set-up Costs

Question 4.13 on the Research Questionnaire asked the Webmasters to say which software they had used to support their local Methodist church's Website. Table 4.13 shows the software was used (software versions are not stated as they are not relevant here):

Table 4.13

<i>Software</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>HTML / Javascript</i>	2	10.5%
<i>Macromedia® Dreamweaver®</i>	4	21.0%
<i>Microsoft® FrontPage®</i>	8	42.1%
<i>Microsoft® FrontPage® Express</i>	1	5.3%
<i>Microsoft® Word®</i>	1	5.3%
<i>Namo Webeditor</i>	1	5.3%
<i>Serif® PagePlus®</i>	1	5.3%
<i>Serif® Webplus®</i>	1	5.3%

Software used by Webmasters for Website Support

Appendix 5 gives manufacturers' quoted costs for versions of the Website design and file transfer software which was used by the Webmasters¹² and this information clearly shows that such software can cost hundreds of pounds – which perhaps could be a deterrent for local Methodist churches considering implementing a Website. However, it is sometimes possible to get Website design software cheaper through retailers, or even free with computer magazines and computer systems, so question 4.9 on the Research Questionnaire asked the Webmasters to state how much their local Methodist church Website had cost to set up. Of the 14 local Methodist church Websites for which information was given, two had initial costs well over £1,000: one had used a commercial company for the initial design and had cost £1,670 to set up; one had been produced by a church Webmaster, but had included a cost of £1,000 for hardware and had cost £1,340 to set up. The other twelve local Methodist church Websites had cost between £0 and £80 to set up, with the mean set-up cost being £30. Two

¹² The software prices relate to software that was available for purchase on 20th April 2004, which was a few months after the Research Questionnaires were sent out, but means that the prices are of the order that the Webmasters might have paid if they had recently purchased the software.

Two other local Methodist church Websites had had their set-up costs absorbed by the Webmasters and another's set-up costs had been absorbed by the Methodist Circuit.

4.9.2 Website Ongoing Costs

Question 4.12 on the Research Questionnaire asked the Webmasters to state the ongoing costs of supporting their local Methodist church Website. Of the 7 local Methodist church Websites for which information was given, two reported ongoing annual costs of over £200. For the other 5 Websites, the mean ongoing cost was £25.50.

4.9.3 Conclusions about Financial Costs of Website Provision

For most of the local Methodist church Websites for which data was provided, the set-up costs and ongoing costs of Website provision were a few tens of pounds and so were small enough that any local Methodist church should be able to afford to spend the money. However, as some local churches may not have access to the hardware or design skills necessary to set up a Website, there is more evidence here of inequality in the provision of local Methodist church Websites within the Methodist Church because not all local Methodist churches would be able to emulate the minority of churches in the research sample that spent over £1,000 for set-up costs and spend a few hundred pounds each year for ongoing costs. Although it could be argued that financial costs should not be a barrier to setting up a local Methodist church Website where there is no need to buy in hardware or design expertise, financial costs could clearly be a barrier if hardware or design expertise is lacking.

4.10 Concluding Remarks about Website Provision

This chapter has built upon the examination in Part 1 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology. This has been done by beginning the examination of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches – considering whether there are significant inequalities in the provision of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church. No identifiable factors linked to the government-produced socio-economic data were found that seemed to be causing or preventing Websites being provided, but some interesting factors influencing Website provision were highlighted, it became clear that the pattern of Website provision for the local Methodist churches under consideration depended to a large extent upon the

personnel available and inequalities in the provision of local Methodist church Websites related to the age, gender and competence of Webmasters were found. It was noted that there have been varying degrees of enthusiasm about the need for, or deployment of, local church Websites and that the local context is a key driver in indicating the needs for Website deployment – with the available local resources, combined with the presence or absence of local enthusiasm for the provision of Websites, determining the ability of local churches to respond to those needs. In conjunction with Parts 3 and 4 of this thesis, which focus on the design and effectiveness of Websites respectively, these findings form part of the conclusions that will be drawn, in the context of the macro-missiological framework provided in Part 1 of this thesis, about the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites.

PART 3 – WEBSITE DESIGN QUALITY

Part 3 of this thesis, building upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by focusing on Website design. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

In the mid-1990s, Kellner (1996, 9) observed that “online services and the Internet are worth more to religious-minded individuals than a crisis intervention service or a neat way to receive a daily spiritual vitamin ... these services have also linked members of large and small churches in ways previously unimaginable”. Some churches, such as Holy Trinity Brompton – Appendix 4, Figures A4.5(1) to A4.5(5) – do have very good-looking Websites which have a very professional look and feel and which enable users to find out a great deal and to do a great deal, even employing techniques such as video presentations. Nevertheless, although Kellner’s assertion can be applied to some churches, it is still questionable whether many local churches, being organisations which rely a great deal on volunteers providing services for them, are able to produce Websites that can be rated among the best of all Websites. Many local Methodist churches do have Websites and some, such as Putney Methodist Church (2005) – Appendix 4, Figure A4.9 – do have a professional look and feel, but it is questionable whether all local Methodist church Webmasters would be able to design Websites to the same standard. This part of the thesis therefore evaluates whether there are significant inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. This work builds upon the work already done in considering Website provision in chapter 4, but its focus is on whether or not local Methodist churches, as a particular type of voluntary organisation, have produced Website designs comparable with ‘best practice’.

Assumptions Related to Website Design

In carrying out the research and evaluation related to Website design in this part of the thesis, two assumptions have been made that will now be explained:

1. **Missiological Significance of Website Design Quality.** The first assumption – that Website design quality has missiological significance – is related to the ways in which the experiences of local church Website users can affect their engagement with Websites and can therefore affect their engagement as subjects of the mission of the corresponding local churches. It is notable that, as new technologies are developed, society is transformed in ways that were perhaps unimaginable even to those who developed them. For example, when it was incorporated into mobile phones the SMS text message was not envisaged as being used except as a minor feature, yet ‘texting’ has become such a phenomenon that O2 Tariffs (2007) include 1000 free texts per month on some mobile phone contracts. The Internet has also transformed society and many people now access Websites for purposes as diverse as finding information, commerce, communication and finding marriage partners. As Frost and Hirsch (2003, 150) note: “The fact is that technologies have massive impacts on the way we perceive ourselves and our worlds, and how we pattern our societies ... *we shape our tools and they shape us*. ... They impact us deeply – much more than we are wont to believe.” In this context, it can be seen that the design quality of Websites is very important; it is relatively easy to produce a Website for a local church, but it is not as easy to design it in such a way that users will value it sufficiently enough to fully engage with it and to want to revisit it. The potential for poor design to negatively influence Website users is why, in studying the quality of Website promotion, Website design features, the layout and style of the Websites and the structural complexity of the Websites, this thesis assumes that poor Website design quality has significant detrimental missiological effects.
2. **Applying Commercial and Secular Standards to Church Websites.** The second assumption is that it is not problematic using the values and standards of Website design for churches that are used to assess commercial and secular Websites. In making this assumption, it is important to note that the Church has used a variety of strategies, techniques and technologies in common with wider society through the centuries, including the sharing of meals, the use of buildings, the use of music, the use of printed texts and the use of electronic technologies such as radio and television.

With all of these strategies for ‘marketing’ the Christian faith, what marks out the Church’s use as special is the content, rather than the medium itself: meals may be designated as ‘eucharistic’ or as being for fellowship; buildings contain religious artefacts and architectural nuances; music is used alongside religious words; texts such as the bible stimulate religious thought and interaction; radio and television have been used to transmit religious services and evangelistic messages. The suggestion of Zukowski (2002, 154) is that “a mission-based marketing approach requires that the parish or religious organization systematically study needs, wants, perceptions, preferences, and satisfaction of members or potential members that they are trying to reach.” In terms of the use of Websites and the Internet, this means that local churches would employ the technologies in ways that those who might use them will be comfortable with so that the effectiveness of these tools will be maximised. For those who might see the use of technology as ‘selling out’ to secularism, it is interesting to note the observation of Kirk (1999, 213-214) that: “The sacred is often understood as referring to a special realm of life associated with the spiritual, religion of God, or to special events or places. ... The secular, on the other hand, relates to worldly, ordinary things not associated with religion or life beyond the material. ... From a Christian perspective the distinction is false. ... Encounter with God is possible in any place.” That the places in which God can be encountered can include Websites might seem to be self-evident to those who produce Websites for churches, but the design of the content of such Websites need not necessarily have to conform to the rules for the design of commercial Websites. However, Wilson (2000, 113) argues that: “A successful business will go to any length to determine what its customer wants then produce that product and invest whatever is required to achieve the best quality possible. ... We need to understand how to reach out and communicate to the people in this the post-Christian information age ... We must be relevant ... Technology is a platform, custom-designed for us to bring the message of God’s truth and grace in an intelligent and relevant way.” This suggests that there are common strands between what businesses and churches are seeking to do, a suggestion reinforced when Wilson (2000, 148) says: “What business is the church in? I think we would have to say the information business. Data that delivers new information transforms itself into learning. ... That experience can now be duplicated on the Internet.” Thus, it can be seen that it is not problematic using the values and

standards that are used to assess commercial and ‘secular’ Websites for assessing the designs of church Websites; indeed, the suggestion of Babin (2002, 73) is that “the networking of computers, the globalization of brands, advertising and marketing ... are now shaping communication in our world ... we must acknowledge these cultural changes and by baptizing them make them our way of communicating the gospel. It is not a matter of endorsing commerce, but Christianizing it.”

Given the above assumptions, the design quality of the Websites of the 22 local Methodist churches under consideration will be evaluated by comparing the designs of these Websites to what is generally felt to be good design practice. This will be done by studying both the ways in which the local Methodist church Websites under consideration are promoted and the design quality of the Websites themselves in terms of the use of Web design features, the Website layout and style, and Website structural complexity.

Method of Assessing Website Design

In order to draw some conclusions about the design quality of local Methodist church Websites – or indeed of any Websites – it is necessary to have a method of assessing Website designs which is able to be applied consistently to all Websites. As a first step towards assessing the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration, a ‘Mirror’¹ copy of each of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration was downloaded,² in order that it would be possible for a stable version of each Website to be studied and assessed for its design quality. However, no method of assessing the design quality of the Websites proved to be readily available – which is perhaps not surprising as it has been suggested by Wootton (2003, 327) that: “Usability is often relegated to being an

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- 1 Websites can be changed at any moment by the Webmaster changing any of the files of which the Website comprises. ‘Mirror’ Websites were studied in order that a fixed ‘snapshot’ of the Website was assessed and to guarantee availability of the same version of the Website at a later date if necessary. Studying ‘Mirror’ Websites is also quicker as it avoids the delays inherent in calling up Webpages from the Internet. As some functionality, such as that to do with data entry and data-dependent processing, does not work correctly on a ‘Mirror’ Website, any questionable functionality had to be checked on the Internet in case the ‘Mirror’ did not accurately reproduce the behaviour of the actual Website.
 - 2 It is possible to download entire Websites using a type of program known as a ‘spider’. One such program which is available free is called ‘WinHTTrack Website Copier 3.23’ and it is available free from the Website <http://www.httrack.com> – HTTrack Website Copier (2003). This is the program that has been used to download the Websites assessed in this chapter. However, as there was no guarantee that this program would precisely emulate the functionality of the actual Website, any problem functionality detected in a downloaded Website was carefully checked – sometimes with reference to the code on the original Website.

afterthought in web projects. The design, branding, or marketing message of the site, as well as the whims of the client, can often make for a confusing experience for your users.” Local Methodist church Websites may be designed by one person, or by a ‘committee’ of people, but however they are designed there is potential for them to suffer from similar problems to those described by Wootton, with the potential result of local Methodist church Websites being less effective for mission in terms of their design than they might otherwise be. By their very nature, as entities with which users interact, Website designs contain a number of aesthetic attributes, so that any method of assessing Website designs will be subjective. Even from a fairly cursory study of Website design literature it soon becomes clear that different people have different views as to what makes a ‘good’ Website design, so that Lowe and Hall (1999, 526-529) list 21 “broad principles” for Website design, but Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 10-34) list 113 “major design guidelines” under 26 different headings for Home Pages alone – they do not even consider the design of the other Webpages which might make up a Website. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Pirouz & Weinman (1997, 87) suggest that, for Web design, “there are NO RIGHT ANSWERS ... all judgments are based on individual taste and are purely subjective. However, there are degrees of good and bad, to which the masses seem to be in agreement.” The nature of this thesis means that what needs to be assessed is the Webmasters’ grasp of Website design principles, rather than their in-depth knowledge of the mass of suggestions about detailed design. Therefore, what was needed was a relatively simple way of comparing the designs of potentially diverse local Methodist church Websites so as to assess whether they have a ‘good’ design. In order to facilitate this, the method of assessing Website designs in this part of the thesis considers four aspects of Website design, namely:

- 1) the extent of Website promotion – chapter 5;
- 2) the use of Website design features – chapter 6;
- 3) the layout and style of the Websites – chapter 7;
- 4) the structural complexity of the Websites – chapter 8.

In the rest of this part of the thesis, therefore, each of these four aspects of Website design will be the basis of a detailed assessment of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration compared to the best Website design practice; conclusions will thus be drawn about any inequalities with respect to each aspect of local Methodist church Website design

quality which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

Part 4 of this thesis will then consider whether there are significant inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. This will be done by first considering the effectiveness of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration in terms of supporting the mission of these churches and then considering whether the feedback that is received by Webmasters about their local church Websites is used effectively.

CHAPTER 5 – WEBSITE PROMOTION

Building upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, this chapter continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This chapter, which focuses on Website promotion, is the first of four chapters which consider whether there are significant inequalities with respect to the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the following chapters in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

It has become clear, as Websites have developed, that Website users are essentially fickle and will only use a particular Website if it serves their needs and suits their aesthetic tastes. Indeed, Nielsen (2000, 9) suggests that: “The Web is the ultimate consumer-empowering environment. He or she who clicks the mouse gets to decide *everything*. It is so easy to go elsewhere; all the competitors in the world are but a mouseclick away.” Such consumer choice means that simply producing a Website does not guarantee that it will be used, which means that if the designers of local Methodist church Websites are to be able to justify the amount of time and money spent on producing and supporting their Websites, then they must surely need to employ strategies in order to attempt to ensure that people are able not only able to find their Websites in the first place, but also then have a desire to return to use them over and over again. In thinking about people finding Websites in the first place, Pirouz & Weinman (1997, 215) asked: “What if you built the ultimate web site and no one came?” Their answer was that “visibility is key”, so whatever strategies Webmasters might employ to attract and retain users in terms of Website design, they also need to ensure that their Websites can actually be found by these users in the first place. With the absence of a telephone-directory style of Website index, and the number of available Websites in existence being counted in millions, the ways in which a Website is promoted to users are clearly very

important.

The promotion of Websites is multi-faceted, but the main factors that should contribute to a Website's use by those who are not familiar with it are:

- 1) The Domain Name;
- 2) Searching, i.e. the Website's accessibility through Internet Search Engines;
- 3) Literature Promotion – such as in newsletters, letter headings and notice-boards;
- 4) Browser Compatibility.

The way in which these elements of Website promotion are used for the local Methodist church Websites under consideration will now be investigated and conclusions will be drawn about any inequalities with respect to the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

5.1 *Domain Name*

One of the most important factors in the promotion of Websites is the Domain Name. A Domain Name normally has the format `http://<prefix><site-name><suffix>`.³ Gilmour (2003, 196-197) made a number of comments, suggestions and questions about Domain Names, of which the following are most pertinent to local Methodist church Websites:

Keep names short

A well chosen domain name should be short and easy to remember.

Make names relevant

Does your domain name relate directly to your business name, brand, product or services?

Get the right suffix

If your company is located in the UK, ideally you should register a .co.uk domain name.

Consider search habits

Users often search by product or service, not business name.

Choose a category

Additional categories often exist under a particular suffix.

Allow for punctuation

3 See the Glossary of Computing Terms and Abbreviations for more details about Domain Names.

No punctuation is allowed in domain names except a hyphen ... hyphenated versions of domain names are generally more Search Engine friendly.

Use lower case

Domains are always in lower case ... use lower case names when printing your domain address on stationery.

Don't forget numbers

Domain names are usually allowed to contain numbers, and a single name may contain letters or numbers.

These suggestions will be borne in mind as each of the three elements of the Domain Name – prefix, suffix and site name – is now examined in turn.

The Prefix

It is possible for the <prefix> to be anything alpha-numeric, though most still seem to be 'www' (for World Wide Web) and this is likely to be the easiest form of <prefix> for people to remember. For local Methodist church Websites, it would thus be sensible for <prefix> to be 'www'.

The Suffix

The <suffix> was originally intended to be related to the nature of the organisation and its country of origin ('.org.uk' being for UK non-commercial organisations, rather than '.co.uk' which is for UK companies), though Websites for the United States of America always tended to omit the country and instead just to use '.com' or '.org'. It is also notable that the <suffix> is not necessarily an indicator of the bona-fides of a company or organisation; Levy (2001, 8) notes that these "at one time used to mean something before the web went wild and sold names to less than creditable companies!" More and more organisations – especially those with global aspirations – tend to omit the country, so that Tesco, for example, uses <http://www.tesco.com> for its UK-based internet shopping Website, rather than <http://www.tesco.co.uk>. Nevertheless, some organisations that operate internationally, such as Amazon, still use a number of different forms of <suffix> to distinguish between Websites for different countries or in different languages and Nielsen and Tahir (2002) suggest that "a country-specific domain is appropriate either for localized sites ... or for sites that are differentiated because they are located in that country." Although Levy (2001, 8) notes that ".org or .net extensions ... are secondary extensions to .com or .co.uk and thought of as amateurish or less used in a professional context", there is, however, still a good deal of sense in having a <suffix> that reflects the commercial or non-commercial ethos of Websites – as

well as the fact that a .co.uk or .com <suffix> may be more expensive to obtain – so that, for local Methodist church Websites, it would thus be sensible for <suffix> to be ‘.org.uk’.

The Site Name

The <site-name> is what lies between the <prefix> and the <suffix> and is the part of the Domain Name that is most specific to the organisation concerned. It might be tempting for Webmasters to use an abbreviated <site-name> on the assumption that this will be easier to remember, but an abbreviated <site-name> is less likely to be found by a Search Engine and so might result in a Website being less useful for a local Methodist church’s mission in terms of helping new users who do not know the Website address to locate the Website through a Search Engine. Furthermore, as Browsers have, for some time, had the facility to store the addresses of Home Pages and other Webpages as Bookmarks, there is not as great a need to abbreviate the <site-name> as there once was. It might also be tempting for Webmasters to take advantage of the free Webspace offered by some ISPs, but this can result in a Domain Name in which the <site-name> incorporates the name of the ISP, which will not only result in a Domain Name that is too long and difficult to remember (e.g. <http://www.any-methodist-church.freemove.co.uk>), but will also result in a confusing and amateurish identity for the Website; Webmasters would be wise to ensure that <site-name> only relates to the name of the church itself. In addition, given that some people will try to memorise Website addresses, or will need to write them down, Webmasters would be wise to limit <site-name> to 30 characters. Finally, to help when searching for the Website, it would be sensible for the <site-name> to include the word ‘church’ and, for local Methodist church Websites, the word ‘Methodist’ and for the different elements of the <site-name> to be punctuated by hyphens in order to aid Search Engines in finding the Website in response to words typed in by users.

Design Principles for Domain Names

A local Methodist church Domain Name would thus take the form <http://www.<site-name>.org.uk>, where <site-name> was up to 30 characters in length, the fullest version of the church’s name with the words separated by hyphens and included the word ‘church’. Table 5.1 (overleaf) shows the design principles for Domain Names that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and whether the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 5.1

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i><prefix> is 'www.'</i>	22 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<i><site-name> relates to the church name</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i><site-name> is not abbreviated</i>	19 (86.4%)	3 (13.6%)
<i>'church' mentioned in <site-name></i>	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)
<i><site-name> comprises 30 or fewer characters</i>	22 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<i><site-name> contains hyphens</i>	0 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
<i><suffix> is '.org.uk'</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Domain Names

The Domain Names adopted by Webmasters for the local Methodist Churches under consideration do suggest that the Webmasters have a degree of understanding of the importance of choosing appropriate Domain Names. In particular, the <prefix> was always 'www.', the <suffix> was usually '.org.uk' and the <site-name> generally related to the church name.

However, the Domain Names chosen for the Websites are evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites because there are some clear discrepancies in the way in which <site-name> and <suffix> are used by the Webmasters. In particular:

- The <site-name> of only 6 (27.3%) of the local Methodist church Websites included the word 'church';⁴
- The <site-name> related in some way to the church name for 17 (77.3%) of the local Methodist church Websites, but 3 of these 17 sites had abbreviations in the form of initials;
- None of the churches (0%) had a <site-name> containing hyphens – although the 3 Websites (13.6%) with less than ideal abbreviated <site-name> components would presumably not have been felt by Webmasters to have needed hyphens.

A further problem was that although 17 of the Domain Names (77.3%) had a <suffix> that

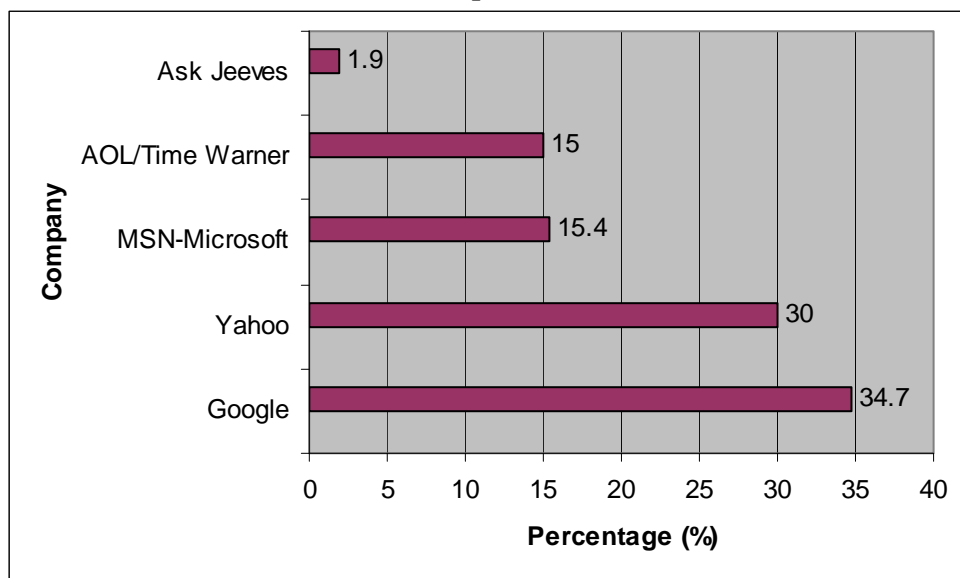
⁴ 5 of the Websites (22.7%) used the word 'Methodist' without 'church' and 4 of the Websites (18.2%) were Circuit Websites, for which 'church' might not be appropriate for the <site-name>.

was ‘.org.uk’, the other 5 Domain Names (a significant minority of 23.7%) used others, such as ‘.com’, ‘.co.uk’ or a <suffix> that related to the ISP (e.g. ‘.faithweb.com’).

5.2 *Searching*

Another important element in the promotion of Websites is the ease with which they can be found using one of the World Wide Web’s Search Engines. According to Rushe (2004) the share of Web searches in February 2004 was as shown in Graph 5.1. This suggests that the ease of finding the local Methodist church Websites under consideration should be investigated when searching with Google, Yahoo, MSN-Microsoft, AOL/Time Warner and Ask Jeeves. However, the statistics shown in Graph 5.1 (overleaf) are simply reporting usage of particular Search Engines and, as it is actually the case that some Search Engines simply use other Search Engines to conduct their own searches, what is important to consider in the context of searching for local Methodist church Websites is the factors contributing to the return of results from the Internet Search Engines which are used – namely the use of keywords and of Search Engine algorithms. This will be done in the following paragraphs.

Graph 5.1



Share of Web Searches, February 2004

Keywords

One thing that affects the chances of a Webpage being found by a Search Engine is the embedding of Keywords in the Source Code of the Webpage itself; Kerr (1999, 21) notes that

“their position on the page will affect the score applied by the Search Engine when ranking the results in order of relevance”. NETVisibility (2004a) notes that: “Alta Vista is example of a full-text Search Engine, meaning that it will read all text that appears on your page. The use of keywords in the title and in the first lines of text is critical to getting well ranked on AltaVista. ... Alta Vista will also consider the use of keyword phrases in the Meta Tags, Comments, and Headers.” However, keywords are not important for all Search Engines. NETVisibility (2004b) suggests that “Google spiders the web to maintain its index, with emphasis on content and link popularity. One factor that determines your rank on Google is the number of links that point to your site, the quality (popularity) of the sites that link to your site, the text in and around the links that point to your site, and who you link to. Google’s web crawler only views the visible text on your page. The meta description and keywords have little influence on Google’s rankings.” This is notable because TOTALCHOICE™ HOSTING (2004) suggests that: “The importance of Google cannot be overstated. Given the integration among the major portals and Search Engines, Google performs a substantial portion of all searches conducted on the Internet. A fair estimation of Google’s contribution to a properly optimized site is in the 85% range (i.e. 85% of a site’s traffic arising from an Internet search will originate from Google).” In addition, NETVisibility (2004c) asserts that: “The Lycos web crawler does not weigh META tags heavily. Indexing is based on an algorithm that takes a look at components of the URL name, Meta title, text body headings and subheadings, how frequently words appear, where these words appear in relationship to one another, as well as a document abstract (based on full body text). Any web page that does not have a minimum of 75 words is not indexed but Frames are supported. Lycos does not care about case sensitivity. ... The thing to remember is that you must have suitable URL content and be engineered to beat your competition within Lycos before you register your pages. Just registering with Lycos does not assure a suitable ranking.” As different strategies are to be required for the different Search Engines – including registering, the use of Keywords and the use of Hyperlinks – it was necessary for the purposes of this research both to check search results and to check the use of Keywords.

For the purposes of this research, it was not be possible to assess the many Webpages which make up the 22 Websites under investigation for the use of Keywords. However, as a way of determining whether particular Keywords would result in a particular local Methodist church’s Home Page being found, it was possible to look at each Home Page and to assess

whether the keywords which are assumed to be important (i.e. the name of the church and the local area) appear in the relevant fields in the Source Code for each Website's Home Page.⁵ There are particular ways in which Search Engines use Keywords and, noting the advice of Kerr (1999, 23), these Keywords would need to appear in the following fields⁶ in order to make an impact on the Search Engines' results:

- **First paragraph of text**
- **Heading – '<head>'**
- **TITLE – '<title>'**
- **URL**
- **Frequency**
- **ALT – '<alt>'**
- **COMMENTS – '<!' ... '>'**
- **META – '<meta>'**

However, an important note with respect to Lycos comes from NETVisibility (2004c): "any web page that does not have a minimum of 75 words is not indexed." In addition, the URL can be ignored as it is assessed as part of the Domain Name.

Design Principles for Keywords

Taking into account the above information about Keywords, Table 5.2 (overleaf) shows the design principles for Keywords that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them.

Table 5.2 is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because there is a clear difference in the way that some of the Webmasters use Keywords –

⁵ For a detailed description of the way in which Search Engines may treat the keywords in particular fields of the Source Code of a Website, see Kerr (1999, 24-28).

⁶ Kerr (1999, 24-28) describes how to place keywords so that a Search Engine will increase its relevance rating for a Website by finding them: a) keywords are assumed to be contained within the first 50 or 100 words of text; b) words placed within '<head>' fields are assumed to be important; c) words and phrases placed within the TITLE field are assumed to be important (especially the first few); d) words which appear in the URL are assumed to have higher importance; e) the more often a word appears, the more important it is assumed to be, but text does begin to lose its meaning if words are repeated often; f) ALT statements relate to images as an aid for the visually impaired and those without graphics, but if they use keywords, the rating of the keywords will increase; g) the COMMENT field is another opportunity to insert keywords; h) the META field can include 'name' and 'description' data and it is checked by some Search Engines, though they may limit their search to the first 150 words and may penalise repetition.

as will now be explained.

Table 5.2

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>At least 75 words of text are present</i>	10 (45.5%)	12 (54.5%)
<i>Area and church name in first 50 text words</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i>Area and church name in <head> fields</i>	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)
<i>Area and church name in TITLE fields</i>	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.7%)
<i>Area and church name in ALT fields</i>	0 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
<i>Area and church name in COMMENT fields</i>	0 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
<i>Area and church name in META fields</i>	8 (36.7%)	14 (63.6%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Keywords

What is striking about the conformity to design principles for Keywords shown in Table 5.2 is that 100% of the Home Pages that were examined did not have the area and church name in ALT or COMMENT fields in the Source Code of their Home Pages and that only 36.7% of the Home Pages had the area and church name in the META fields – though two more churches (9.1%) had some of this information in the META fields. This means that that there could theoretically be an improvement in the way that all of the Webpages are found by certain Search Engines, simply by making changes to include the area and church name in ALT or COMMENT fields, along with further improvement for the 63.3% of Websites whose Home Pages did not have both the area and church name in the META fields of the Source Code. However, it is likely that the reason for the absence of the area and church name in the ALT, COMMENT and META fields is due to the fact that the Website design software being used does not easily allow for this information to be included and, given that the majority of the Webmasters did not claim to have better than average Website design skills, it would perhaps be too much to expect the Webmasters to make manual additions to the Source Code of their Homepages. Furthermore, the benefit of making these changes is by no means clear, as not all Search Engines take notice of the ALT, COMMENT and META fields. Given that all Website design software has facilities for text to appear on Webpages, it is relatively easy for Webmasters to get the textual content of their Websites' Home Pages into

a form that will help their Website to rise in the Search Engine rankings. However, given that only 45.5% of the Home Pages had 75 or more words of text, there is a clear need for the majority of Webmasters to ensure that sufficient text is present on the Home Page. Also, as only 77.3% of the Home Pages had the church name and area in the first 50 words, there is also a need for a number of Webmasters to ensure that the text that is placed on the Home Page includes the church name and area. It was also notable that the one Webpage that used Macromedia Flash® on the Home Page made the mistake of putting most of the textual content into the Flash® part of the Webpage, where Search Engines would not detect it – this is something that must be avoided if Webpages are to be high in Search Engine rankings.

It was also notable that many Websites had the required information in the “<head>” and TITLE fields – again presumably because many Website design programs easily allow for this to be done without the Webmaster having to resort to editing the Source Code. Thus, 72.7% of the Home Pages had both the area and church name in the “<head>” field – with a further 22.7% having part of the information present – and 63.6% of the Home Pages had both the area and church name in the TITLE field – with a further 22.7% having part of the information present. These findings suggest that it is intuitive to many of the Webmasters that the title of the Home Page should relate to the area and name of the church.

Search Engine Algorithms

Given the comments made about the different uses of Keywords made by Search Engines, and in order to assess how the Websites under consideration feature in the results from Search Engines, an attempt was made on 15th June 2004 to locate each Website using UK versions of three popular Search Engines chosen because they have different search algorithms:

AltaVista (2004), Google (2004) and Lycos (2004). On the assumption that some people may not know the name of their local Methodist church, or that they might be looking for any church within the local area, three searches were carried out for each Website using the church’s name (as it appears on the Website) and the local area: 1) with the area name and the word ‘church’ with ‘+’ marks so as to match both components [`+<area> +church`]; 2) with the church’s name and the area so as to match any components of the name [`<church-name> <area>`]; 3) with the church’s name in quotation marks so as to match the exact name

[“<church-name>”].⁷ Ideally, the relevant local Methodist church Website should appear at the top of the list of results from the Search Engines, but it would be acceptable if it was visible on the first page of results, less helpful if it was on one of the first 5 pages and of little help at all after that because users would probably give up looking through the results, so the criterion for success is that the Website should be found on the first 5 pages of search results (i.e. should be in the first 50 results returned).

Table 5.3 shows the results of the searches that were carried out and the results for the 22 Websites under consideration:

Table 5.3

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Search [+area +church] successful (AltaVista)</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i>Search [+area +church] successful (Google)</i>	15 (68.2%)	7 (31.8%)
<i>Search [+area +church] successful (Lycos)</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i>Search for [church-name area] successful (AltaVista)</i>	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)
<i>Search for [church-name area] successful (Google)</i>	19 (86.4%)	3 (13.6%)
<i>Search for [church-name area] successful (Lycos)</i>	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
<i>Search for [church-name] successful (AltaVista)</i>	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
<i>Search for [church-name] successful (Google)</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i>Search for [church-name] successful (Lycos)</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Searching

The figures in Table 5.3 are evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because some Webpages are clearly appearing higher in the lists of results and are therefore, in some way, better designed for this. Some notable findings of the assessment of searching were as follows:

- In the tests of Search Engines, 49.5% of the searches (98 out of 198) resulted in the

⁷ The square brackets in the examples denote the search field, so that what appears between them is what would be entered into the search field. Double quotation marks may enclose more than one word, such as “Methodist Church” or “North Harrow” in order that the text including spaces is matched as entered.

target local Methodist church Website being returned as the first result, with a further 21.7% of the searches (43 out of 198) resulting in the target local Methodist church Website being displayed on the first page of results. Therefore, in 71.2% of the searches the relevant local church Website would appear somewhere on the first Webpage;

- The number of times that a Website was returned as the first result was always greater, and sometimes significantly greater, with AltaVista and Lycos than with Google; this result is of concern, given that Google was identified in Graph 5.1 (page 99) as having the largest share of web searches, and suggests that Webmasters need to consider how to make their Websites move higher in the Google search results;
- The success of the searches depended to some extent on the names of the churches and the areas in which they were located. Those churches whose Websites were not found by the 5th page of results included some which were located in areas with a large number of churches (e.g. Harpenden) and some with very common names (e.g. “St. Mark’s”). Conversely, churches located in relatively small communities (e.g. Digswell Village) or with distinctive names (e.g. “St. Hugh and St. John’s”), were generally to be found at, or towards, the top of the first page of results.

The results of the searching are, however, worth further study, as shown by Table 5.4:

Table 5.4

Search Engine	[+area +church]			[church-name area]			[church-name]		
	AltaVista	Google	Lycos	AltaVista	Google	Lycos	AltaVista	Google	Lycos
1st Result	8	5	8	17	6	17	15	6	16
Page 1	6	5	8	2	8	1	3	9	1
Page 2	2	2	1	1	3			1	
Page 3	1	3						1	
Page 4									
Page 5					2				
No find	5	7	5	2	3	4	4	5	5

Search-Engine Performance

The findings recorded in Table 5.4 also suggest that it is rarely worth looking beyond the 3rd

Webpage of results when using a Search Engine because the chances are that a Website that has not been found by the third page of the results might not be found at all, or might need the user to search a large number of Webpages of results. If users adopt this idea, then those churches whose Websites were not found by the 3rd results Webpage should definitely try to improve the promotion of their Websites in lists of search results returned by Search Engines.

5.3 *Literature Promotion*

If a local Methodist church Website is to be effective for mission, then the address of the Website should be able to be found very easily by anybody who needs it, so another important element in the promotion of Websites is the use of literature. This does not just mean promoting the Website on the internet because Kerr (1999, 70) urges his readers to remember that: “Print still Matters! ... Add the URL and email to all your printed materials: stationery, printed advertising, invoices, orders, internal memos, business cards, brochures, etc.” Indeed, if a Website is integral to the mission of a local Methodist church, then everybody who has some form of church publicity should know from that publicity how to access the church’s Website. Each local Methodist church was therefore asked to answer questions on the Research Questionnaire about Website publicity in order that it could be determined how widely the church’s Website was being promoted in the church’s literature.

Design Principles for Literature Promotion

Table 5.5 (overleaf) shows the design principles for literature promotion that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

These findings suggest that there are inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because, although the study of literature promotion suggests that churches are making some attempts to promote their Websites, there are clear discrepancies in the ways in which different Websites are promoted with literature.

Table 5.5

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Church's headed paper promotes Website</i>	9 (40.1%)	13 (59.9%)
<i>Church's newsletter/magazine promotes Website</i>	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)
<i>Church internal notice-boards promote Website</i>	12 (54.5%)	10 (45.5%)
<i>Church external notice-boards promote Website</i>	9 (40.1%)	13 (59.9%)
<i>Minister's business card promotes Website</i>	1 (4.5%)	21 (95.5%)
<i>Other opportunities are used to promote Website</i>	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Literature Promotion

Some notable findings of the assessment of literature promotion were as follows:

- The most frequently-used means of promoting Websites (90.9%) was through the churches' own newsletters or magazines;
- Ways of promoting local Methodist church Websites to a wider audience which were not used as often included internal notice-boards (54.5%), external notice-boards (40.1%), church headed paper (40.1%) and the minister's business cards (4.5%);
- The 'other' opportunities of promoting the local Methodist church Websites which were used by more than 1 of the 18 (81.8%) of the churches under consideration included: other Websites (17 churches, 77.3%); preaching plans (4 churches, 18.2%); village/parish newsletters (2 churches, 9.1%);
- Emailing people, Search Engines, local newspapers, service notice sheets and postcards were all cited by 1 church (4.5%).
- Given the means of Website promotion that were employed, it is clear that some attempts being made to publicise the Websites beyond the churches' traditional community links.

5.4 Browser Compatibility

The final important element in the promotion of Websites is Browser compatibility. The role of the Browser is so important in reproducing Webpages that Pirouz & Weinman (1997) began their book on Website design by devoting a whole chapter to Browsers, in which they pointed out a number of inconsistencies between the Netscape® and Microsoft® Internet

Explorer® Browsers that could affect the presentation of Webpages – such as positioning, spacing, text size and the default size of the viewing area. Although a Browser is required to view Webpages, it is thus clear that not all Webpages contain Source Code that will work with every Browser. For example, there was a time when users of the Netscape® Browser on computers running the Windows® 98 operating system who were trying to access the Argos Website – Argos (2003a) – would find that the Argos Website detected this and, because the Argos Website would not work properly using the Netscape® Browser, a different page entirely – Argos (2003b) – was actually displayed informing users of the problem and suggesting alternatives (Appendix 4, Figure A4.3). There have also been problems accessing some Websites with a Browser running on an Apple® computer running the MacOS® operating system. It is therefore important to check whether the local Methodist church Websites are accessible with different Browsers on computers running different Operating Systems. Although many Webmasters may not have access to more than one computer – with Apple® computers being less widespread than PCs running Microsoft® Windows® – in order to facilitate checks of their Websites’ functionality with different Browsers, it might be wise for local Methodist church Webmasters to find ways of testing their Websites with different operating systems and to adopt the practice suggested by Nielsen (2000, 36): “keep a collection of all the major versions of all the major browsers ... keep checking your pages in the old browser for about two years to make sure that they work reasonably well ... you will invariably get bug reports from users ... have a wide collection of browsers in hand in order to replicate the problem.”

Design Principles for Browser Compatibility

Table 5.6 (overleaf) shows the design principles for Browser Compatibility that were felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt – namely that local Methodist church Websites should be able to be displayed with the Internet Explorer®, Netscape® and Opera® Browsers⁸ on computers running the Microsoft® Windows® Operating System and with the Internet Explorer® Browser on an Apple® computer running the MacOS®

⁸ This research uses version 6.0 of the Microsoft® Internet Explorer Browser, version 7.01 of the Netscape® Browser and version 7.03 of the Opera Browser. Note, however, that the availability and popularity of Browsers changes so that, by January 2008, TheCounter.com (2008) reported the most-used Browsers as: Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 (42%); Microsoft Internet Explorer 7.0 (37%); FireFox (14%); Safari (3%).

Operating System⁹ – and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them.

The findings of the assessment of Browser compatibility are evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because of the discrepancies in Browser compatibility, which could be due to the software being used to generate the Source Code being incompatible with all of the Browsers, or the Browsers not being fully compliant with the relevant standards (60% of the Source Code was generated with Microsoft® FrontPage® 4.0, 20% with Microsoft® Word® 9 and 20% with Serif® PagePlus 7.0), or the Webmasters failing to design or test their Websites properly.

Table 5.6

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Compatibility with Windows® and Internet Explorer®</i>	15 (68.18%)	7 (31.82%)
<i>Compatibility with Windows® and Netscape®</i>	8 (36.36%)	14 (64.64%)
<i>Compatibility with Windows® and Opera</i>	10 (45.45%)	12 (54.55%)
<i>Compatibility with MacOS® Browser</i>	-	-

Conformity to Design Principles for Browser Compatibility

Some notable findings of the assessment of Browser compatibility were as follows:

- Although 68% of the Websites worked with Windows® and Microsoft® Internet Explorer®, the problems which were encountered were: Windows opening up too small; page width reduction causing errors (e.g. missing parts of page headers, bad text wraps on bullet points); tables being coloured in wrongly (white bars, rather than continuous blocks of colour); Applets crashing; font size problems; items not lining up properly.

⁹ Due to the researcher not having an Apple® Mac® computer, it was not possible to assess whether the Websites were compatible with a MacOS® Browser. Many local church Webmasters will have a similar problem, as they will only have access to a computer with the Microsoft® Windows® Operating System, or to a computer with MacOS®, but not both. If Webmasters own an Apple® computer, though, they should be able not only to test their Websites with a MacOS® Browser, but also to install software that emulates Microsoft® Windows® (e.g. 'SoftPC') in order to test their Websites with the Microsoft® Internet Explorer, Netscape® and Opera Browsers running in a Microsoft® Windows® environment, though such a system may, of course, introduce errors into the display of Webpages.

- Although 36% of the Websites worked with Windows® and Netscape®, the problems which were encountered were: incorrect column spacing; failure to remember used Hyperlinks and turn them from blue to purple when used; loss of background colouring on scrolling banners; bad alignment and wrapping of bullet points; bad positioning of text; empty boxes; incorrect font sizing; incorrect font changes; bad table alignment; Applet crashes; border colour problems on Flash® presentations; incorrect line widths; bad menu button alignment; poor alignment of slide show controls; bad line spacing of lists and bullet points; incorrect left-justification of centred pictures; over-writing of text; overlaying of boxes; partial menu display.
- Although 45% of the Websites worked with Windows® and Opera, the problems which were encountered were: incorrect column spacing; windows opening at the bottom of the page and being partly invisible; part-display of header text (bottom missing); poor table column formatting; failure to always remember used Hyperlinks and turn them from blue to purple when used; display of an empty box in a menu; bad text wraps on bullet points; bad paragraph spacing; failure to display pictures; bad table spacing; change of fonts; bad table alignment; failure to line up a coloured border with the corresponding background colour block; bad display of pictures (alignment, size, position, moving position when cursor over them); Applet crashes; border colour problems on Flash® presentations; incorrect line widths; bad alignment of menu buttons; table borders that were not visible in other Browsers; bad text spacing; bad spacing on bullet points; missing vertical and horizontal lines in tables.
- As it was not possible to view the local Methodist church Websites under consideration with a computer running MacOS®, no conclusions could be drawn as to how well the Websites would work with this operating system.

These findings suggest that Webmasters are able to ensure better compatibility with Windows® and Internet Explorer® than with other Browsers; perhaps this is not surprising as statistics from TheCounter.com (2004)¹⁰ in Table 5.7 (overleaf) show that at least 94% of Website hits are with Microsoft® Internet Explorer®, so it was perhaps more likely that Webmasters would test their Webpages with Microsoft® Internet Explorer®.

¹⁰ The data shows which Browsers were used to access Websites that were monitored by TheCounter.com (2004).

Table 5.7

<i>Browser</i>	<i>Hits</i>
<i>Microsoft Internet Explorer v6</i>	232513328 (75%)
<i>Microsoft Internet Explorer v5</i>	56252056 (18%)
<i>Unknown</i>	4715245 (2%)
<i>Netscape 5</i>	3063647 (1%)
<i>Mozilla</i>	2684189 (1%)
<i>Netscape Compatible</i>	2070942 (1%)
<i>Opera</i>	1708631 (1%)
<i>Microsoft Internet Explorer v4</i>	1230494 (0%)
<i>Other</i>	(1%)

Browsers used to access TheCounter.com in February 2004

Table 5.7 does not, however, explain why so many problems were found with Website display using Microsoft® Internet Explorer®, but it could be that the Webmasters did not have sufficient skills to fix the problems that they encounter, or that they did not test their Webpages sufficiently to detect certain problems (e.g. they may not have tested on other computers or with different screen settings).

There could be a number of other reasons for the greater compatibility with Microsoft® Internet Explorer®, including: 1) the set of Webpages the Webmaster tested may have corresponded well to the ones examined by this research; 2) the Webmasters may not have had the experience to ensure that their Websites were compatible with particular Browsers; 3) the Website design software used may not have been compatible with particular Browsers. Table 5.8 (overleaf) presents data that could possibly help to see any such significant factors, but the data is inconclusive. Furthermore, none of the data gathered explains why more Websites were compatible with the Opera® Browser than with Netscape, though because the usage of both is of the same order of magnitude, the discrepancy is perhaps not significant.

Table 5.8

Webmaster Expertise	Webmaster Experience (Years)	Website Design Software	Browser Compatibility		
			Microsoft Internet Explorer®	Netscape®	Opera®
Expert	4	Dreamweaver v5	No	No	No
Advanced	9	Dreamweaver v6	Yes	No	Yes
Advanced	8	HTML editor / javascript	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advanced	8	HTML editor / javascript	No	No	No
Advanced	7	Frontpage 2003	Yes	No	No
Advanced	4	--	Yes	No	No
Advanced	0	Serif Page Plus v8	Yes	Yes	Yes
Average	6	Frontpage 2002	No	No	No
Average	6	Frontpage 2003	Yes	Yes	No
Average	6	Frontpage 2003	Yes	Yes	Yes
Average	6	Frontpage 2003	Yes	Yes	Yes
Average	5	Frontpage	No	No	No
Average	4	Namo Webeditor v5.5	Yes	Yes	Yes
Average	4	Frontpage 2002	Yes	No	Yes
Average	2	Word 97	Yes	No	No
Average	0	Dreamweaver v3	Yes	Yes	No
Basic	4	Frontpage v10	No	No	No
Basic	3	Frontpage Express	Yes	No	Yes
Basic	3	Frontpage 2002	No	No	Yes
Basic	2	Dreamweaver MX	Yes	No	No
Basic	2	Serif Webplus v8.0	Yes	No	No
Beginner	0	--	No	Yes	Yes

Significant Factors for Browser Compatibility

5.5 Concluding Remarks about Website Promotion

This chapter has built upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, continuing the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This has been done, in this first of four chapters in Part 3 of this thesis, by considering whether there are significant inequalities in the Website promotion aspects of the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church.

In considering Website promotion, a number of differences in the strategies for the local

Methodist church Websites under consideration were highlighted, revealing a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the other chapters in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – these findings form part of the conclusions that will be drawn, in the context of the macro-missiological framework provided in Part 1 of this thesis, about the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites.

CHAPTER 6 – USE OF WEB DESIGN FEATURES

Building upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, this chapter continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This chapter, which focuses on the use of Web design features, is the second of four chapters which consider whether there are significant inequalities with respect to the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the remaining chapters in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

The means of Website promotion explored in chapter 5, if adopted, should ensure that those who are searching for a local Methodist church Website will have the best possible chance of finding and displaying the relevant Website. However, effective Website promotion is not, by itself, sufficient to guarantee that a Website will be an effective tool for mission; an effective Website design is also essential in order that those who find the Website will feel that they have a good experience of using it and will then feel that it is worth returning to. Thus, Kerr (1999, 11-12) suggests that “promoting a Web site ... includes ensuring that an initial visit becomes a regular event ... by ensuring that the content and design of the site is such that it becomes an essential part of the information resource collection of the desired visitor.” Nevertheless, it is by no means guaranteed that a Website will be designed with characteristics that will satisfy users; Gates (1996, 143) notes that “the quality of Web publishing is uneven, as you’d expect in a medium in which anybody can publish and nobody can easily charge anything for their work”. Therefore, in order to draw conclusions about any inequalities with respect to the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design, this chapter and the other remaining chapters in this part of the thesis – chapters 7 and 8 – will explore different aspects of Website design and, in

particular, whether the local church Websites under consideration are comparable with ‘best practice’.

A key aspect of Website design is the way in which the available web design features are used. Austin (2003, 10) suggests that “some of the most effective and eye-catching sites on the Web work well by sharing something of real value”, but providing real value in Website design involves more than simply providing similar information to that which is available in any contemporary library. Websites can add value to the range of resources that is available in traditional libraries by bringing together many of the different features of various media, such as printed text, graphics and ‘movies’, and making these easily accessible whilst, at the same time, providing a degree of inter-relation and interaction that cannot be provided in the same way when using the resources that were traditionally available in libraries before the advent of the Internet and Websites.

As Websites can present a unique and immensely flexible medium for communication to their users, Webmasters need to ensure that they make the most of this medium by making the best-possible use of the web design features available to them. Thus, a lot of what users perceive as being useful about Webpages is likely to be related to the use of the web design features which are available to Webmasters. It is therefore important, at this point, to consider the web design features that are available to Webmasters when designing Websites and to determine how well these features have been used in the local church Websites under consideration. In doing so, it must be noted that the number of web design features available to Webmasters has increased over time, and has continued to increase as this thesis has been written, so that this study will only consider the features that were available to Webmasters early in 2004 when the local Methodist church Websites under consideration were downloaded and the designs were assessed.

6.1 *Text Display*

Despite the availability of a number of web design features, it is still the case that much of what is contained on Webpages consists of textual information. It is, then, perhaps not surprising that Austin (2003, 43) suggests that “words can make or break a website” and that a great deal of advice is available as to how to display text on Webpages. Some of the important design considerations for text display are: the flexibility of Webpages with respect

to fonts; the layout of the text; the content of the text itself; the relatively small area that is available in the Browser window for display purposes; the fact that text which is not on display needs to be accessed by scrolling or by displaying a new Webpage; and the fact that delays are introduced if the user needs to move from one particular screen of information to another one. The first three of these aspects of text display – fonts, tables and text content – will now be considered; the others will be considered in the study of aesthetics in Chapter 7.

Fonts

As with printed text, it is possible to use a wide variety of fonts on Webpages. Figure 6.1 shows just a small selection of fonts that were available on the researcher's PC with Microsoft® Windows® XP and Microsoft® Office Word 2003.

Figure 6.1

Arial 12pt	Luci da Consol e 12pt
Bookman Old Style 12pt	Magneto 12pt
Comic Sans MS 12pt	Times New Roman 12pt
Courier New 12pt	Verdana 12pt
Impact 12pt	<i>V ivaldi 12 pt</i>

Font Samples from Microsoft® Windows® XP

One consideration when designing Webpages, however, is that fonts which are available on the Webmaster's computer might not also be available on the computer of the person who accesses the finished Website – in which case, a different font will be substituted for the missing font and the Webpage will look different on that computer to the way in which the Webmaster intended it to look. This seemingly small problem might have serious effects; it can be seen from the different lengths of the two columns in Figure 6.1 that fonts of the same point size can actually be of different heights, so applying an identical font size to a substituted font might result in a changed layout with the consequence that some features of the Webpage might then either be obscured or moved outside of the visible area. No wonder, then, that Austin (2003, 45) suggests “using only fonts that are included as part of Microsoft

Windows or the Apple Mac: Arial, Courier, Times Roman (for Windows PCs) ... Helvetica

(for Apple Macs)". The principle of using widely-available fonts is sensible, as it should help to minimise display problems, but Austin's advice is incorrect in that: the name of the font that he calls 'Times Roman' is actually 'Times New Roman'; the font that he calls 'Courier' is actually 'Courier New'; expanding the list for the Apple® Mac to include Times would give more flexibility. It would therefore be good for Webmasters to aim to specify a mixture of Arial, Courier New and Times New Roman fonts with Windows® PCs in mind and to specify alternatives of Helvetica and Times fonts with Apple® Mac® PCs in mind.

Webmasters who do stick rigidly to this principle might feel that it stifles their creativity to some degree due to the use of a limited number of fonts, but stifled creativity might not be a bad thing because another consideration is the overall consistency of a Website, such that Levy (2001, 19) argues for consistent use of fonts on each page and Cato (2001, 105) notes the need to "make sure the style you use is consistent with all the other organization, user, supplier and customer style ... a consonant and consistent whole." There is a case, however, for using significantly different fonts in order to make an impression on the user that certain special-purpose Webpages are different – such as for children's use or where, as Cato (2001, 105) suggests, "you consciously want to create a disjoint to, say, shake the user into a new mode of thinking." Therefore, a better principle might be that widely-available fonts should be used consistently within a Website, and that where fonts which might not be widely available are specified for special-purposes, a widely-available substitute font should be specified so that the appearance of the Webpage can, at least, be predicted when a special-purpose font is not available.

As well as specifying fonts, it is also possible for Webmasters to specify font sizes. This can be done by using a point or pixel size, but Nielsen (2000, 302) suggests setting font sizes as percentages of the default font size so that text sizes will grow and shrink accordingly as users change the text size and visually-impaired users will be able to adjust font sizes until they are legible.

Table 6.1 (overleaf) shows the design principles for fonts that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.1

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Use widely-available fonts</i>	8 (36.4%)	14 (63.6%)
<i>Define common substitutes for rarer fonts</i>	3 (21.4%)	11 (78.6%)
<i>Define font sizes relative to default, not fixed</i>	8 (36.4%)	14 (63.6%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Fonts

Some notable findings of the assessment of fonts, as reflected by the data in Table 6.1 were as follows:

- Although a large percentage of the Websites under consideration (63.6%) do not use widely-available fonts, 78.6% of the Websites that do not use widely-available fonts do actually define widely-available substitute fonts for those rarer fonts. This suggests that either the majority of Webmasters, or their web design software, are aware of the need to consider what happens when their chosen fonts are not available.
- As only 36.4% of Websites define font sizes that are relative to the default size, there is a lot of potential for problems when users wish to change the text display size – for example when they need bigger text due to visual impairments.

Tables

The use of tables can ensure neatness and order over a range of Browsers, allow alignment of information precisely on the screen and assist with spacing of information. Austin (2003, 24) therefore calls tables “the cornerstone of design”. This is because tables can help to compensate for the fact that people who access Websites will do so with different computers which allow for different display areas; without the use of tables, it is possible that a Webpage that looks good on the Webmaster’s computer will seem to be too small when accessed on a computer with a larger screen size or will only display partially when accessed on a computer with a smaller screen size. There is, however, a decision to be made as to whether tables are defined with pixels – allowing the table to remain the same size irrespective of Browser, but perhaps forcing the user to scroll horizontally – or with percentages – which will force the Browser to re-size the table to fit the screen, but can make a table appear badly formatted. This is a choice that Webmasters are free to make, but they should still choose to use tables in order to bring order to Webpage layout.

Another use for tables is simply to present data consistently. If data is being presented about a particular set of measurements or indicators then those accessing the data will wish to know what it pertains to. Multiple sets of data should therefore be presented as tables with clear headings in order that users can easily assimilate the data.

Table 6.2 shows the design principles for tables that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.2

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Use tables use to help layout</i>	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)
<i>Use tables that display neatly</i>	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)
<i>Use headed tables for multiple sets of data</i>	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Tables

Some notable findings of the assessment of tables as shown by the data in Table 6.2 were as follows:

- The majority of Webmasters (90.9%) used tables to help with Webpage layout. The reason that 9.1% of the Websites did not use tables could have been that those Websites did not actually have any data that the Webmasters considered might usefully be displayed in tables, so that it could potentially be the case that 100% of Webmasters are aware of the uses of tables to assist with Webpage layout. However, of those Websites that did use tables, 2 of the Websites (i.e. 9.1% of the total number) had problems in using tables in that one of the Websites did not always use tables when it would have been possible to do so and one of the Websites did not use tables very well.
- The majority (72.7%) of Websites used tables that display neatly. Actually, as 2 of the Websites had no need for tables, this figure rises to 80% (i.e. 16 out of 20) of Websites using tables that displayed them neatly.

- The majority of Webmasters (77.3%) did not use headed tables for multiple sets of data. This was particularly disappointing because, although 7 of the Websites (i.e. 31.8% of the total number) did not need to use such tables, 10 Websites (i.e. 45.5% of the total number) could have benefited from the use of headed tables. Therefore, of the 15 Websites that could have benefited from headed tables, only 5 of the Websites – some 33.3% – actually used them, which suggests that the majority Webmasters are not aware of the benefits of presenting data in this way.

What the data in Table 6.2 could not show was that there was no determinable pattern of Websites failing to conform to the design principles for tables, so that it is not possible to suggest that particular Webmasters – or that Webmasters with particular levels of expertise or experience – might have problems with the use of tables in general.

Text Content

Defining text fonts and using tables when applicable is not necessarily sufficient to guarantee good results when a Webpage is displayed. As with any use of the written word, there is also the need to produce text that is appealing to those who will read it. Levy (2001, 19) suggests that text should be “informative, interesting and well written ... there should be no grammatical or spelling errors!” Of course, people’s impressions about how informative or interesting a particular piece of text may be are naturally going to be subjective – something that Cato (2001, 106-115) highlights in exploring different styles of presentation – but Nielsen (2000, 101-115) suggests that sections of text should be short and easily scanned (because users tend to pick out keywords), that spellings should be checked and that plain language should be used. These sensible suggestions for text content therefore need to be accommodated in Website design.

Table 6.3 (overleaf) shows the design principles for text content that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.3

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Use concise, plain-language text</i>	15 (68.2%)	7 (31.8%)
<i>Use correct spellings and grammar</i>	3 (13.6%)	18 (86.4%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Text Content

Some notable findings of the assessment of text content as shown by the data in Table 6.3 were as follows:

- A clear majority of Webmasters were judged as being able to produce concise, plain-language text (although assessments as to whether language is plain and concise are, of course, subjective). Of those Websites that were thought to have problems with this aspect of Website design, most had text that was not concise and this problem was not generally to be found throughout these Websites. Such sporadic problems with text could be due to multiple authorship; Webmasters may have solicited contributions from other people which proved to be sub-standard and then failed to edit the content to suit the overall Website style.
- The majority (86.4%) of the Websites had some problems with spelling or grammar. These problems included missing or misplaced apostrophes or accents, bad spellings (often with one wrong letter), spurious extra characters, missing spaces, missing letters (e.g. ‘durin’ instead of ‘during’), additional letters (e.g. ‘to challenges us’ instead of ‘to challenge us’) and transposed letters (e.g. ‘ot’ being used instead of ‘to’). Admittedly, just about all of the spelling and grammar on the Websites was found to be correct – only one or two problems were generally to be found on any particular Website – but it still seems incredible that, when the majority of PCs provide both spelling and grammar checkers, such problems were still present. The simple precaution of checking all text before it goes ‘live’ on publicly-accessible Webpages should prevent such problems, so Webmasters either need to be trained to use spelling and grammar checkers, or need to be convinced that their use is worthwhile.

Conclusions about Text Display

Although there was a lot of good design for text display present in the local church Websites under consideration, there was also a good deal of evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. In particular, the high degree of lack of conformity to the design principles for fonts, the low incidence of the use of headed tables, the significant number of Websites with badly displayed tables and the frequency of occurrence of spelling and grammar problems suggested an imbalance of design capabilities among the Webmasters concerned.

6.2 *Colour*

Webpage designers are faced with thousands of possible colour choices at their disposal, so it is therefore important that colours are used in such a way as to add to, rather than detract from, users' experience of using Webpages.

Colour and the Human Eye

Constraints as to the use of colour are introduced due to the physical capabilities of the human eye. Some significant points about the human eye's perception of colour are made by Faulkner (1998, 20-21) in relation to the visible colour spectrum: "Small blue objects tend to disappear on the screen, and this is especially true where the blue is pale. Small changes in shades of blue are difficult to distinguish but the eye is sensitive to small changes in red ... Different colours also require re-focussing so spectrally extreme colours should not be placed together. The human eye would find it difficult to cope with red and blue together ... However, red, orange and yellow can all be viewed comfortably together." Nielsen (2000, 302) also makes the point that there can be accessibility problems for Website users who are blind, or who have other visual disabilities, and notes that "it is quite common to see combinations of background and foreground colors that make pages virtually unreadable for colorblind users." Faulkner (1998, 21) notes that "the most common form of colour blindness is red-green but there are other rarer forms ... for those readers who wonder what red-green colour-blind people see instead of red and green then the answer is grey." Clearly, then, the inappropriate use of colour in Website design can be particularly unhelpful to those who are colour-blind because they may either fail to distinguish differences between things which are coded by colour or they may fail to see things altogether if an inappropriate colour

combination is used.¹

Another factor in designing Webpages is that it is possible to use coloured and/or patterned backgrounds in a similar way to printing on coloured or patterned paper. It is, of course, possible to design really good Webpages which have coloured or patterned backgrounds, but such situations tend to be exceptional simply because they are not very easy for the human eye and brain to assimilate. Nielsen (2000, 302) therefore suggests a “high contrast between foreground and background colors” and that designers should “avoid background patterns that interfere with reading (such as) textured backgrounds or subtle colors.” It is also possible to use white text – and even some colours – on a black background {see, for example, Deanway United Church (2004), as shown in Appendix 3, Figure A3.4}, yet Austin (2003, 41) notes that “skilfully done, a black background can be a powerful design trait (but) ... needs careful consideration and good graphic design skills to succeed.” Austin (2003, 41) also notes cases where small amounts of white on black or even images on a black background can look good, but Austin (2003, 40) does suggest that “most people find that black text placed on a white or light background is easiest to read” and this would be a reasonable choice due to the fact that most books use the same colour scheme, so that it should feel familiar and comfortable to Webpage users.

With the above comments in mind about the use of colour in Webpage design, Figure 6.2 shows some colour combinations that are possible; some are counter-productive and some should be generally acceptable:

Figure 6.2

Counter-Productive

Small changes in Blue
Spectral Extremes
Red on Green
Green on Red
White on Black
Textured Background

Generally Acceptable

Small changes in Red
Red Orange Yellow
Black on White

Some Colour Combination Possibilities

1 The visible colour spectrum is: red; orange; yellow; green; blue; indigo; violet. Other colours mix these.

Appropriate Use of Colour

People who have appreciated the way in which colour photographs look so much more life-like than black and white photographs might automatically assume that the use of colour on Webpages will always be a positive thing. However, the over-use or inappropriate use of colour can result in Webpages that are less pleasing to the eye, rather than more pleasing. Indeed, Preece (1993, 77) warns: “colour should be used conservatively: too many colours clutter up the screen.” Furthermore, as taste in colours is a very personal thing, it could be that a Webmaster who used colour on a Webpage in order to make it more visually satisfying might produce a Webpage that some users felt to be visually displeasing. This does not mean, of course, that colour photographs should not be placed onto Webpages; rather, that the use of colour in Webpage design should be carefully considered in order to aid, rather than hinder, Website users.

Colour Reproduction

The use of colour can also be problematic because colour shades are reproduced in different ways on different computer systems. In a similar way that two colour photographs produced from the same negative can have different colouring due to the developing process, so the computer, Operating System, Browser, monitor, printer and ink can all affect the way in which colours are reproduced on a Webpage. It is therefore important to realise that subtle changes of colour might not be easily discerned on some computer systems and to avoid forcing users to make decisions based upon colour variations alone, or expecting users to appreciate colours which might not be available to them.

Design Principles for, and Conclusions about, the Use of Colour

Table 6.4 (overleaf) shows the design principles for the use of colour that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.4

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Avoid using textured backgrounds</i>	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
<i>Mainly use black text on white, or light, background</i>	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.4%)
<i>Minimise the number of colours on Webpages</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i>Avoid spectral extremes (e.g. red and blue together)</i>	10 (45.5%)	12 (54.5%)
<i>Avoid small changes of blue shades</i>	22 (100%)	0 (0%)
<i>Do not use red or green with grey</i>	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Colour

It is clear from the study of the use of colour that that the local Methodist church Webmasters are able to avoid many of the pitfalls that can be associated with the use of colour. Some notable findings of the assessment of the use of colour as shown by the data in Table 6.4 were as follows:

- It is significant that 81.8% of Websites avoided using textured backgrounds, thereby following good practice for the use of colour.
- Other aspects of good practice that were widely adopted were: avoiding small changes of blue shades; not using red or green with grey; minimising the number of colours on Webpages.

However, it is not clear from the data whether these good design decisions were due to knowledge of good practice or simply to personal taste.

The significant number of failures to conform to the design principles for the use of colour is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. In this respect, some notable findings of the assessment of the use of colour as shown by the data in Table 6.4 were as follows:

- Although it could be argued that a very light texturing – as was mainly used in the 18.2% of Websites with textured backgrounds – in some way enhances the presentation of the Websites, this texturing did make some Webpage features hard to discern.

- Only 63.6% of Websites mainly used black text on a white, or light, background – and some of the colour combinations² that were used extensively on some Websites proved to be very hard to read.
- More than half of the Websites (54.5%) included uses of spectral extremes, the majority of these using combinations of red and blue and one using a less spectrally-extreme purple and yellow combination.

6.3 Graphics

Graphics introduce possibilities into Webpage design which help to turn Webpages into a communication medium that is far more powerful than the printed word. A positive argument for the use of graphics comes from Faulkner (1998, 43) who suggests that “human beings are able to recall pictures better than they can recall words.” In addition, the research of Sears, Jacko and Dubach (2000, 257) found that “both Swiss and U.S. participants agreed that sites with graphics are more attractive”. Graphics might seem, then, to be desirable additions to Webpages, but this might not always be the case, as will now be shown.

Uses for Graphics and Some Drawbacks

A clear constraint with graphics is the finite nature of the visible area available for use on a computer screen; Stein (1995, 275) advises: “The real estate on a Web screen is precious. Don’t clutter it up with unnecessary clip art, icons, dividers, borders and other doodads. Use graphics sparingly. They’re best for establishing a sense of common identity among your pages and for adding a touch of emphasis at the right places.” It is therefore important that graphics should be used in order to enhance Webpages, rather than just as gimmicks. The Home Page of Trinity Church, Harrow – Appendix 3, Figures A3.20(1) and A3.20(2) – is an example of how graphics should not be added to a Webpage because the graphics on that Webpage, four of which are actually animated, seem to serve little purpose other than, perhaps, the amusement of the Webmaster. Perhaps a good analogy when considering the use of graphics is the difference between the comic and a newspaper. A comic predominantly contains pictures, each of which usually has a few words attached in order to clarify what is going on, whereas a newspaper tends only to use pictures to help people to visualise a

² Colour combinations used on Webpages included: bright green background; red text on a blue and white background; Dark Green text; red and purple on a white background; red on a white background; blue on a beige background; a black background with various colours on it.

situation, with many articles having no pictures at all and most pages only having a handful of pictures. As the subject matter of comics is usually intended to be less factual than that of newspapers, it is arguably the case that local Methodist church Websites, whose content is mostly factual, should generally have an appearance more akin to a newspaper than to a comic.

Figure 6.3 (overleaf) shows some graphics taken from the local Methodist church Websites under consideration, all of which have potential drawbacks and could be seen as detracting from the effectiveness of Webpages, rather than enhancing them. Of the graphics in Figure 6.3, the banner “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us” (1) was found on a Webpage with the title “Beliefs”; although this, at first sight, is a statement of faith, its archaic language also gives an impression of a church which is looking to the past and not up-to-date, whereas other areas of the Website suggest that the church is actually very forward-looking. The hearing-related sign (2) was above some text saying that the worship space had an induction loop, but could be taken at first glance to be something to do with the Webpage itself. The magazine cover (3) does not really have enough detail to be useful and there were even smaller Thumbnails of previous issues that were virtually impossible to distinguish. The Clip-art graphic (4) was shown above the caption “Connecting!” and to the right of details about a group called “Tuesday Get-together” – it was presumably meant to signify that people can meet up at the group, but it perhaps needs too much thought to work this out. The clip-art graphic of chairs around a Bible (5) was on a Webpage about Bible study, but it adds nothing in terms of information and, once again, needs some thought on the part of users if they are to see its significance. The clip-art envelope (6) was for contacting somebody by email, but there was no related text, so the functionality was unclear even when the mouse was over the graphic.

Figure 6.3



Graphics from Local Methodist church Websites³

It is also possible to use the logos of companies and organisations on Webpages, both to help people to easily recognise a particular organisation and to serve as a Hyperlink. However, Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 23) urge caution as such logos can not only be taken to be advertisements or endorsements, but can also become out of date. Figure 6.4 (overleaf) shows some of the logos that were found on the local Methodist church Websites under consideration.⁴

³ The graphics in Figure 6.3 were from: (1) Ley Hill Methodist Church; (2) St. Andrews Methodist Church, Bushey Heath; (3) Abbots Langley Methodist Church; (4) Digswell Village Church; (5) Trinity United Reformed and Methodist Church, Harrow; (6) North Harrow Methodist Church.

⁴ The graphics in Figure 6.4 were from: (1), (2) Trinity United Reformed and Methodist Church, Harrow; (3) Harlington Methodist Church; (4) Digswell Village Church; (5) St. Hugh and St. John's Church, Chells, Stevenage; (6) St. Marks and Putnoe Heights LEP, Bedford.

Figure 6.4



Logos found on Local Methodist church Websites

The Size of Graphics Files

Another problem with the use of graphics is that graphics files usually comprise a number of kilobytes – and sometimes megabytes – of data, so that the use of graphics will therefore usually make Webpages display more slowly than equivalent Webpages that just contained text. The problem of large graphics files slowing down the display of Webpages has even caused some users to avoid Websites containing such features, so that Sears, Jacko and Dubach (2000, 257) found that some users can prefer sites with fewer graphics because they are prone to “associating more graphics with slower download times and a decrease in usability.” Given that Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 49) see plain text as the foundation of most information and suggest a rule of thumb of allocating “somewhere between 5% and 15% of the homepage to images”, it would therefore be preferable to minimise the use of graphics on higher-level Webpages (i.e. the Home Page – level 0 – and those Webpages on the next level down – level 1). A widely adopted, and still useful, way of speeding up download times when graphics were required is to use Thumbnails to access graphics so that smaller versions of the graphics can initially be downloaded as previews. Figure 6.5 (page 130) shows the

difference between three pictures in JPEG format. The original picture is 65.5kB; the largest Thumbnail was scaled⁵ to 50% of the height and width of the original and is 21.3kB; the smallest Thumbnail is scaled to 25% of the height and width of the original and is 6.19kB.⁶

Given that a file of 100kB may take over 20 seconds to download with a slow (28kbps) modem, or over 10 seconds with the widely-used 56kbps modem, it would be sensible for the Websites under consideration to limit the total size of graphics files to 100kB on Webpages, except for those which contain files accessed via Thumbnails. Having said that, it must also be noted that such strict limits on the size of graphics files are becoming less important due to the greater roll-out of faster Broadband speeds and decreasing Broadband prices.⁷

Nevertheless, the introduction of Broadband has not been without its problems: Judge (2005a), noted that “after launching and heavily marketing an 8 megabit-per-second broadband and phone service ... (Bulldog) was simply unable to cope with the demand. The service has suffered software glitches and customers have complained about delays in their service being connected and about a lack of help to deal with their problems”; Judge (2005b), noted that “despite efforts by the Government and providers to promote broadband, two thirds of British households – 16 million out of 24 million – do not have it”; Judge (2005b), noted that “France’s second-biggest internet service provider ... offers speeds of 15-20 Mbps. Most BT services have 2 megabits per second, although services of 8 Mbps are on trial ... Be, a Swedish internet company, recently introduced a 24-megabit service in Britain, but analysts say that it does not reach a mass market.” Therefore, for the purposes of evaluating graphics files for the Websites under consideration, it still made sense to insist on less than 100kB of graphics files per Webpage – except on Webpages specifically designed to contain large

5 The scaling of pictures for this example was done with the Microsoft® Paint program supplied with Microsoft® Windows® XP.

6 Thumbnails can be produced by resizing graphical files, but Nielsen (2000, 135) notes how “scaling reduces the image so much that pictures with extensive detail wash out and become too crowded to be meaningful.” Nielsen (2000, 135) therefore suggests a combination of a crop to 32 percent followed by a resize to 32 percent, resulting in a file 0.1 times the size of the original.

7 Tiscali offered a ‘free’ upgrade whereby existing subscribers to its 512kb service costing £24.99 per month would be upgraded to the 1Mb service at the end of March 2005 for no additional charge. At the same time, the 512kb service was reduced in price from £24.99 per month to £19.99 per month. By September 2005, Tiscali (2005) was offering its 1Mb unlimited service at prices ranging from £14.99 per month to £19.99 per month; by September 2006, the Tiscali 1Mb unlimited Broadband service cost just £12.99 per month – a reduction of nearly 50% in a period of 18 months; in January 2008, Tiscali was offering ‘up to 8Mb Broadband at £12.99 per month.

graphics, such as those accessed via Thumbnails.

Figure 6.5



A Church Picture and Two Thumbnails

Graphics and Visual Impairment

The use of graphics can cause problems for people who are blind or visually impaired because such people are not able to assimilate the information that is contained within the graphics themselves. There are screen readers that can help blind and visually impaired

people to assimilate Websites, but these are designed to work with text and cannot describe the content of graphics files. These screen readers can, however, read text associated with graphics via the ‘ALT’ attribute in the HTML code, so Nielsen (2000, 303) suggests using the ‘ALT’ attribute to associate text with graphics so that “users who cannot see the photo (whether because they are blind or because they have turned image loading off due to bandwidth concerns) will see or hear the alternative text.”

Design Principles for, and Conclusions about, the Use of Graphics

Table 6.5 shows the design principles for the use of graphics that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.5

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
<i>Minimise size of graphics on higher-level Webpages</i>	17 (77.3%)	5 (22.7%)
<i>Only use graphics to enhance Webpage content</i>	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
<i>Use less than 100kB of graphics per Webpage</i>	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)
<i>Access larger graphics files via Thumbnails</i>	7 of 12 (58.3%)	5 of 12 (41.7%)
<i>Associate alternative text with graphics</i>	8 (36.4%)	14 (63.6%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Graphics

Although the assessment of the use of graphics to enhance Webpages is subjective, the data in Table 6.5 is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because the use of graphics was inconsistent and a number of Webmasters seem either to need to acquire the skills necessary to incorporate graphics effectively into their Website designs, or to be encouraged to carefully consider the ways in which the use of graphics and alternative text on Webpages could enhance the experience of Website users. Specific findings of the assessment of the use of graphics as shown by the data in Table 6.5 were as follows:

- All 22 of the Websites under consideration used graphics in some way, although only

12 of these Websites had files large enough that the use of Thumbnails would be sensible in order to minimise the display time of some of the Webpages.

- Although the majority (77.3%) of Websites did seem to have been designed in order to minimise the use of graphics on higher-level Webpages, it is notable that 22.7% of Websites did not do so and examples of this omission included the use of large images on the Home Page, the use of a large graphic file as a background and the use of a number of identical files to display the same logo in different places on the same Webpage. This suggests that some Webmasters are either unable to minimise the use of graphics on higher-level Webpages or that they are unaware of the need to do so. However, because the only measure of attempts to minimise graphical content was the observations of the researcher, it could be the case that less than 77.3% of the Websites were actually designed in order to minimise the use of graphics on higher-level Webpages.
- The majority (81.8%) of Websites did seem to use graphics such as photos, logos, clipart, headings, links and menu items in order to enhance Webpage content. However, it is notable that 18.2% of Websites used graphics in ways that did not enhance Webpages – such as scattering graphics about all over Webpages or the construction of all content from graphics. This suggests that some of the Webmasters are unable to use graphics well enough to enhance Webpage content.
- The majority (72.7%) of Websites did use less than 100kB of graphics per Webpage, though it is notable that 27.3% of Websites used graphics totalling more than 100kB on Webpages – such as by using a large background graphic, by using large number of Thumbnails, or by displaying large images without Thumbnails. This suggests that some Webmasters are either unable to – or unaware of the need to – keep the size of graphics on Webpages below 100kB in order to allow Webpages to display within a reasonable time.
- Of those Websites which contained graphics large enough to warrant the use of Thumbnails, only a slight majority (58.3%) did actually use Thumbnails. This suggests that some Webmasters are unaware of the technique of using Thumbnails for larger images in order to allow Webpages to display within a reasonable time.
- The majority of Websites (63.6%) did not associate alternative text with graphics. What is more, of the 36.4% of Websites that did use alternative text, some only displayed file names – suggesting, perhaps, that this information was automatically

inserted by web design software. In addition, all except one Website only used alternative text for some of the graphics – which could be very misleading to a visually impaired person because they might assume that they were being told about all of the graphics when they were not. These findings suggest that most Webmasters are unaware of the technique of using alternative text in order to aid visually impaired users and that most Webmasters who do use alternative text do not have an approach to Website design that is disciplined enough to ensure that sensible alternative text is available for all of the graphics on their Websites.

6.4 *Sound*

One clear difference between Webpages and printed pages is that sound can be incorporated on Webpages. The sound content of a Webpage may take a number of forms, such as music, speech, recognisable noise or feedback related to the use of the Webpage.

Possible uses of Sound on Webpages

Possibilities for the use of sound for local Methodist church Websites might include the playback of recorded services or events and the playback of worship songs. Another useful application of sound on Webpages could be for visually impaired people, so that Preece (1993, 68) suggests that audio output “is vital for visually impaired people and can be very effective in providing feedback”. Even for normally-sighted people, the use of sound is important enough for Faulkner (1998, 25) to suggest that “in human-computer interaction, the second most important means of communication, for people with normal vision, is sound.” One way of using sound to assist users could be the regular use of particular sounds to indicate when users have done something correctly or incorrectly. Thus, Preece (1993, 68) suggests that “alarms can be used for attracting attention” and Faulkner (1998, 46) suggests that “visual and or audible clues should be given to confirm that the user is succeeding or progressing towards the task goal.”

Clearly, the availability of sound on Webpages could mean that every Webpage could have its own set of sounds and that individual Webpage features could also have associated sounds. However, Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 49) reported that, when studying a number of sites, “only 4% of the sites played music as soon as the user entered the homepage. Considering that 96% of the sites provide a quiet user experience, this is what we currently

recommend.” Of course, just because a majority of Websites do not use a particular feature, that does not automatically mean that it should not be used, but the fact that sound has been available for inclusion in Website designs for some time, yet still does not have a significant take-up, could well suggest that it has not proved to be a useful feature. The use of sound on Webpages therefore needs to be carefully thought through. Sound should never be used to such a degree that a Webpage becomes meaningless without the presence of the sound – especially relevant for those whose sound system has failed and for those who routinely, or even occasionally, leave the sound turned off on their computers. In addition, Levy (2001, 53-54) notes that “what may be music to someone’s ears, may be a hellish cacophony to others. A lot of people really hate music that blares out as soon as a site is opened up.” Sound files must therefore be used with caution: it should be possible to turn sound off if it is not wanted (or even to design Webpages so that users have to turn sound on if it is wanted) and it should be borne in mind that some Browsers may not handle particular sound file formats correctly.

Design Principles for, and conclusions about, the Use of Sound

Table 6.6 shows the design principles for the use of sound that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.6

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Sound files should be used on Webpages	2 (9.1%)	20 (90.9%)
Sound should give feedback to assist users	0 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
Sound should not be played on the Home Page	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)
Sound should be selectable – ‘on’ or ‘off’	1 of 2 (50.0%)	1 of 2 (50.0%)
Webpages should make sense with sound inaudible	22 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Sound

Some notable findings of the assessment of the use of sound as shown by the data in Table 6.6 were as follows:

- Only 9.1% of Websites actually used sound files on any of their Webpages (though a further Website, representing 4.5% of the total number, did have a sound file present that was not actually used). In addition, even those Websites which did use sound only used it in Macromedia Flash® presentations. It is not, therefore, clear from the data why the use of sound is not very common; it could be that Webmasters do not feel that the use of sound adds anything to their Webpages, or it could be that the software for the design of Flash® presentations makes the incorporation of sound very easy, but that Webmasters do not generally know how to incorporate sound files into other aspects of their Webpage designs.
- No Webpages included design features using sound in order to give feedback to users – suggesting that Webmasters either do not see the need to do this or do not know how to – though it could be possible that some Operating Systems or Browsers would add their own sounds when Webpages were being used in order to give feedback, but that is not something that the Webmasters themselves would have control over. The fact that sound was not used on so many of the Webpages means that no firm conclusions can be drawn from the fact that only 4.5% of Home Pages had music playing – which could be for a number of reasons, including lack of design skills, personal taste or even knowledge of Nielsen and Tahir’s suggestions about having a quiet user experience.
- Given that 90.9% of Webpages did not use sound, no firm conclusions can be drawn from the fact that 50% of the 2 Websites that used sound enabled the sound to be selectable as ‘on’ or ‘off’, or from the fact that 100% of the 2 Websites using sound made sense when sound was inaudible.

6.5 *Menus*

An important design feature for Webpages is the menu – a feature which presents a number of options which, when selected, will result in an action for the user. The user action associated with a menu option is often a change of Webpage, but may sometimes be the appearance of another Browser window. The key issues for this section are to do with the appearance of menus, which means that the relationship between menus and user tasks is not considered here.

The layout and functionality of menus is not always helpful to users, so Gibbons (2002, 11)

suggests seven rules for menu usability:

- Menus must be considerate of the user's main task;
- Menus must be distinct from content;⁸
- Menus must be clearly readable (this includes visual contrast and text and icon size);⁹
- Menus must be easily scanned for information;¹⁰
- Menus must be easily operated;
- Menus must behave as your target user would expect;
- Menus must load as quickly as possible.

However, because the operation of menus is generally related to the web design software that was used and because issues of loading speed and menu behaviour will be addressed in a general way in sections 7.4 and 8.1 respectively, neither of these issues will be considered in this section. The design principles for menus will therefore be limited to the aspects of the appearance of menus that web design software usually allows to be defined by Webmasters.

Design Principles for the Use of Menus

Table 6.7 (overleaf) shows the design principles for the use of menus that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them.

-
- 8** Gibbons (2002, 13) suggests that making menus distinct from Webpage content involves using different font sizes and spacing for menus, as well as visual separation clues for menus like lines or boxes and some white space around menus.
- 9** Gibbons (2002, 18) suggests that making menus readable involves using text and graphics that contrast with the background, are large enough to be operated even at high resolution and never hide usable text or graphics.
- 10** Gibbons (2002, 18-19) suggests that making menus that are easy to scan for information involves keeping word descriptions short and simple, as well as using easily-recognisable descriptions such as: search; print; products; contacts; the user's name; an email address; telephone number; and icons such as a printer, shopping 'cart' or email envelope.

Table 6.7

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Menus must be distinct from content	17 (81.0%)	4 (19.0%)
Menus must be clearly readable	15 (71.4%)	6 (28.6%)
Menus must be easily scanned for information	18 (85.7%)	3 (14.3%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Menus

The data in Table 6.7 suggests inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. Particular findings related to Table 6.7 that support this conclusion are:

- Although the majority (81.0%) of Websites did seem to have been designed in order to make menus distinct from Webpage content, it is notable that 19.0% of Websites did not do so because the menu entries were simply placed within the contents of the Webpages and were not separated out with techniques such as the use of lines and boxes. This suggests that some Webmasters are either unable to construct menus (and therefore used individual Hyperlinks instead) or are unaware of the need to make menus distinct.
- The majority (71.4%) of Websites did have clearly readable menus. However, it is notable that 28.6% of Websites used menus that were not clearly readable – due to the text on the menu entries being too small or failing to contrast sufficiently with the background. This suggests that some Webmasters are either unaware of the techniques for making menus readable, incapable of making their web design software produce readable menus, or have deliberately chosen inappropriate combinations of text size and background.
- The majority (85.7%) of Websites did have menu entries that were easy to scan. However, the tendency to employ longer descriptions on some menu did lead to them being classified as being difficult to scan. This suggests that some Webmasters are unaware of the need to keep word descriptions short and simple on menus.

6.6 *Simple Animations*

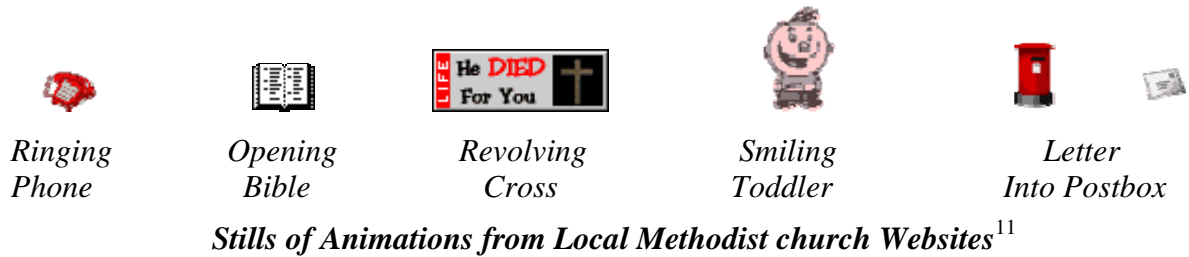
Another difference between a Webpage and a printed page is that animations can be incorporated. There are increasingly more complicated ways of incorporating animations into Webpages, so this section considers animation principles and simple animations; the two following sections will consider the use of more complex animations such as Macromedia Flash® (section 6.7) and the use of video presentations (section 6.8). Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 49) report that when studying a number of sites, 30% included some form of animation on the Home Page. It is possible to design such animations specifically for particular purposes, but there are also libraries of them available with web design software and also online, for example Microsoft Clipart (2006). The use of animations is not always helpful, as will be shown below, and even though Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 49) observe that “it’s rare to see animation used well”, Nielsen (2000, 143) suggests that animation can enhance a Webpage in the following circumstances:

- Showing continuity in transitions (e.g. animating the proof of a theorem);
- Indicating dimensionality in transitions (e.g. which way to turn a page);
- Illustrating change over time (e.g. deforestation);
- Multiplexing the display (e.g. showing multiple information in one space);
- Enriching graphical representations (e.g. icons);
- Visualising three-dimensional structures (e.g. the solar system);
- Attracting attention (e.g. denoting choices made on a previous Webpage).

Clip Animations

Clip animations are available to Webmasters in forms such as ‘GIF’ files which animate when a Browser displays them on a Webpage; these clip animations can be added into Webpages in the same way as clipart files can be added for graphics. However, the use of clip animations is questionable because some Webmasters seem to use them as gimmicks, rather than using them to add meaning and value to their Webpages. Figure 6.6 (overleaf) shows some stills of animations with questionable value, along with descriptions of what the animations do.

Figure 6.6



Nielsen (2000, 131) is cautious about the use of multimedia features such as animations and says that “unconstrained use of multimedia results in user interfaces that confuse users”. Furthermore, Austin (2003, 11) suggests that: “Adding fun-type animations ... to a personal website is a matter of taste. However, for a business-oriented website, a much more considered approach is called for.” As local churches have a particular mission and ethos, local Methodist church Websites should be more akin to business-oriented Websites than personal Websites, so that the use of simple animations should be limited to cases when they add something to the Webpage that is not achievable by other means. Indeed, Nielsen (2000, 143) suggests that “in general, it is best to minimize the use of animation” and suggests that if a point can be made with a non-animated graphic, then the animation should not be there.

Scrolling Banners

As well as animated graphics, it is also possible to animate text to move across the screen to produce what are sometimes known as scrolling banners. The benefit of such animations is questionable and Nielsen (2000, 143) reports a user as saying: “I have stopped reading crawling text because experience has shown me that it never has any useful information”. The problem with scrolling banners is that – even if they do contain useful information – it is often not possible for the user to see the whole text at once; even at those times when the whole of a scrolling banner is displayed at once, it is harder for the user to read animated text than the equivalent stationary text because the user’s eye has to track a scrolling banner as it moves across the screen. For example, the Home Page of Harlington Methodist Church (2004), has a scrolling banner which reads: “Next phase of building project has started. See weekly picture updates ‘Building Project’ page.....” It is very frustrating waiting for this banner to completely appear, especially as the information is actually quite useful – despite

¹¹ These graphics were all from Trinity United Reformed and Methodist Church, Harrow – see Appendix 3, Figures A3.20(1) and A3.20(2).

being badly phrased. To draw people's attention to this 'newsflash', it would be better to display the information as static text in a relatively large and bold eye-catching font – a technique that would also make it easy to incorporate a clickable Hyperlink, rather than leaving users wondering how to find the 'Building Project' page.

Applets

It is also possible to use 'Applets' to perform some types of simple animations – such as animated menu buttons – but these features are generally provided by web design software as 'off the shelf' components when particular designs are selected. The way in which Applets have been used has not, therefore, been assessed as it would simply highlight design preferences, rather than helping to assess website design capabilities.

Design Principles for the Use of Simple Animations

Table 6.8 shows the design principles for the use of simple animations that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.8

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Clip animations may be used	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)
Clip animations should enhance Webpages¹²	0 of 5 (0.0%)	5 of 5 (100%)
Scrolling Banners should not be used	19 (86.4%)	3 (13.6%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Simple Animations

It is not entirely clear from the data in Table 6.8 whether the use of simple animations is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. The relatively low use of clip animations and scrolling banners (13.6%) could be taken to suggest that the local Methodist church Webmasters do seem to understand some of the negative implications of

¹² As suggested by Nielsen (2000, 143), Webpage enhancements may: show continuity in transitions; indicate dimensionality in transitions; illustrate change over time; multiplex the display; enrich graphical representations; visualise three-dimensional structures; attract attention.

using simple animations – so that they might refrain from using scrolling banners due to the frustrations that users can experience and they might see that using clip animations for the sake of it does not enhance Webpages. However, alternative explanations of the limited use of these simple animations might be: (a) that many of the local Methodist church Webmasters do not know how to use simple animations; (b) that many of the local Methodist church Webmasters do not have access to appropriate clip animations; (c) that there are not many occasions where the use of clip animations might enhance local Methodist church Webpages.

6.7 *More Complex Animations with Macromedia Flash®*

There are a number of ways of putting more complex animations onto Websites,¹³ thereby enabling unique user interfaces and interactive presentations to be constructed. Such techniques can, for example, give users a degree of choice as to exactly what is displayed by processing user inputs and selections. A popular software package is Macromedia Flash® and the use of this software would seem to be a good way of assessing the capabilities of Website designers of using these techniques because Austin (2003, 100) says that “Flash essentially sets the standard if you want to create a high quality interactive and animated Web display ... Flash files are comparatively small ... and provide fast playback on typical modem-based connections.” In order to use a Flash® animation, the Browser needs to have the Flash® ‘Plugin’, but this is now provided as part of Microsoft® Windows® and on Apple® computers. It is also possible in later versions of Flash® to place a static image on a Webpage if a Browser does not have the Flash® ‘Plugin’ installed.

A disadvantage of Flash® is that it is not as accessible for blind or visually impaired users – though it is, of course, possible to put alternative features onto Webpages for such users.

Design Principles for the Use of Flash® Animations

Table 6.9 (overleaf) shows the design principles for the use of Flash® Animations that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the

13 The easiest way of putting complex animations onto a Website is to use a software package. Alternatively, animations can be inserted directly into the HTML code, but this requires a high level of expertise. One of the Websites under consideration did have such a HTML routine which provided a rather gimmicky date and time cursor on a Webpage about Epiphany, but although the Webmaster claimed to have Advanced skills at Website design, the style of the code suggests that it was copied from another Website and the feature seemed to add little value to the Webpage because it became a bit annoying by getting in the way of the text.

22 Websites under consideration conform to them.

Table 6.9

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Use Flash® for unique presentations	2 of 22 (9.1%)	20 of 22 (90.9%)
Provide alternatives for non-Flash® users	0 of 2 (0%)	2 of 2 (100%)
Provide alternatives for blind users	0 of 2 (0%)	2 of 2 (100%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Flash® Animations

The data in Table 6.9 suggests a number of points concerning the implementation of Flash® animations. Only 9.1% (2) of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration used Flash® animations. Of these, one used a Flash® animation for an animated Home Page and the other had three picture presentations about the life of the church at different times of the year. Both Flash® Websites incorporated sound into their Flash® animations, but neither provided an alternative for non-Flash® users other than downloading the Flash® ‘plugin’ and neither provided an alternative for blind users. The lack of a non-Flash® alternative was especially problematic for the Website which used Flash® for its Home Page as the Website was potentially inaccessible without it (depending on whether the Browser would allow the display of the non-Flash® component); good practice would suggest that an alternative to Flash® should be available, as is the case for Putney Methodist Church (2004). Therefore, either the majority of Webmasters had decided not to implement Flash® animations or not many of the local Methodist church Webmasters had the knowledge or software to be able to implement Flash® animations. The latter possibility seems most likely as Flash® is one of the more recent innovations available to Website designers. Therefore, it is not entirely clear whether the use of Flash® animations is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

6.8 Video Presentations

For some time, it has been possible for Websites to offer a truly multi-media experience by the use of video presentations. Video presentation technology has been used extensively on entertainment Websites such as BBC (2004) and BBC Top of The Pops (2004), as well as on

news Websites such as CNN (2004) and Channel 4 News (2004). The distribution of Windows® Media® Player with Microsoft® Windows® and Quicktime® on Apple® Computers, along with the availability of free versions of software such as RealPlayer (2004) means that all Website users potentially have free access to video playback technology.

Advantages of Video Presentations

In an age where people are used to watching the moving images of television programmes, cinema, videos, DVDs and computer games, it would seem that there must be some advantages in using video presentations on Websites too. Austin (2003, 101) suggests that “video is humanizing: it can put over warmth, personality, emotion, feelings, tension and passion ... international visitors may understand spoken language better than text ... moving pictures can describe complexities effectively ... video is undoubtedly a powerful advertising medium!” Nielsen (2000, 149) suggests that video is good for:

- Promoting television shows, films, or other non-computer media that traditionally use trailers in their advertising;
- Giving users an impression of the speaker’s personality ... (though) it is not necessarily a good idea to show a talking head unless a video clip truly adds to the user’s experience;
- Showing things that move, such as a clip from the ballet.

Disadvantages of Video Presentations

Despite the potential advantages of video presentations on Websites, the fact that video files can be very large does limit the ways in which video presentations can be used. Video files have to be large if the size of the viewing area and the quality of the video reproduction is to be acceptable and large files are not easily handled by dial-up internet connections of, say, 56kbps, or even by some Broadband services. Nielsen (2000, 150) suggests that “because of the poor quality of streaming video, it is often best to digitize a higher-quality version of the video and make it available for download” and users may have to decide whether to wait a number of minutes for a whole video clip to download or, if video streaming is available, possibly to experience jumpy playback while their video-playing software waits for the next portion of data. Austin (2003, 101) notes the following drawbacks of video technology: “Web video can make heavy demands on a visitor’s PC ... technology is still a relatively new and complex development requiring more complex tools ... spoken language may be difficult

to understand sometimes.” Nielsen (2000, 149) suggests that “due to bandwidth constraints, use of video should currently be minimized on the Web – though he was writing at a time when most users only had access to, at best, 56kbps connections. Perhaps foreseeing the increase in Broadband provision, Nielsen (2000, 149) did go on to say that “eventually video will be used more widely.”

A further disadvantage of using video on Webpages is that is not as accessible for some disabled users as some other elements of Webpages: blind users would only hear the soundtrack and deaf users would need captions. Although there are ‘talking’ Browsers that can describe what cannot be seen, the use of such tools for videos would inevitably cause problems when the commentary clashed with the video soundtrack. Nielsen (2000, 155) therefore suggests that “it may be necessary to provide a completely textual alternative that integrates the information found in the audio and visual tracks of the video”.

Design Principles for the Use of Video Presentations

Table 6.10 shows the design principles for the use of video presentations that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 6.10

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Use video if it adds to the user’s experience	0 (0%)	22 (100%)
Break up longer videos into manageable parts	N/A	N/A
Provide alternative commentary for blind users	N/A	N/A
Provide captions for deaf users	N/A	N/A

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Video Presentations

The data in Table 6.10 does not help conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because none of the Websites under consideration employed video clips, so that none of the techniques of breaking up longer videos into manageable parts, providing alternative commentaries for

blind users and providing captions for deaf users could be assessed. Even though the opportunities for using video clips are limited because the recording of an hour-long worship service, or even more than a few minutes of video, would result in files that were very large, small video presentations – such as appeals for funds, or a message from the minister – might potentially be useful. However, the data in Table 6.10 suggests that the local Methodist church Webmasters either do not have the capability to produce video presentations or that they have decided not to use video presentations due to bandwidth constraints or lack of suitable subject matter for their Websites.

6.9 *Electronic Documents*

A useful feature that has developed for Websites is the ability to allow users to access electronic documents from them. It is thus possible for one person to produce a document on his or her own computer and, once that document has been uploaded to a Website, for the document to be downloaded, accessed and printed by anybody who has access to the Website. This form of access means that electronic documents and information can be accessed and printed in the original form without the need for Webmasters to put a lot of effort into designing Webpages containing the information from the document.

The simplest way of facilitating document access via Websites is to upload the document file to the Website where a Hyperlink appears allowing the document to be downloaded.

However, this form of access can have a number of problems:

- A document produced by a particular software application might not be accessible to all users. For example, a document produced using Microsoft® Word 2000 would not necessarily be accessible to a user who had Microsoft® Word 97;¹⁴
- An original version of a document could be downloaded and altered, thus creating problems of configuration management and the potential for legal battles between originators and recipients of a document over which version of a document was correct;

14 Many software programs work by storing an encoded version of the information that the user sees so that the formatting of the document can be reproduced again by the software when the saved document is next accessed. Even so, it is not always necessary to have the same software in order to open a document – later versions of software tend to be compatible with earlier versions and it is also possible to get ‘readers’ or format converters for some programs which allow the information to be presented without having the actual software or to use other software that can read the encoded files and reproduce the document.

- As different computers tend to have different settings and fonts, a document may appear differently even if the same software is being used, so that the content of particular may be formatted differently and, if font sizes or page sizes are different, some information might even appear on different pages than the author anticipated.

Ways of facilitating document access that allow more programs to access documents downloaded from Websites include the use of text format (‘.txt’ files) and rich text format (‘.rtf’ files); although the formatting possibilities of these documents are more limited than those of documents produced by word processing programs such as Microsoft® Word, they do afford greater accessibility possibilities.

A way of facilitating document access that retains the original format, fonts and pagination of documents and that also allows some fairly sophisticated operations to be performed on the documents when downloaded is to use the portable document format (‘.pdf’ files).

Documents in this format are also relatively compact, which is an advantage for Website access. The ‘.pdf’ documents are generally created by Adobe® Acrobat® software – version 6.0 of this software even allows for ‘.pdf’ documents to be commented upon and approved electronically – though it is possible to create ‘.pdf’ documents from some other software programs too. One disadvantage of the ‘.pdf’ format is that Webmasters may have to pay to obtain software such as Adobe® Acrobat® in order to create ‘.pdf’ files,¹⁵ another potential disadvantage is that ‘.pdf’ documents cannot be edited in the same way that the original could be with the right software. These disadvantages may be outweighed by the principal advantage of this format, that the Adobe® Reader® software to read the files produced by Adobe® Acrobat® is freely obtainable from the Adobe UK (2004) Website so that anybody who obtains this software can then download files and see them in exactly the format that they were originally produced in.

Design Principles for the Use of Documents

Table 6.11 (overleaf) shows the design principles for the use of documents that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22

¹⁵ Some free programs that produce ‘.pdf’ files are available on the Internet – such as PDF redirect v2 from EXP Systems – Such programs work by being accessed instead of printer software, but they may not always faithfully reproduce the quality or layout of the original document.

Websites under consideration conform to them.

Table 6.11

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Use documents for large files or formatting purposes	2 (9.1%)	20 (90.9%)
Use ‘.txt’ or ‘.rtf’ files for greater compatibility	0	0
Use ‘.pdf’ files for well-formatted compatibility	2 of 2 (100%)	0 of 2 (0%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Electronic Documents

Some notable findings of the assessment of the use of electronic documents as shown by the data in Table 6.11 were as follows:

- Only a small minority (9.1%) of the Websites under consideration allowed electronic documents to be downloaded. However, only a further 27.3% of the Websites under consideration could probably have usefully used electronic documents – for items on their Webpages such as magazines, articles, preaching plans newcomers’ notes, yearbooks, histories or diaries – so that 25% of those Websites that could have used electronic documents actually did so. This small usage of electronic documents could be due to a number of reasons, such as Webmasters not being aware of the possibility, not having the necessary software at their disposal, not being capable of putting electronic documents onto Websites or not having the time to put electronic documents onto Websites.
- Of those Websites that did contain electronic documents, 100% used ‘.pdf’ files for well-formatted compatibility. This suggests that those Webmasters who do want to put electronic documents onto their Websites are doing so in order to allow users to reproduce the documents in their original format.

Although it is not entirely clear from the research data as to why a small percentage of Websites that might use electronic documents actually do so, it does not seem to be entirely a matter of the Webmasters’ expertise because the two Webmasters who did use electronic documents claimed to have Advanced or Average expertise, whereas the six Webmasters who could potentially have used electronic documents, but did not, claimed to have Advanced (3),

Average (1) or Basic Expertise (2). Other factors might therefore be relevant, such as whether there was a perceived need to use electronic documents and whether the Webmasters had the time to incorporate electronic documents into their designs – though it would arguably take less time to put an existing electronic document onto a Webpage than to enter and format the equivalent amount of text. It is therefore inconclusive as to whether or not the use of electronic documents for the Websites under consideration is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

6.10 *Search Facilities*

For a person who is trying to find specific information on a Website, it can be very helpful to be able to search the whole Website for that information without having to trawl through the Webpages manually. Furthermore, as usability studies by Nielsen (2000, 244) suggested that “slightly more than half of all users are search-dominant”, the provision of a search facility on a Website would seem to be a high priority. Indeed, Krug (2000, 67) suggests that “every page should either have a search box or a link to a search page”. There are different ways of offering Website search facilities to users and Lowe and Hall (1999, 145) note that: “At its very simplest, a trivial keyword match on page titles can be used. At the opposite extreme we have context-dependent searches involving complex search criteria. Additional search functionality is not always desirable (as it) may serve only to distract the user.”

Because a Website search facility can be very useful, Lowe and Hall (1999, 143-144) note that “it is relatively standard practice, especially with Websites, to attach a search engine onto an application once the site has been designed and implemented.” A simple assessment was therefore undertaken to see whether the 22 Websites under consideration included a search facility on their Home Pages, as it would seem to be most likely that users will require a search facility when they are using the Home Page and do not know how to find what they are looking for. The assessment found that only 2 (9.1%) of the 22 Websites under consideration had a search facility available on the Home Page; both of the search facilities consisted of simple boxes into which words could be entered, with one of the search facilities consisting of a search box on the Home Page itself and one being a link from the Home Page to a Webpage containing a search box.

It is not clear why there was so little provision of search facilities for the Websites under

consideration, but the very fact that there was so little provision is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. However, the fact that only 2 of the 22 Websites under consideration provided a search facility does not seem to be entirely a matter of the Webmasters' expertise; the two Webmasters whose Websites did have search facilities claimed to have Advanced or Average expertise, whereas the other twenty Webmasters claimed to have expertise ranging from Expert to Beginner. Other factors might therefore be relevant, such as whether there was a perceived need to incorporate searching, whether the Webmasters had the time to incorporate searching into their designs and whether the ISPs hosting the Websites provide a search capability.

6.11 Email

Austin (2003, 31) suggests that "users are naturally suspicious of any new medium like the Internet, and not including basic familiar contact information does not help ease that feeling in many." It is interesting to note the assertion of Nielsen (2000, 277) that: "email has become popular because it does have some benefits in terms of being able to communicate outside the barriers of time and space." Furthermore, as Huberman (2001, 39) asserts that "the link structure of the Web implies the existence of communities that share common interests", it could be that the provision of an email facility on a Webpage might not only be reassuring to users, but might also encourage in them a sense of belonging or engagement with the person or organisation behind the Website, rather than users feeling that they are interacting impersonally with the computer. Assuming that emails received via a local Methodist church Website will actually be answered, then the provision of a contact facility via email would seem to be an essential design feature of these Websites and Austin (2003, 31) even suggests that "including contact details on all pages that make up your site to ensure that visitors always have immediate and easy access to contact you".

Design Principles for the Use of Email

Table 6.12 (overleaf) shows the design principles for the use of email contact that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them.

Table 6.12

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Email contact facility available	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)
Email contact on every Webpage	5 of 20 (25%)	15 of 20 (75%)

Conformity to Design Principles for the Use of Email

The high number of local Methodist church Websites that had email contact facilities suggests that it is a Website design priority for most Webmasters to enable people to be able to make contact via email. However, it should be noted that 2 of the Websites did not use the most efficient way of enabling email contact – which is to include a ‘mailto’ link that automatically calls up an email dialogue. Therefore, a total of 81.8% of Websites enabled email contact using the mailto dialogue to automatically call up the local Methodist church’s email address, 9.1% of Websites allowed email contact that involved copying the church’s textual email address from the Website into an email dialogue and 9.1% of Websites did not allow for email contact. In terms of the provision of email contact facilities, there is therefore only very limited evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

It is notable, however, that of those local Methodist church Websites that had any form of email contact, only 25% had an email contact on every Webpage, which suggests that those local Methodist church Webmasters feel that making email contact is a priority. However, all of the contacts that appeared on every Webpage were for the Webmaster, which would perhaps suggest to users that the priority was for feedback about the Website itself, rather than contact from users related to the church’s mission. Therefore, in being unequally adopted for all Webpages, the use of email for the Websites under consideration is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

6.12 Blogs

Boardman (2005, 100) defines a Blog as a “web-based personal diary – short for ‘weblog’” – and some Websites, such as Typepad (2005), make it their business to provide Blog facilities. Gordon (2006, 33) notes that there are “some 50 million blogs worldwide, and ... the European ‘blogosphere’ is growing by 50,000 new blogs every day.” This popularity is reflected by examples such as David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party, having a

Blog (Webcameron, 2006) – see Appendix 4, Figure A4.13 – and the National Trust organising a national ‘One Day in History’ event (National Trust, 2006) where people were encouraged on to “make history ... by taking part in the biggest blog in history” by sending in Blog entries describing what they had done on 17th October 2006. There has been at least one Blog aimed at Methodists in Great Britain – called ‘the Connexion.net’ – and Blogs could also be used on the Websites of local Methodist churches if Webmasters provided the facility. However, Gordon (2006, 34) notes that “blogging brings risks as well as benefits ... monitoring ... potentially damaging material can be far from easy”; providing a Blog facility might therefore prove problematic for local Methodist church Websites because it could involve a high degree of Webmaster supervision as it could be that people would put things into a Blog on the church’s Website that were rude, defamatory, or at odds with the church’s theological stance, mission priorities or Website policy; as Boardman (2005, 40) notes: “if anyone can publish anything on the Web for next to nothing, where is the quality control?” One of the attractions of Blogs is that they enable free expression of ideas, so to provide a Blog facility that is then censored might not only involve a great deal of time for the Webmaster to look through the Blog entries, but might also deter people from making entries at all. In reporting the findings of her research on computer-mediated group interaction, Taylor (2000, 104) suggested that “more group cohesion was perceived in groups receiving identifying information”, which suggests that Blogs where users are clearly identifiable might promote a sense of community and might be appropriate for local Methodist church Websites.

Design Principles for the Use of Blogs

Given the difficulties of controlling the entries on Blogs, this section notes the existence of Blogs as a feature and, without making a judgment as to their appropriateness for local Methodist church Websites, notes whether or not they are present. Table 6.13 (overleaf) shows how many of the 22 Websites under consideration have Blogs.

Table 6.13

Websites with Blogs	Websites without Blogs
0 (0%)	22 (100%)

Websites using Blogs

Although none of the local church Websites under consideration had Blogs, it is not clear whether this was because the Webmasters decided not to provide them, or whether the Webmasters did not have the expertise to implement them. It is therefore inconclusive as to whether the use of Blogs for the Websites under consideration is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

6.13 Concluding Remarks about Use of Web Design Features

This chapter has built upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, continuing the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This has been done, in this second of four chapters in Part 3 of this thesis, by considering whether there are significant inequalities in the aspects of the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration related to the use of Web design features which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In considering the use of Web design features, a number of differences in the designs of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration were highlighted – principally in the most basic areas of text display, use of colour, use of graphics, use of sound and use of menus. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the other chapters in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – these findings form part of the conclusions that will be drawn, in the context of the macro-missiological framework provided in Part 1 of this thesis, about the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites.

CHAPTER 7 – WEBSITE LAYOUT AND STYLE

Building upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, this chapter continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This chapter, which focuses on Website layout and style, is the third of four chapters which consider whether there are significant inequalities with respect to the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the final chapter in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

At a time when, perhaps due to its accessibility and perhaps due to its sheer amount of available data, people are increasingly look to the Internet as a source of information, it might be thought that producing any form of Website for a local Methodist church would be a good thing. However, it is important to note comments from people such as Kerr (1999, 3), who suggests that “investment of time and resources can be justified by high usage of the resulting resource.” Having designed a church Website, Stephenson (2006, 41) “headed for the church to show it off and to receive praise and awe from the staff. The painful lessons began as awe turned to awful. First, the front page took forever to download over a modem. Then, the pages would not fit on small monitors. On the 256-color monitors at the church, all the cool shading was converted to a huge mosaic of polygons, and the textured background looked horrible.” If a local church Website is to be valued by those who access it, if repeat visits are to be encouraged and if the outcome of the deployment of the Website in terms of the mission of the local church is to be positive, then the amount of time and other resources that are invested in developing the Website will be important factors. Indeed, the experience of car designers¹, and the failure of many badly designed products and facilities to be well-used,

¹ The original Ford Sierra, released in the early 1980s was a case where the supposedly advantageous so-called futuristic design was simply too different for the likes of consumers; it was soon labelled as a

suggests that the achievement of a Website in terms of fulfilling mission objectives might depend largely on the expertise with which it is designed. Indeed, Lowe and Hall (1999, 148) suggest that “many current Websites which contain good content fail badly because the user interface is poorly designed.” Preece (2000, 143) notes two broad types of usability issue: “The first concerns the way software is designed for use by individuals ... Can individuals access the online community, use it, and leave, having satisfactorily achieved their aims in a pleasant way? ... A second concern is how can feedback be provided to give users a sense of who else is active in the community and what they are doing?”

Website technology has progressed a great deal in recent years, so that an increasing number of design features is available to Webmasters. However, the use of many of the Website design features available may not always be wise. Lowe and Hall (1999, 142) note that there is “a strong temptation to use a very broad array of approaches to interact with an application in order to make the application appear sophisticated ... this often leads to an application where the users’ ability to retrieve information is actually hampered”. The simplicity of Website design, rather than being a problem, might therefore be a strength; some people will find using computers and the internet a very daunting experience and as Nielsen (2000, 10) suggests that “web users exhibit a remarkable impatience and insistence on instant gratification”, it could be that even ‘expert’ internet users may not persevere with a particular Website if it seems difficult to use. Perhaps that is why Austin (2003, 13) urges: “devise designs that display quickly, are interesting, engaging, attractive and ‘tuned’ to the interests of your target visitors” and Krug (2000, 11) says that the first law of Website usability is: “Don’t make me think! ... a Web page ... should be self-evident. Obvious. Self-explanatory.” Krug (2000, 13) goes on to say “when you’re creating a site, your job is to get rid of the question marks.” In other words, the fewer difficulties that a user encounters in working out how to use a Webpage, the easier it will be to use. This is because, as Krug

‘jelly mould’ and the Sierra was relatively quickly given a face-lift so that its design was more acceptable to potential buyers. Another manufacturer, Skoda, once had a reputation in the UK for building awful cars known colloquially as ‘skips’, but since the company was taken over by Volkswagen, redesigns have led Aherne (2003, 85-111) to say that they are “highly recommended” in the ‘supermini’, ‘estate car’ and ‘hot hatch’ classes. The new Renault Megane, which was released in 2002, has a rear boot design which many people seem to dislike intensely; the manufacturers seem to have noted this problem, having launched an advertising campaign early in 2003 which showed pictures on billboards of the rear of the car with the slogan “shake it” – presumably a reference to the colloquial expression “shake your booty” which is about people shaking their bottoms – followed by a further, less subtle, television campaign with music about “shaking that ass” and pictures of people shaking their bottoms.

(2000, 15) explains: “when we’re using the Web every question mark adds to our cognitive workload, distracting our attention from the task at hand.” However, recognising the difficulties inherent in Website design, Krug (2000, 19) also suggests that: “Your goal should be for each page to be self-evident ... Sometimes, though, particularly if you’re doing something original or ground-breaking or something very complicated, you have to settle for *self-explanatory* ... it takes a *little* thought to ‘get it’ – but only a little. The appearance of things, their well-chosen names, the layout of the page, and the *small* amounts of carefully crafted text should all work together to create near-instantaneous recognition.”

Krug’s comment about there being small amounts of text is just one of many such comments that are made about the minutiae of Website design by so-called ‘experts’. Much of what is said about the minutiae of Website design by such ‘experts’ is arguably to do with personal preferences – especially when it comes to issues such as choosing the types of font to use for the textual parts of Websites and whether to use ‘serif’ or ‘sans serif’ fonts – see, for example, Faulkner (1998, 23-24)². The design quality of a Website, being an aesthetic attribute, is therefore difficult to assess in an objective way. However, there are a number of discernible Website design principles that are generally applicable, rather than focusing on small details of design, and it is therefore possible to assess how well Website designs conform to such design principles. Blackmore (1999, 59), for example, gives ten design tips for church Web pages which relate to general principles about Webpages being easy to find, use and understand, as well as being up-to-date³. Kerr (1999, 12) also lists some design

2 Faulkner (1998, 23-24) notes that “There has been a lot of work carried out on font design ... Originally, it was argued that serif fonts which have extra strokes on the letters were easier to read than sans serif ... Nowadays, it is argued, because many more fonts are sans serif, readers are accustomed to seeing them and find them just as easy to read as serif fonts. Indeed, some people go even further and argue that sans serif fonts are easier to read than serif fonts ... But it is certainly true that it is bad practice to mix too many fonts.”

3 Blackmore’s ten design tips for church Webpages are: 1) “If the site is for the faithful, make sure there’s also a clear introduction relevant for new people”; 2) “Watch out for jargon or making assumptions about what your audience believes or understands”; 3) “Keep the pages as clean and uncluttered as possible”; 4) “Use a contrasting page background (or white) that makes the text very easy to read”; 5) “Try to keep blocks of text to a minimum, as people’s attention span is far shorter when reading from a screen”; 6) “Decide on a font (or maybe two) and colour scheme to use and then stick to that theme throughout the pages”; 7) “Don’t load your pages with unnecessary images as they will slow down the speed of the page”; 8) Pay attention to navigation buttons: is it simple to browse from page to page without getting lost?; 9) “Don’t forget to submit details of your site to search engines, Christian directories and local community directories”; 10) “Update it. Update it. Update it”.

principles⁴, noting that “there are some aspects of creating and developing a Web site that contribute greatly to its usability, and consequently its success.” Preece (1993, 24) suggests that information should be “legible, distinguishable, comprehensible, uncluttered and meaningfully structured”. Cato (2001, 258-265) carries out a comprehensive exploration of usability which results in a number of suggestions about things to do in order to ensure good usability grouped under the headings of purpose, areas, visual design, the action process, information on a page, and action & interaction.

For the purposes of this thesis, Website design advice has been considered from a number of sources, including: Blackmore (1999); Cato (2001); Faulkner (1998); Kerr (1999); Krug (2000); Lowe and Hall (1999); Nielsen (2000); Nielsen and Tahir (2002); Preece (1993); and Wootton (2003). This study has enabled the derivation of a set of principles against which the Website designs of local Methodist churches will be assessed, all of which are grouped under five headings:

- Aesthetics (pleasure of use);
- Intuitiveness (ease of use);
- Consistency (standardisation of functionality);
- Compactness (size of Website files);
- Completeness (presence of all elements).

The degree to which the designs of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration conform to these design principles will now be explored in the belief that better conformity will result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

7.1 *Aesthetics (pleasure of use)*

In designing any product, there are choices to be made. Some design choices might affect the functionality or performance of the product, but others might only affect the amount of pleasure that can be derived from using the product because of aspects of the design such as the product’s appearance, feel and fashion appeal. Such pleasure-affecting aspects of a product’s

⁴ The Website aspects that Kerr (1999, 12) claims contribute greatly to usability are listed as being: accuracy (of Hyperlinks, text and content), topicality (up-to-date Webpages with information about when they were created and/or updated), accessibility (clear design of content, images and Hyperlinks), completeness (no empty Webpages or Webpages which say something like ‘under construction’) and compatibility (with popular Browsers for Mac and PC).

design are known as aesthetics and Sheppard (1987, 154) suggests that “enriching our aesthetic experience goes together with developing our powers of imagination and understanding.” The benefits of an aesthetically pleasing Website design could therefore be not only that users will feel that using the Website is a good experience, but also that the Website could develop their understanding, fire their imagination and result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. Sheppard (1987, 73) made some observations about tulips which could conceivably also be applied to Websites: “The singular nature of the judgement of taste is relevant here. There are no rules for what counts as beauty in tulips which I can learn and apply and pass on to others. What matters is the experience of this particular tulip.” Applying this principle to Website design would suggest that the nature of such an aesthetically pleasing Website design is somewhat arbitrary because what constitutes a pleasing Website design will not be universally agreed upon. Nevertheless, Cato (2001, 77) asserts that the “objective is to design a useful, effective, efficient and satisfying experience for the user”; if it is possible to design local Methodist church Websites with good aesthetic properties, this should lead users to feel that their experiences of using the Websites are pleasing ones. It is therefore important that some thought goes into local Methodist church Website design in order that users will find such Websites satisfying to use. In the same way that a car assembled from well-designed, purpose-built, parts might please drivers more than a car that has been constructed from an array of spare parts intended for different cars, so one way of satisfying Website users might be to produce a Website that suggests a completeness and structure that was thought through during the design process, rather than giving an impression of having been cobbled together from various disparate pieces; Cato (2001, 105), for example, advises: “Make sure that the whole website holds together as a consonant and consistent whole. Keep all of the elements of the design in harmony with one another.”

There was a broad consensus in the works studied – such as Krug (2000), Levy (2001), Preece (1993) and Wootton (2003) – that the layout of Webpages needs to be well thought out and various suggestions were made about producing good Website layouts. For example: Wootton (2003, 333) suggests that there is a need “to be certain that the user is comfortable and familiar with the elements of the page, even if they are part of a unique design”; Krug (2000, 30) suggests “designing pages for scanning, not reading”; Levy (2001, 16) suggests

that design “comes down to personal taste, but most of us know a turkey when we see one”.⁵ Pleasure of use therefore embraces individual elements of Webpages, Webpages themselves, whole Websites and even the way in which Websites fit with the broader conventions of other Websites. Detailed observations about individual elements of Webpages were made in chapter 6 of this thesis and Website design conventions will be considered in the study of intuitiveness in section 7.2, so this section is therefore limited to the key elements of Website and Webpage layout.

Visual Structure

One aesthetic consideration for Website design is the visual structure of the Webpages – i.e. the way in which information is organised and the effect that this organisation, or lack of it, might have on Website users. Krug (2000, 31) suggests that designers “Create a clear visual hierarchy on each page (and) Break pages up into clearly defined areas”, whereas Wootton (2003, 333) is more prescriptive and divides Webpage design into three areas: header, footer and page content area, suggesting different contents for each of these areas. The appeal of Wootton’s approach is that it gives clear advice as to how to design Webpages, but the sheer variety of applications for which Webpages are designed and the ever-changing world of Website design would suggest that, rather than prescribing a particular Webpage structure in the way that Wootton does, it would be best to adopt an approach like Krug’s, whereby it is simply asserted that a visual structure is necessary. This approach is also consistent with Cato (2001, 73), who suggests that: “any method is better than no method ... group together areas of information and activity, understanding the basic building blocks of the system.”

Home Page Uniqueness

A further aesthetic consideration for Website design is that, despite the need for consistency of style throughout a Website (see section 7.3), the Home Page may have to be unique in

5 There is, however, some disagreement about the layout of Webpages, some of which is due to personal preferences or to changes in technology. Preece (1993, 71) suggests that “grouping similar items in a display together improves readability and can highlight relationships between different groups of data” and suggests the use of colour coding, graphic borders around different groups of information and highlighting using flashing, reverse video, underlining, boldness & brightness. However, Preece’s suggestions about highlighting reflect the available technology when Preece was writing – when many displays were not based on Microsoft® Windows® or other similar interfaces. With the prevalence of colour monitors, the use of flashing, reverse video and brightness to highlight items is not as important now as other techniques can produce more visually pleasing results; the use of underlining could now be very misleading because the convention has become that underlined text is linked to a Hyperlink which will take the user to another Webpage or Website.

some ways in order to make statements about the organisation. Nevertheless, if the Home Page is too different from the rest of the Webpages, then users may have trouble in using the Website. Nielsen (2000, 166) therefore suggests that “home pages and interior pages should share the same style, but there are differences”. The ways in which the Home Page might be unique could include: the lack of a ‘home’ button, since the presence of one could confuse users into thinking that they were not actually on the Home Page; a search feature for those who prefer to search Websites rather than navigating using menus and buttons; a larger organisation logo; the display of any special promotions or news.

Visibility of Information

Another aesthetic consideration for Website design is the ability of users to see all of the information that they need to see. There are three aspects of this: ensuring that no item obscures another; ensuring that information always fits the horizontal viewing area and ensuring that information on long Webpages is easily accessed.

Following the principle of ensuring that no item on a Webpage obscures another item would mean that users will always see the intended content as long as that portion of the Webpage is visible in the Browser window. This principle seems to be taken for granted by people who write about Webpage design as they tend to focus on the elements of design and their proper use, rather than on the ways in which they might be badly used. However, Webpages with items that overlap not only look poorly-designed, but may also become unusable, so Webpages should be tested with as many Browsers and screen configurations as possible in order to ensure that overlapping is not likely to be a problem. However, because an assessment of the display of Webpages with different Browsers has already been carried out in section 5.4, no further assessment of this aspect of aesthetics will be carried out here.

Adopting the principle of ensuring that information should always fit the horizontal viewing area will avoid users having to scroll pages horizontally, as well as eliminating the possibility of users missing content altogether due to it not being visible. Wootton (2003, 331) notes that “pages that are larger than the user’s window size can make for a very frustrating experience ... If a user needs to scroll right-to-left-right in order to read every line of text on your site, you’ve done them a disservice” and Nielsen (2000, 28) suggests that “because there is no way of knowing how large a screen your users have, you should design for all screen

resolutions – in other words, resolution-independent pages that adapt to whatever screen size they are displayed on.” Clearly, Webmasters will have to have the knowledge required in order to implement such design layouts, but if this is not done, it could give a very poor impression of their Websites and could deter many users from visiting them again.

The length of each Webpage is also an important consideration. If Webpages are too long, then users will have to scroll down (and possibly up again and so on) within such Webpages in order to use them – which may not seem to be a problem except that, because Webpages are not as easily to flick through as books, users might begin to feel ‘lost’ within Webpages, might therefore be deterred from exploring too far within long Webpages, and so might not find what they are looking for at all. However, if Webpages are too short, then information may have to be presented to users on multiple Webpages, which can have implications in terms of the time that is required to access the required information. With this in mind, Nielsen (2000, 115) notes that: “After a user has reached a destination page, studies show that he or she will scroll through a few screenfuls if the first screen seems promising. Users will almost never scroll through *very* long pages, though.” Stein (1995, 267) quantifies this, suggesting that “a good rule of thumb is to make a page at least as long as a screen, and not longer than ten screens.” Austin (2003, 29) is even stricter: “Keep your page lengths as short as possible. Try to fit all of the current topic into fewer than 1 or 2 screens ... ensure you don’t force your visitors to scroll down more than 4 screen-heights as an absolute maximum.” In addition, it is possible to help users to navigate within larger Webpages by providing a set of Hyperlinks that work within each long Webpage – perhaps even with a page index at the top, so that the content of long Webpages can be easily assessed when such Webpages are initially displayed and can also be easily accessed. Stein (1995, 267) calls these internal Hyperlinks ‘named anchors’ and says that they can be “extremely useful for managing long pages. If you use internal anchors carefully, you can bend or break the 10-screen limit.” However, Nielsen (2000, 115) suggests that as “scrolling navigation pages are bad for users because they make it impossible to see all the available options at the same time”, so it would seem to be best to limit the Webpage length to 10 screens and, with Austin’s advice in mind, to employ internal anchors on ‘large’ Webpages with more than 4 screens.

Design Principles for Aesthetics

Table 7.1 (overleaf) shows the design principles for aesthetics that are felt to be important for

local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites⁶ under consideration conform to them.

Table 7.1

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
A clear visual structure on the Webpages	15 (68.2%)	7 (31.8%)
A distinctive Home Page, yet similar in style	8 (38.1%)	13 (61.9%)
Webpages should adapt to the horizontal view	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.4%)
Webpages should be between 1 and 10 screens long⁷	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
Named anchor navigation on large Webpages	7 (70.0%)	5 (50.0%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Aesthetics

The data presented in Table 7.1 concerning conformity of the local church Websites under consideration to the design principles for aesthetics does not show any clear evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because, although there was never uniform conformity to the design principles, the data collected in the Research Questionnaires does not conclusively suggest that the experience and expertise of the Webmasters could have affected the aesthetics of their Website designs, so that the design differences are more likely to be attributable to individual design choices. Detailed comments concerning the individual design principles for aesthetics will now be made.

Table 7.1 shows that 68.2% of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration had a clear visual structure on the Webpages. This structure was demonstrated in various ways, including the use of header, footer and other areas, the use of background and text colouring and the deployment of menus and buttons, some of which seemed more aesthetically pleasing than others. However, a significant number of Websites – 31.8% – did not have a clear visual structure because of problems such as: very poor layout; inconsistent layouts; and difficulty

⁶ The nature of some of the Websites meant that it was not always relevant to assess them.

⁷ For assessment purposes, the fact that the length of a Webpage depends upon the horizontal viewing area available (if the Webmaster has, as already advocated, chosen to ensure that the Webpage adapts to the horizontal space available) means that the assessments of the Webpages' lengths was done with the full horizontal space available.

in distinguishing the functionality of the Webpage due to factors such as Hyperlinks being located within text or menu entries not being sufficiently easy to distinguish from ordinary text. The reason for some Webmasters failing to design a clear visual structure would seem to be more to do with the Webmasters' design choices than differences in their design capabilities because all of the Webmasters in question claimed to have design expertise that was either average or advanced and all except 1 of the Webmasters had at least 4 years' Website design experience.

Table 7.1 also shows that only 38.1% of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration had a distinctive Home Page that was similar in style to the Websites' other Webpages. The lack of distinctiveness of the Home Pages was because: 12 of the Home Pages (57.1%) had 'Home' buttons which might lead users to assume that they were not seeing the Home Page (one of these actually had 2 'Home' buttons); 3 of the Home Pages (14.3%) looked so similar to the other Webpages on their Websites, so that users would find it hard to tell that they were seeing the Home Page. Although 2 of the Home Pages did have a search facility, other factors meant that this feature alone did not make them distinctive enough. The majority of Webmasters therefore clearly failed to design Websites that had distinctive Home Pages. The reason for some Webmasters failing to design a distinctive Home Page seems to be to do with the Webmasters' design choices because Webmasters with a wide range of design expertise and Website design experience designed Home Pages that were, or were not, sufficiently distinctive and there was therefore no discernible link between the capabilities of the Webmasters and the distinctiveness of the Home Pages.

It can also be seen from Table 7.1 that only 63.6% of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration had Webpages that adapt to the horizontal viewing area and thereby allow users to see all of the information available without having to scroll horizontally. The reason for some Websites not adapting to the horizontal viewing area seems to be to do with the Webmasters' design choices – not only because Webmasters across the range of Website design experience and expertise chose either to adapt or not to adapt their Webpages horizontally, but also because the software used did not have a uniform impact on horizontal adaptation (although none of the minority of Webmasters who used Serif software or HTML to design their Websites had horizontally-adapting Webpages, there was a clear mix of strategies for horizontal adaptation used by the majority of Webmasters who used

Frontpage® and Dreamweaver software).

Table 7.1 also draws out the fact that only 81.8% of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration had Webpages that were between 1 and 10 screens long. This means that a significant percentage of Webmasters (18.2%) either failed to see the disadvantage of maintaining a small page length, or assumed that the topics on their long Webpages were interesting enough to hold users' attention. The reason for some Webmasters exceeding the limit of 10 screens seems to be to do with the Webmasters' design choices, rather than their design capabilities because, even though the Webmasters in question claimed to have design expertise that was either basic, average or advanced, all of the Webmasters had at least 2 years' Website design experience.

Finally, Table 7.1 shows that, of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which had Webpages more than 4 screens long, 70% used named anchors on large Webpages and 50% did not. (The reason for the percentages adding up to more than 100 is that some Websites contained long Webpages that used named anchors along with other Webpages that did not.) This means that a significant percentage of Webmasters (i.e. 50%) either failed to see the advantage of using named anchors or did not know what they were, or how they could be implemented. The reason for some Webmasters failing to use named anchors seems to be to do with the Webmasters' design choices, rather than their design capabilities, because all of the Webmasters in question claimed to have design expertise that was either average or advanced and all of the Webmasters had between 2 and 7 years' Website design experience.

7.2 *Intuitiveness (ease of use)*

The nature of the World Wide Web is such that, subject to the limits imposed by the physical infrastructure, hardware and software technology, users are free call up Websites from a wide range of sources and for a wide range of reasons. In doing so, the fact that Webpages may be designed by people with a variety of skills, backgrounds, levels of training and understanding, means that users may then be faced with Webpages that appear with a whole host of different layouts. Some of these Websites may be easier for users to employ than others, which is why the quality of intuitiveness – the degree to which a Website enables users to instinctively operate a Website, whether for the first time or on subsequent occasions, without having to spend a lot of time and effort trying to work out what to do – can be very

important. Indeed, as Preece (2000, 229) notes: “the Web is full of competing attractions, and people will not hang around a site if the experience there is not satisfying!” Faulkner (1998, 56) suggests that: “A good interface appears to be natural, it should seem to be an appropriate way of performing a task” – the implication being that designing Webpages for intuitiveness involves taking a logical approach that springs from an understanding both of existing conventions and of human behaviour. Aspects of intuitiveness that will therefore be examined in this section are: logical similarity; abbreviations and jargon; data formats; colour conventions; and Hyperlinks.

Logical Similarity

Logical similarity as an aspect of intuitiveness is about the way in which the grouping of the Website design features which have already been explored in chapter 6 is done. This is important because these features might be used in ways which might help or hinder users who are trying to understand the functionality of Webpages. For example, it is possible to display navigation buttons as textual or graphical objects, each of which can be:

- Scattered around a Webpage – which might make it hard for users to immediately see that the buttons are there, or that there are buttons with similar functionality;
- Grouped in particular parts of a Webpage – which might make it easy for users to see that the buttons in the group do similar things;
- Coloured and styled similarly (implying similar functionality) or differently (implying different functionality);
- Labelled meaningfully to give the users a very good idea of what they do (e.g. ‘Worship’, ‘Outreach’, ‘Charity’) or obscurely, giving users hardly any idea what they do (e.g. ‘Page 1’, ‘Page 2’, ‘Page 3’);

Austin (2003, 30) uses The Hungersite (2004) as an example of the way in which buttons in the form of tabs across the top of a Webpage can be an aid to navigation, while Preece (1993, 77) notes that colour can be effective for segmenting a display into separate regions, search and detection tasks and enhancing the legibility of a symbol against its background. It would therefore seem to make sense to group logically similar buttons together (e.g. navigation within a Website separate from navigation outside of a Website) and to ensure that logically similar items are similarly displayed.

Abbreviations and Jargon

The second aspect of Website design that can affect intuitiveness is the use of abbreviations and jargon. With the relatively small amount of visible space available for each Webpage, it might be tempting to use abbreviations and jargon in order to shorten text or to describe buttons. Such a strategy could be problematic because, as Gowers (1977, 106) suggests that “using jargon is a dangerous habit; it is easy to forget that the public do not understand it ... those seeking enlightenment will find themselves sinking into even deeper obscurity.” For example, Christians often confuse ‘evangelical’ (which describes a set of values that a Christian might hold dear in the same way that ‘liberal’ and ‘catholic’ Christians hold certain values dear) with ‘evangelistic’ (which is about activities and events designed to make Christian converts), so that Websites using these terms might actually confuse people if the terms themselves are not explained. Similarly, some Christians put ‘GNB’ or ‘NIV’ or other abbreviations after biblical quotes to denote which version of the Bible they are from, but not everybody – especially not non-Christians or newer Christians – might know that ‘GNB’ means ‘Good News Bible’ and ‘NIV’ means ‘New International Version’. Only appropriate use of abbreviations and jargon should therefore be made – which means that all abbreviations and jargon should either be explained on local Methodist church Websites, or should be avoided altogether – particularly as such Websites are generally aimed both at people inside of and at people outside of churches.

Data Formats

A further aspect of Website design that can affect intuitiveness is the display of data; in order to help Website users, attempts should be made to display data in formats that are recognisable. Particular complications arise with currencies, dates and times because they are conventionally formatted differently in certain countries and this might cause confusion to users.

Currency information can easily be misinterpreted by users in different countries for a number of reasons. The first problem could be that if amounts of money are mentioned without any denomination, then they could be understood in different ways by different users – for example, does ‘1000’ mean ‘£1000’, ‘\$1000’, ‘€1000’ or 1000 units of an entirely different currency? Furthermore, although it should be clear to most people that the ‘€

symbol means ‘Euros’, the ‘£’, and ‘\$’ symbols are more open to confusion. For example, ‘a thousand dollars’ is not the same in Canada as in the USA and ‘a thousand pounds’ is not the same in England as in Egypt.⁸ Similar problems could arise for other currencies like Krona and Krone that are used in more than one country. International conventions have tried to get over this problem so that \$ is generally taken to mean US dollars, whereas Canadian dollars would be written ‘Can \$’. A better system would seem to be that of using unique abbreviations; some Websites, such as Reuters Currency Converter (2005), use abbreviations like GBP for British Pounds, EGP for Egyptian Pounds, USD for United States Dollars and CAD for Canadian Dollars – though such abbreviations on their own will not necessarily be easy for those who are unfamiliar with them to understand. For the local Methodist church Websites under consideration, it could be suggested that all currency amounts would naturally be taken to be British Pounds, but then some Webpages could conceivably talk about international projects which require sums of money that are described in different currencies.⁹ The safest advice is therefore always to make clear which currency is meant, either by writing sums in English – ‘British Pounds’ or ‘Canadian Dollars’ – or, if symbols are used, then to put a note somewhere on the Webpage explaining which currency is being referred to.

Dates also need to be formatted so that users can easily understand them. It might be argued that the meaning of a date will always be obvious to users and yet, where history is concerned or people from different countries might access a website, this is by no means certain. For example, a Webpage that recounts the history of a church might begin with some information about the church opening in 1886. Later on, a paragraph about the church’s ministers might mention that the church’s most famous minister was Rev. Kenneth Andrews who came to the church on 1/7/86, but it would not be clear whether that was 1986 or 1886. Even writing the figures denoting years in full could cause problems because the Gregorian (Western/Christian) calendar which is meant to begin in the year of Christ’s birth¹⁰ has

⁸ On 14th October 2005, Reuters Currency Converter (2005) reported that 1000 British Pounds was equivalent to 10080.70000 Egypt Pounds.

⁹ In a Website originating in the UK, it cannot be assumed that GB Pounds (£) are being referred to because a Webpage talking about aid to Africa could legitimately refer to the local African currency or currencies, or even to US Dollars (\$) or Euros (€).

¹⁰ It is not clear exactly when Jesus was born. Kasper (1977, 26) asserts that: “Jesus of Nazareth lived in Palestine sometime between 7 BC and 30 AD.”

different year numbers to systems used elsewhere, such as by Muslims¹¹ and Jews¹². Nevertheless, the Gregorian calendar is so widely used, that it is acceptable for British Websites – and especially local Methodist church Websites which should surely use the Christian dating system – to use it without further explanation. Similarly, Americans and people in other countries tend to state dates in different ways, so that what British people would refer to as ‘September 9th’ would be called 9th September in America – hence the terrorist attack on New York is referred to as ‘9/11’ by the Americans, but they mean September 11th, not 9th November, which is why Nielsen (2000, 318) suggests that: “The date of an event should not be given a notation like 4/5 ... It is always better to spell out the name of the month in any dates than to use the shorter notation.” Even though the Websites under consideration are those of local Methodist churches in England, the increased internationalisation of our culture and the ability of people to access Websites from around the world means that it is best to follow Nielsen’s advice, displaying dates in full – e.g. ‘11th October 2005’, rather than ‘11/10/05’. If there is little room for the date then, for dates in the current year, or even a few months into the next year, it would seem sensible to follow the advice of Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 181), who suggest that leaving out the year “would allow room for spelling out the name of the month, which makes the date format more international.”

Time information is also open to misinterpretation, in that ‘12:00’ might mean 12AM or 12PM and then might relate to an entirely different time zone to that of the Website user. Nielsen (2000, 318) therefore suggests that “times listed on a web page should – at a minimum – always make it clear whether they are given in the AM/PM system or the 24-hour system ... and which time zone they refer to.” For the local Methodist church Websites under consideration though, despite the fact that people can access them from around the world, it can safely be assumed that times are local time – whether GMT or BST. However, it is best for these Websites to distinguish between ‘AM’ and ‘PM’, as there is no simple way

11 The Islamic year is denoted AH (*anno Hegirae*, in the year of the Hijra); speaking of Muhammad, Rippon (1990, 33) asserts that: “The move to Yathrib is referred to as the *hijra* (‘emigration’ or ‘flight’) and the year in which it happened (622) serves as the focal point of the Muslim calendar.”

12 The Hebrew year is denoted AM (*Anno Mundi*, in the year of the world); Jewfaq (2007) asserts: “In the fourth century, Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar, still in use, standardized the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. Adar I is added in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of the cycle. The current cycle began in Jewish year 5758 (the year that began October 2, 1997).”

of denoting that the 24-hour clock system is being used.

Colour Conventions

Another aspect of intuitiveness that affects Website design is that of colour conventions. Such conventions are used in everyday life, for example in the choice of the colour green to indicate it being alright to proceed (e.g. green traffic lights or temporary ‘go’ signs at road works) as opposed to the colour red indicating having to stop because of a potential danger (e.g. red traffic lights, car brake lights). Although some software does not conform to such conventions,¹³ designing a Website that uses green and red the other way round could cause problems (e.g. a green button marked ‘delete’ might be too readily be seen as something that had to be done without too much thought – so might quickly be pressed, causing a user to ruin some data, whereas marking the button in red might cause the user to pause and consider the implications of the action.) Preece (1993, 76) suggests that colour can be used in a number of ways, including relating objects to their real-world counterparts (e.g. blue for sky), capitalising on existing conventions (e.g. red for danger, green for ‘go’) and to give additional coding. The key consideration as far as Website design is concerned is that, where Webmasters can choose colours for their Webpages, existing colour conventions should be used wherever possible.

Hyperlinks

There are a number of intuitiveness issues to do with Hyperlinks, arising from the fact that textual Hyperlinks have conventionally been displayed underlined – with blue text when they have not been used recently and purple text when they have. In this section, however, Hyperlinks will not be covered further as they will be considered as part of the study of consistency in section 7.3. A further issue is the way in which some graphical Hyperlinks are generally indicated by a change of cursor, but this is an issue to do with the behaviour of Browsers, rather than Website design, and so does not need to be considered in this thesis.

Design Principles for Intuitiveness

Table 7.2 shows the design principles for intuitiveness that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under

13 A software package called Sonic DigitalMedia LE v7 which is for making CDs and DVDs and was released by Sonic Solutions in 2004 has a large round red button alongside a message “Click button to continue”.

consideration conform to them:

Table 7.2

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Display logically similar items in similar ways	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)
Avoid or explain abbreviations and jargon	11 (50.0%)	11 (50.0%)
Use recognisable data formats	17 (77.3%)	7 (22.7%)
Always use existing colour conventions	22 (100%)	0 (0.0%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Intuitiveness

The conformity of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration to the design principles for intuitiveness as shown in Table 7.2 suggests that, despite the ability of the vast majority of Webmasters to design Websites that display logically similar items in similar ways, there are significant differences in the way in which Webmasters treat abbreviations and jargon and some differences in the way in which Webmasters apply data formats. This is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. Detailed comments concerning the individual design principles for intuitiveness now follow.

Table 7.2 shows that 95.5% of the Websites displayed logically similar items in similar ways. The exception was a very jumbled Website in which it was hard to pick out individual elements or items without closely studying the whole of the Webpage. The Webmaster concerned was male – as were the majority of Webmasters – and claimed to have average expertise, but 0 years of Website design. This suggests that the vast majority of Webmasters have a good grasp of the logical organisation of Webpages and that the one exception was due to lack of experience.

Table 7.2 also shows that 50% of the Websites under consideration avoided or explained abbreviations and jargon and 50% did the opposite. Some examples of the problems encountered were:

- Unexplained phrases such as ‘Local Ecumenical project’, ‘Covenant service’, ‘healing service which includes the laying on of hands’, ‘the word of God’, ‘the Good News’, ‘a fully united Local Ecumenical Project’ and ‘light party’;

- Unexplained abbreviations such as ‘PA’ (meaning public address system – though it is also commonly used to abbreviate Personal Assistant), ‘MAYC’ (meaning Methodist Association of Youth Clubs), ‘L.E.P.’ (meaning Local Ecumenical Partnership/Project) and ‘YF’ (meaning Youth Fellowship – though the context also suggested Young Families);
- Unexplained words such as ‘Westerley’ (the name of a residential care home), ‘ecumenical’ and ‘intercessions’.

The non-compliant Websites were designed by Webmasters who claimed to have expertise ranging from Beginner to Advanced and experience of between 0 and 8 years, so there is no obvious explanation for these problems, except that the Webmasters were probably unaware that some people might find the phrases, abbreviations or words confusing. Therefore, the underlying cause of these problems seems to be to do with the Webmasters’ design capabilities in that they have not been educated about these potential pitfalls.

In addition, Table 7.2 shows that 77.3% of the Websites used recognisable data formats. Of particular note is that many Websites used the am/pm convention for times and fully wrote out dates. Two Websites even gave international dialling codes for those who might need to contact the church from abroad. The non-compliant Websites all failed to use the am/pm system for times and were all designed by Webmasters who claimed to have either Basic or Average expertise and experience of between 0 and 5 years, so there is no obvious explanation for these problems except that the Webmasters did not have the necessary design capabilities. A common problem in Websites deemed not to conform to the design principle for data formats was that a mix of time formats was used – sometimes with am/pm and sometimes without – such that times could only be accurately deduced from the context of the information (e.g. that it is a morning / evening event). Although a number of Websites did use the ‘£’ sign to denote currency, without saying which currency this referred to, this was not felt to be a problem because the information always clearly related to the British context.

Finally, Table 7.2 shows that 100% of the Websites never went against existing colour conventions. This finding is not that significant in that no situations were actually identified within the Websites where existing colour conventions needed to be followed.

7.3 *Consistency (standardisation of functionality)*

Design consistency is important if users are to be able to move from one Webpage to another within a Website and to easily be able to understand how to use the new Webpage that has been displayed. Garrett (2002, 150) suggests that “a successful design is not merely a collection of small, well-designed objects; rather, the objects should form a *system* that operates as a cohesive, consistent whole.” Without such consistency, there is the potential for users to become confused about the functionality and purpose of Webpages, or the potential for users to stop using a Website because it becomes too taxing mentally to work out what to do on each Webpage. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Cato (2001, 105) also suggests that designers should “make sure that the whole website holds together as a consonant and consistent whole”.

An important aspect of consistency is that of the use of design conventions which are used for other Websites – for example, Austin (2003, 23) advocates “carefully worded headlines placed at the top of your pages, at every vertical screen height, and at other key locations”; Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 52-53) recommend that it is essential that Home Pages should have features such as a logo in the upper left, a white search box in the upper part of the page and something about the ‘company’. Another convention that has followed on many Webpages is to put navigation menus on the left, but this is not now as prevalent due to a growing trend of putting navigation tabs at the top of Webpages – see, for example, The Hungersite (2004), Tesco.com (2004), Amazon.co.uk (2005) and Easyjet.co.uk Bookings (2005)¹⁴. The Webpages are shown in Figures A4.6, A4.11(1), A4.1 and A4.4 respectively of Appendix 4. Many of the conventions to do with Website design have not come about because of the introduction of mechanisms for standardisation, but have become conventions by virtue of the fact that ideas implemented by individual Webmasters have been widely accepted as being good and have therefore been adopted by other Webmasters – such as the convention of having a menu of Hyperlinks down the left-hand side of Webpages to enable users to navigate to other Webpages within the Website and the navigation tabs used on Amazon.co.uk (2005) that have been emulated by other Websites, such as Tesco.com

¹⁴ The Easyjet Bookings Webpage even puts little icons on its tabs to help users to understand both with pictures and words what the functionality of the tabs is.

(2004).¹⁵ Following existing conventions is very important in that it should help users to quickly understand how to use a Website with which they are unfamiliar, so Garrett (2002, 89-90) suggests that: “Using conceptual models people are familiar with makes it easier for them to adapt to an unfamiliar site. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with breaking with convention either – as long as you have good reason for doing so”. Breaking with conventions for the sake of it can be dangerous, though, especially if a Website user perceives that the Website is following accepted conventions and the Website then behaves differently; when most Websites use coloured, underlined text for Hyperlinks, users will not expect to find similarly-coloured underlined text that is not actually used for Hyperlinks. A safe approach would seem to be that advocated by Krug (2000, 36): “innovate when you *know* you have a better idea ... but take advantage of conventions when you don’t.” As conventions change, then, for consistency with current design conventions it is important for Webmasters to remain abreast of developments and to change their Websites accordingly in order to avoid their Websites looking outdated. As some Website conventions – such as the possibilities for layouts and styles that can be easily implemented – are either suggested or enforced by Website design software, inexperienced Webmasters might therefore adopt them because it is easiest to do so. Unfortunately, though, if Webmasters do not update their Website design software when adopting this approach, they could eventually end up producing Websites conforming to out-of-date layout conventions which might then become harder for people to use as conventions change. Consistency with design conventions used for other Websites will always be hard to apply because these conventions change with the availability of new techniques and fashions, but the Website design conventions for individual Web design features have still been considered as far as possible in the detailed appraisal of Website design features in chapter 6.

Whatever conventions are used for a particular local Methodist church Website, it is clearly important for them to be applied consistently in order to assist users and to enhance the users’ experience of using that Website. Examples of consistency within a Website are: the way in which input is solicited; Hyperlink conventions for identifying which images are ‘clickable’

15 Although the dates of the references to amazon.co.uk (2005) and tesco.com (2004) might be taken to suggest that Tesco used the Webpage tabs first, these dates simply denote the date in which the Websites were accessed to check that their designs were as they were thought to be. Interestingly, the US-based Amazon.com (2005) had so many store categories that it had just three tabs at the top of its Homepage, one of which expanded to show all of the categories – see Figure A4.2 in Appendix 4.

and for the style and colour of text Hyperlinks;¹⁶ conventions for font styles, sizes and colours. A further Website convention might be the variation of conventions throughout the Website according to the place of a Webpage within the Website hierarchy and the function of the Webpage; for example, Cato (2001, 124) notes how “Amazon has used a simple and subtle approach of color cues to indicate different areas” – though none of the Websites under consideration used this approach, perhaps because they all had a relatively small number of Webpages. The remainder of this section will therefore consider the following aspects of design consistency within the local Methodist church Websites under consideration: user input, style and Hyperlinks.

User Input

The method provided for user input can be a key element of consistency because users can become confused if different methods of input are required of them. Faulkner (1998, 56) suggests that the user interface “should be consistent in its requirements for input and have consistent mechanisms for the user to make any demands on the system ... The user should not be expected to learn one method for one area of the system and then another for somewhere else ... There should be a consistent format for menus, messages and so on.”

This principle, when applied to Webpages, suggests that navigation buttons, menus and input boxes, however constructed, should be consistent in style, colour and function across similar Webpages within a Website in order that once a user has understood how to use one of the Website’s Webpages, he or she will then understand how to use all of them.

Style

A further element of consistency is the style of the Web design elements used on the Webpages. One aspect of this consistency is to ensure that one of the powerful features of 21st Century computers – the way in which they enable people to select from a large number of font sizes, colours and designs – does not get out of control. The detailed design principles for fonts have already been studied in section 6.1, but Websites have the potential to become very inconsistent if too many fonts, font sizes and font colours are used, which could result in

16 Navigation Hyperlinks help Website users in maintaining a sense of their position within the Website – often with the use of ‘context information’ in the form of Hyperlinks to Webpages ‘above’ the current Webpages or to Webpages which are conceptually ‘branches on the same level’. The research undertaken by Park and Kim (2000, 214) showed the importance of such context information: “participants with the context information visited fewer nodes repeatedly, and therefore visited fewer pages in total.”

a Website that does not look very coherent and is difficult to use. Perhaps this is one reason why Nielsen (2000, 81) suggests “a single style sheet for all the pages on your site ... to ensure visual continuity as the user navigates your site.” Such style sheets are usually called ‘Cascading Style Sheets’ and Mason (2003, 59) notes that they allow “control of font, color, text, and the ‘box model’ of content/padding/border/margin”.¹⁷ Some Webmasters may not have the technical knowledge to use Cascading Style Sheets, or may even feel that the time and effort involved in implementing them is not justifiable for their Website if it is relatively small. Therefore, whether or not Cascading Style Sheets are used, Cato (2001, 105) suggests that Webmasters should “keep all of the elements of the design in harmony with one another”, ensuring that font, line, colour, text and other styles are replicated throughout.

Hyperlinks

The properties of Hyperlinks give them the potential to be self-explanatory, such that Wootton (2003, 328) notes: “when you hover over a hyperlink (the) cursor generally changes from a pointer to a hand. This kind of feedback tells the user that there is a hyperlink there, regardless of the colour of the ink or even lack of underlines.” The point is well made, but it can be very difficult to use a Webpage if it is not clear where the Hyperlinks are located; an example from the Webpages that were studied for this research is that of Trinity Church, Harrow (2004) – see Figures A3.20(1) and A3.20(2) in Appendix 3 – which not only had underlined textual hyperlinks scattered around the Webpage along with small graphics – some of which also served as Hyperlinks and some of which did not – but also had blue underlined text serving as a header, rather than a Hyperlink as would conventionally be expected (for an explanation of text Hyperlink conventions, see the next paragraph). Therefore, although Hyperlinks provide an excellent way of enabling users to select different Webpages or Websites, there is potential for users to become confused if Hyperlinks are not displayed clearly and consistently.

For text Hyperlinks, Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 53) make the recommendation that it is essential that the colours are different for visited and unvisited links. This convention seems to be widespread on Websites, so it would seem a sensible one to adopt. Nielsen and Tahir

¹⁷ This definition relates to the CSS Level 1 definition of Cascading Style Sheets (CSS1), though Mason (2003, 59) also notes that CSS2 “adds more functionality, such as media types ... additional positioning control, more internationalization features, generated content, and cursor controls.”

(2002, 53) also make suggestions about the colours of visited and unvisited links and about link underlining. The convention of link underlining is also widespread – Nielsen (2000, 195) suggests that “it is usually best to represent links as underlined text, keeping the standard link colours of blue for links to unvisited pages and purple for links to pages the user has seen before” and Austin (2003, 46) says: “Don’t underline text just to add emphasis (unless it’s a hyperlink). Instead consider using *italics* or **boldface** formatting”. Although the colouring and underlining of Hyperlinks tends to be done by Browsers, in order to avoid confusion it would seem sensible to insist that blue and purple text is not used on Webpages and that text underlining is confined to Hyperlinks. The appearance of Hyperlinks can also be chosen in order to aid users: textual Hyperlinks should always use the same text and URL for a given Hyperlink throughout a Website so that what the user sees, both in terms of text and colouring, will be consistent; graphical Hyperlinks should use the same graphic for a given Hyperlink throughout a Website.

Design Principles for Consistency

Table 7.3 shows the design principles for consistency that are felt to be important for Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the local Methodist church Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 7.3

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Consistent means of user input	22 (100%)	0 (0.0%)
Webpages use the same style (except special pages)	10 (47.6%)	11 (52.4%)
Consistency of Hyperlinks (colour, text/image)	10 (45.5%)	12 (54.5%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Consistency

The conformity of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration to the design principles for consistency as shown in Table 7.3 suggests that, although all of the Webmasters used consistent approaches to user input, the majority of the local Methodist church Webmasters failed to be consistent in their use of style and of Hyperlinks. This is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. Detailed

comments concerning the individual design principles for consistency now follow.

Table 7.3 shows that 100% of the Websites employed consistent means of user input. That is not to say that all of the means of user input were similar, or even that they were all easy to use, but within the Websites there was a consistency which meant that users moving within the Websites would know what was expected of them in terms of using navigation buttons, menus and – where applicable – input boxes.

Table 7.3 also shows that there are differences in the Webmasters' design capabilities because only 47.6% of Websites used the same style throughout, except for special Webpages. This means that the majority of Websites – 52.4% – had inconsistencies in the use of style. The problems that were observed included: changes in colouring and headers; changes in font sizes and styles; some Webpages lacking headers; inconsistent styles of Webpage headers and sub-headers; differences in text colours; different background styles; the use of very different styles for some Webpages.

Finally, Table 7.3 shows that there are differences in the Webmasters' design capabilities because only 45.5% of Websites used Hyperlinks consistently, so the majority of Websites – 54.5% – had inconsistencies in the use of Hyperlinks. The problems that were most often observed were the use of underlined text when there was no Hyperlink (36.4%) and the use of text Hyperlinks without them being underlined (27.3%). In addition, a few Websites were inconsistent in their approach to graphical Hyperlinks and one Website told users to click some underlined text, but this was not a Hyperlink.

7.4 *Compactness (size of Website files)*

The aspects of Website layout and style that have been considered so far have all been to do with the way in which users will perceive and understand what appears on their computer screens. The compactness of Websites, however, is to do with the way in which the users' perceptions of Websites are influenced by the speed with which they are displayed. The faster speed of CPUs and graphics processors on modern personal computer systems means that the display of Webpages for users of the Internet is generally limited by the amount of data comprising the Webpages and the speed of the computer's link to the Internet, rather than by the speed of CPUs or graphics processors. As the download time of Webpages is

directly related to the speed of data transfer,¹⁸ the benefit of a compact Website design is that Webpages will download more quickly and users will not be kept waiting for too long a time before they see the Webpages that they request.

For a Home Page, Austin (2003, 22) suggests: “ensure your Home page downloads within about 25-30 seconds using a 28.8kbps modem – ideally within 10 seconds.” This 10 second rule is not an arbitrary figure, though; Austin (2003,22) also notes that “recent studies suggest we’re getting more impatient and may move on to another website if we don’t get sufficient visual payback within 10 seconds of the page starting to load!” Perhaps it is for the same reason that Nielsen and Tahir (2002, 52) also make an ‘essential’ recommendation of: “At most 10 seconds at the prevalent connection speed for your customers. For 56kbps modem users, this means a total Webpage file size of less than 50kB.”¹⁹ Nielsen (2000, 48) unpacks this a bit more: “The one-second response-time limit is required for users to feel that they are moving freely through the information space. Staying below the 10-second limit is required for users to keep their attention on the task.” In 2004, Broadband internet access started to become more widely used in homes, offering modem speeds of 512k bits per second, or even 1Mbps, but many users were still using modems with connection speeds of 56k bits per second, or even 28k bits per second. Nielsen (2000, 48) notes that anything slower than 1.5Mbps will result in usability problems, but suggests that a page size of 34kB is necessary to minimise the number of modem users who will become frustrated by the slow download of Webpages and so try something else instead.

In July 2005, it was announced by Ofcom (2005) that “for the first time, there are now more households with broadband than dial-up internet connections.” This suggests that, early in 2004, when the research into local Methodist church Websites was conducted, the majority of internet connections were still either 28kbps or 56kbps dial-up modems. With this in mind, along with the problems noted with the roll-out of faster broadband connections in section 6.3, it would certainly seem sensible for the Home Page, being the first that most users will

18 The terms used to measure data transfer relate to the basic unit of data exchange for computers, which is the ‘bit’ – a data item having the value of 0 (i.e. ‘off’) or 1 (i.e. ‘on’). A Byte comprises 8 such bits and a KiloByte comprises 1024 Bytes (1024 is 2^{10}). A modem which has a speed of 56Kbps can transfer $(56 \times 1024) = 57344$ bits per second and $(56 \times 1024 / 8) = 7168$ Bytes per second. Some of the data transferred will be for protocols (e.g. to allow for consistency checks), hence the recommendation of a maximum Webpage size of 50KB in order to allow for transfer in 10 seconds using a 56kbps modem.

19 A Webpage’s file size comprises the size of the Webpage’s html file along with the sizes of all of the components which make up the page (e.g. graphics files, sound files, etc.). In order for a Webpage to be displayed and to be usable, all of these files need to be downloaded.

see, to be designed to meet Nielsen's recommendation of a page size of 34kB in order that users of slower internet connections would not give up while waiting for the requested Home Page to appear. It will not be as critical for other Webpages to be quite as small because users will probably tolerate a longer wait once they have accessed a Website and know what they are trying to do within it – so a doubling of the size might be allowed for other Webpages (though Webpages designed specifically for photograph display can be excluded from this criterion if Thumbnails or appropriately labelled Hyperlinks are used to access these).

Design Principles for Compactness

Table 7.4 shows the design principles for compactness that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them:

Table 7.4

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Total size of Home Page less than 34kB	3 (13.6%)	19 (86.4%)
No other non-photo Webpage larger than 68kB	12 (57.1%)	19 (42.9%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Compactness

The conformity of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration to the design principles for compactness as shown in Table 7.4 suggests that the majority of the local Methodist church Webmasters did not sufficiently consider optimisations to their Home Pages and other Webpages in order to allow them to load faster. This, combined with the differences in optimised or non-optimised elements, is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. Detailed comments concerning the individual design principles for compactness now follow.

Table 7.4 shows that only 13.6% of the Home Pages were less than 34kB in size and so generally avoid user frustration with a 28 or 56Kbps modem. A further 59.1% of the Home Pages were less than 68kB in size, so 72.7% of the Home Pages should still load in a reasonable time with a 28 or 56kbps modem. The elements which significantly increased the

size of the Home Pages were photographs – often of the church – along with page banners, menu button state elements and animations. Of particular concern was that one church photograph – Hertford Methodist Church – was approximately 1.6MB in size, which could take around 4 minutes to download on a 56kbps modem.

Table 7.4 also shows that only 57.1% of Websites had all non-photo Webpages smaller than 68kB and, of these, it was notable that some had used Thumbnails to access larger pictures, or had used pictures which seemed to have been deliberately reduced in size. Nevertheless, 42.9% of the Websites had at least one Webpage that was over 68kB though, to be fair, all of those Websites only had a few Webpages that were so large. The main cause of Webpages exceeding 68kB was the use of a number of relatively large images, though other causes included: the use of a single large image (e.g. a map); the accumulated size of a number of small images – including too many Thumbnails; the use of large graphical background images; the use of graphical Hyperlinks whose combined size was quite large, the use of animations and the use of a java script for menus.

7.5 *Completeness (presence of all elements)*

The completeness of a Website is something that might easily be overlooked by Webmasters, but that is essential if users are to have a good experience of using a Website and are therefore to be more likely to return to it.

The obvious way of determining whether a Website is complete is to see whether there are any Webpages that are designated ‘under construction’ and are thus signalled by the Webmaster as not yet being complete. Stein (1995, 282) suggests that it is acceptable for some parts of a Website to be under construction as long as there are clear progress indicators. Such thinking might rely upon a sense that an acknowledgement of incompleteness might be thought to be a good thing in that users might not then feel so negative about the Website and might even feel a desire to return later to see how things are progressing, but such incompleteness will inevitably lead to Website users wasting time calling up Webpages that do not contain the expected information and so might frustrate users in the same way that a sailor might be frustrated by seeing dry land, but never being able to reach it. Kerr (1999, 12) notes that “every good Web site is always under review and in development” and expresses sentiments similar to Nielsen (2000, 164): “Don’t tell users

what you don't have; that's only frustrating ... It's fine to have a small article that talks about future plans ... but ... focus on what a user can do here and now". In addition to not having Webpages that are designated 'under construction', Webmasters should also ensure that they do not leave Webpages blank in order to avoid the possibility of confusing users because of their uncertainty as to whether the blank page is intentional due to the Website being under construction, or is some form of unintentional error.

A second aspect of Website completeness is that all of the data that is necessary for the Website's Webpages to appear and function correctly should be present; if data is missing or corrupted, then Webpages might appear without certain elements or an error message or a fragment of HTML code might appear; an example of HTML code appearing in error is Philishave Registration (2005b) – see Figure A4.7(2) of Appendix 4 – which appeared after trying to register in United Kingdom English from Philishave Registration (2005a) – see Figure A4.7(1) of Appendix 4 – though this error does seem, as suggested, to have been due to a Web server error, rather than poor Webpage design, because a functioning Webpage, Philishave (2005c) – see Figure A4.7(3) of Appendix 4 – appeared the following day. Whilst it is not possible for Webmasters to guarantee the availability of the Web servers that support their Webpages, or of any external Websites that their Websites are linked to, it is possible for Webmasters to check that their Websites do not have missing files or any Hyperlinks that do not work and that their Webpages seem to display correctly without showing spurious information such as fragments of HTML code. A more detailed study of Hyperlinks will be carried out in section 8.2, so only the completeness of sets of files will be given further consideration here.

A third aspect of Website completeness is that information should be up-to-date. Just as it would not be very helpful for Website users to try to buy a product from a Website advertising a special offer on its Home Page, only to be told on another Webpage that the product is out of stock, so it would be of little help to users of local Methodist church Websites to find that information about 'next Sunday's services' is for last week, last month, or even last year! Such out of date information would not only be a deterrent to users regularly using a local Methodist church Website for the purposes of finding out 'up to date' information about the church, but it could also call into question, in the minds of the users, the accuracy of all of the other information that they might find on the same Website. With

this in mind, it is clear why Nielsen (2000, 219) shows a screenshot of a Website that he took three days after the end of the conference that it was advertising and suggests that “sites need to have procedures in place to remove outdated information immediately.” In addition, Levy (2001, 71) suggests that “nothing turns off potential visitors more than a tired, predictable, and out of date web site” so, as advocated for Websites in general by Blackmore (1999, 59), Austin (2003, 38) and Kerr (1999, 12), it is very important that local Methodist church Websites should only contain information that is up to date. Nevertheless, ‘up to date’ could arguably mean relative to a time frame of which a part is in the past. For example, if the Webmaster will be unable to update a Website for a while, it would be acceptable to publish information on Websites such as ‘February’s diary’ or ‘current preaching plan’, though in some cases it might be better to substitute general information for time-sensitive information in order that no users would be frustrated by finding information that was out of date.

Design Principles for Completeness

Table 7.5 (overleaf) shows the design principles for completeness that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration conform to them.

The conformity of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration to the design principles for completeness as shown in Table 7.5 suggests that many of the Webmasters were not able to ensure the completeness of their Websites; although the reasons for this are unclear, most of the errors that were observed could have been easily corrected given sufficient time to update Webpages, careful checking of Webpages and the ability to perform simple HTML editing tasks. The findings are evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. Detailed comments concerning the individual design principles for consistency now follow.

Table 7.5

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
No ‘under construction’ or blank Webpages	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)
All required files should be present	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
No spurious information should be displayed	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)
All information should be up-to-date²⁰	12 (54.5%)	10 (45.5%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Completeness

Table 7.5 shows that 72.7% of the Websites under consideration did not have any Webpages that were blank or ‘under construction’. All of the Webpages that were ‘under construction’ gave an unhelpful impression of incompleteness: one of the Websites had very unhelpful message on a Webpage saying “space reserved”; one Webpage gave some incomplete information about an event that had happened five months previously and said “Details later”; one Website had two Webpages that just contained the headers and menus; some Websites had messages on Webpages indicating the nature of the content that would appear.

Table 7.5 also shows that 81.8% of the Websites under consideration did have all of the necessary files present. Of the 18.2% of Websites whose Webpages did not have all of the required files, the errors included a reference to a file on the Webmaster’s computer (which would be undetectable without testing on another computer), incorrect names for picture files (which also might not be detectable without testing on another computer), a missing Webpage and an Applet failing to work.

In addition, Table 7.5 shows that 72.7% of the Websites under consideration did not have any spurious information displayed. Of the 27.3% of Websites whose Webpages did contain some spurious information, the types of information were mainly stray characters, though one Website had some HTML code on a Webpage and one Website had a spurious link to another Webpage that was clearly unnecessary because the same Webpage could be accessed from

20 It was not feasible to assess whether all of the factual information was correct when the Websites under consideration was downloaded, so the assessment as to whether information on the Websites was out of date could only be done by checking whether events and occasions listed were not in the past when the Websites were downloaded.

the Menu on the left of the Webpage.

Finally, Table 7.5 shows that 54.5% of the Websites under consideration had all of their information up-to-date. Some of the information that was considered to be out-of-date included information about individual events that had already happened, a diary for the two months prior to the 'last modified' date displayed on the Website and lists of dates for the 'current' month when the current month was actually a later month than the one shown. Some information about past events could still be considered to be current, such as when information was displayed about whole months or from whole preaching plans – 22.7% of the Websites used this method of keeping data fresh longer, so a total of 68.2% of Websites actually contained information that was about events that had already happened.

What Table 7.5 could not show, however, was that only 36.4% of the Websites conformed to all of the criteria for completeness.

7.6 *Concluding Remarks about Website Layout and Style*

This chapter has built upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, continuing the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This has been done, in this third of four chapters in Part 3 of this thesis, by considering whether there are significant inequalities in the aspects of the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration related to the Website layout and style which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In considering Website layout and style, it became clear that there were significant differences in the designs of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration and a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites in terms of the intuitiveness, consistency, compactness and completeness of the designs were revealed. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the other chapters in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – these findings form part of the conclusions that will be drawn, in the context of the macro-missiological framework provided in Part 1 of this thesis, about the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites.

CHAPTER 8 – WEBSITE STRUCTURAL COMPLEXITY

Building upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, this chapter continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This chapter, which focuses on Website structural complexity, is the last of four chapters which consider whether there are significant inequalities with respect to the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

An important, if perhaps not immediately obvious, aspect of Website design that can be frustrating to users is that, in using a particular Website, a number of Webpages might need to be visited in order to achieve what the user wishes to achieve, so that a user can begin to feel confused as to how the Webpages within the Website fit together in a way that has been described as feeling ‘lost in hyperspace’. Lowe and Hall (1999, 154-155) suggest that: “The idea of being lost in hyperspace is essentially about the user losing an understanding of either their local context or where they are in the information space ... (this) is a significant problem ... it impedes our ability to navigate further. If we do not know where we currently are, then we will have great difficulty finding out how to get elsewhere.” This might seem to be a rather esoteric problem to those who are not familiar with using Websites, but the way in which Websites use Hyperlinks to cross-refer to Webpages and to other Websites can enable a user to perform, in the space of a mere few minutes, tasks similar to looking at many cross-referenced pages within a number of books. This ability to refer to many items through Hyperlinks, coupled with the difficulty for users of understanding the boundaries of Websites, can cause the sensation of feeling lost. However, the feeling of being ‘lost in hyperspace’ can be reduced if Websites are structured well; such structuring should result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design and the three

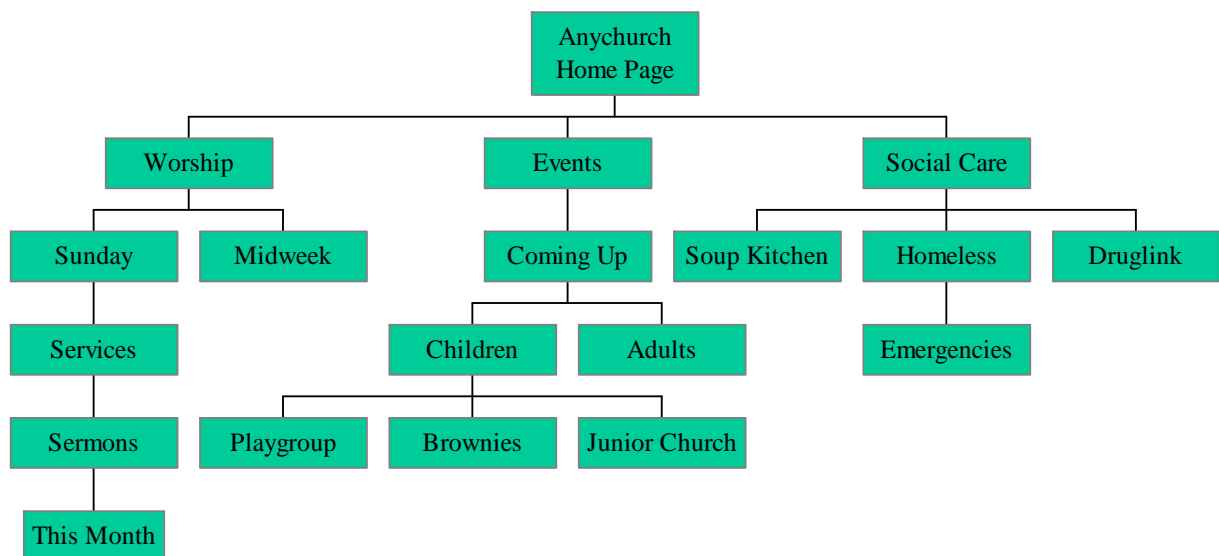
key aspects of Website structural complexity will therefore be explored in this chapter: tree complexity, Hyperlinks and Website mapping.

8.1 *Tree Complexity*

The first aspect of Website structural complexity – tree complexity – becomes apparent when it is understood that the structure of any given Website can be thought of as being like a tree of Webpages with its ‘root’ Webpage being the Home Page. The tree-like structure of Webpages becomes clearer when Webpages accessed from the ‘root’ (Home Page) are considered either as ‘branches’ (subsidiary Webpages which access subsidiary Webpages) or as ‘leaves’ (subsidiary Webpages which do not access subsidiary Webpages).¹

Conventionally, such trees are shown ‘upside-down’, with the Home Page at the top of the diagram;² an example of such a tree is given in Figure 8.1:

Figure 8.1



An Example of Website Structure

This tree-like structure of Webpages within Websites raises the question of tree complexity, which is a measure of the efficiency with which the branch and leaf Webpages are organised.

¹ In reality, the structure of a Website is often far more complex than a tree structure because Webpages usually have Hyperlinks to different Webpages (both within and outside of the Website). However, even where there are Hyperlinks to different Webpages within a Website, it is still possible to visualise the Website as a tree and to measure its complexity as such.

² Microsoft® FrontPage® 2000 is an example of a computer program that displays a Website tree with the Home Page at the top.

There are many possible alternatives to the structure in Figure 8.1, the most extreme of which would be either to have 18 Webpage leaves hanging off of the 'Anychurch' Home Page (a broad structure), or to have 1 Webpage branch hanging off of the 'Anychurch' Home Page which in turn would have one branch and so on until the final leaf appeared at the 18th level down the tree. In the broad structure, any Webpage could be accessed with just one selection (but from a choice of 18), whereas in the deep structure there would only ever be two choices (return upwards or continue downwards), so that it would take a lot of selections to reach the lower levels of the structure and, at lower levels, it could be hard for a user to retain a sense of position within the structure.

It is possible to calculate a tree's complexity in terms of the number of choices made to get from the Home Page to a particular branch or leaf Webpage. However, because the local Methodist church Websites under consideration do not, in general, have a very large number of Webpages, such calculations will not be performed as part of this thesis because such a treatment would be very complex for the relatively simple tree structures involved. A simpler consideration in relation to the tree complexity of a Website is the search time. Gotlieb and Gotlieb (1978, 206-209) consider what they describe as 'Trie Directories' (tree structures with a variable number of possible branches at each level) and note that "within a level of the trie, the search time is constant" and that "the search time is $O(a.h)$ " – meaning that, where 'a' is the time to make a selection at one level and 'h' is the height of the trie, then navigation to a particular point in the trie will take a time proportional to the height of the trie. In other words, if a user has to locate a given Webpage and has no prior knowledge and no 'shortcuts', then the amount of effort required by a Website user to display a particular Webpage is proportional to the level within the structure at which the Webpage is located. Pirouz & Weinman (1997, 75) suggest that "a reasonable site depth can be anywhere from 1 to 5 pages" but that this depends on the target audience, site content, mode of transfer and bandwidth. A further reason for seeking an efficient tree structure is that, as Preece (1993, 23) notes, "human-computer interaction is essentially *cognitive*, that is, it involves the processing of information in the mind." Researchers have shown that the limitations of the human brain mean that a 'menu' involving choices, such as those involved in the selection of a Webpage, can only have a certain number of options before it becomes hard for a user to make a choice. Thus, Faulkner (1998, 39) points to George Miller's experiments which "showed that the capacity of short term memory is 7 plus or minus 2 chunks of information.

More can be remembered if the items can be chunked.” This suggests that, to be efficiently usable, a Website should be designed so that any particular Webpage has a ‘menu’ relating to between 5 and 9 branches. Indeed, Faulkner (1998, 65-66) goes on to say that there is “a desirable number of entries for each menu which is determined by human cognition ... It is useful to think of the magic number 7 plus or minus two. If more menu items are needed than this then it is necessary to subdivide large menus and menu entries.” The principle of subdivision of menus is demonstrated by Tesco.com (2004) {where a large number of menu choices are categorised under differently-formatted headings such as “Extra”, “Groceries” and “Telecoms” – Appendix 4, Figures A4.11(1) and A4.11(2)} by Amazon.com (2005) {where menu tabs are provided to access a number of options – Appendix 4, Figure A4.2} and by Tesco Extra (2005) and Amazon.co.uk (2005) {where different styles of menu and tab are displayed on one Webpage along with sub-divided menus – Appendix 4, Figures A4.12 and A4.1}. These sub-divided menu structures could, however, possibly be off-putting for users who were looking for something, but unsure of the menu or sub-heading that it would be under. This potential drawback might be less serious if a Website has a brand loyalty that causes users to take time to try to find what they need, or if the assertion of Nielsen (2000, 244) that “slightly more than half of all users are search-dominant” means that a search box is available to be used – though there was no search box on the Homepage of Tesco.com (2004). In addition, in relation to the ‘7 plus or minus 2’ limit, Lowe and Hall (1999, 158) suggest that “if an information hierarchy requires the traversal of more than four or five levels, then the ability of the user to manage navigation, focus on the goal of the navigation and interpret each layer of information which is presented will be severely hampered.” If the first level of the Website tree is thought of as the set of Webpages below the Home Page, then Table 8.1 (overleaf) shows, for particular numbers of nodes per level, how many branch or leaf nodes there would be at each level for a fully-populated tree (i.e. nodes filling all places where they are able to be).

Table 8.1

	<i>5 nodes per level</i>	<i>7 nodes per level</i>	<i>9 nodes per level</i>
<i>Level 1</i>	5	7	9
<i>Level 2</i>	25	49	81
<i>Level 3</i>	125	343	729
<i>Level 4</i>	625	2401	6561

Branch / Leaf Nodes for Fully-Populated Trees

For the local Methodist church Websites under consideration:

- The smallest number of Webpages for a Website was 1;
- The largest number of Webpages for a Website was 615;
- The mean number of Webpages per Website, expressed as an integer, was 54.
- 90.1% of the Websites had 49 or fewer Webpages so that, with a well-designed Website structure, Table 8.1 suggests that they should be able to be arranged with 2 levels of leaves with up to 7 nodes per level;
- 100.0% of the Websites had 625 or fewer Webpages, so that, with a well-designed Website structure, Table 8.1 suggests that they should be able to be arranged with 4 levels of leaves with up to 5 nodes per level, or with 3 levels of leaves with up to 9 nodes per level.

However, one of the Websites under consideration had 255 Webpages comprising archives of newsletter articles and another Website under consideration had 497 Webpages comprising archives of sermons, weekly bible notes and intercessions. Counting the Webpages in these archived areas as a single node on the basis that they are specialised content whose organisation beneath a single node can be ignored for the purposes of generalised access, means that the Webpage count of one of the Websites can be reduced by 254 and of the other by 494. This gives the following modified data excluding archived material:

- The smallest number of Webpages for a Website was 1;
- The largest number of Webpages for a Website was 121;
- The mean number of Webpages per Website, expressed as an integer, was 20.

- 95.5% of the Websites had 49 or fewer Webpages so that, with a well-designed Website structure, Table 8.1 suggests that the non-archive material should be able to be arranged with 2 levels of leaves with up to 7 nodes per level;
- 100.0% of the Websites had 125 or fewer Webpages, so that, with a well-designed Website structure, Table 8.1 suggests that the non-archive material should be able to be arranged with 3 levels of leaves with up to 5 nodes per level.

Therefore, excluding archived material, there would seem to be little reason for any of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration to have leaves below level 3. However, allowing for the fact that not all of the nodes within any given Website tree structure will necessarily be populated, it would be acceptable for some leaves to be located at level 4.

The work of Hochheiser and Shneiderman (2000, 190) on simultaneous menus is also of note: “simultaneous menus can lead to improvements in user performance over comparable sequential layouts ... if users are expected to make multiple selections from two or more menus, simultaneous menus provide better performance.” In terms of the design of Webpages, these findings lend weight to the idea adopted by many Webmasters of separating the menu options for site navigation (Home Page, page up, page down) from those for navigation to branches.

Table 8.2 (overleaf) shows the design principles for Tree Complexity that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites³ under consideration conform to them.

Table 8.2 is evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because, despite all of the Websites having a good structure in terms of leaf depth, the way in which Webmasters designed menus was inconsistent both in terms of the number of entries on navigation menus and the separation of site and branch navigation.

³ For some criteria, it was not possible to assess some of the Websites due to the nature of their design – for example, some Websites had no navigation menus. Such Websites were therefore discounted.

Table 8.2

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Maximum leaf depth should be no more than 4	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)
Navigation menus should be limited to between 5 and 9 lower Webpages	10 (52.6%)	9 (47.4%)
Site and branch navigation should be separate	7 (33.3%)	14 (66.7%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Tree Complexity

Indeed, from Table 8.2, it can be deduced that 95.5% of the Websites under consideration had a maximum leaf depth of no more than 4 (50% had a maximum leaf depth of 2). This would rise to 100% if an anomalous Website, which generally had a maximum leaf depth of 4, was reconfigured to remove a sequential set of hyperlinks which followed a teaching series. Clearly, then, the Webmasters have generally designed the structures of their Websites well in terms of leaf depth, although it is not possible to deduce whether this was intentional or accidental.

In addition, despite the Websites under consideration having generally good leaf depths, a poorer aspect of the Website structures is revealed by the second row of data in Table 8.2, which shows that 47.4% of the local Methodist church Webmasters designed navigation menus that had more than 9 or fewer than 5 entries, which means that the navigation menus were not designed for optimal operation by human beings. This would seem to suggest either that the Webmasters were not aware of the research that has been done in this area, or that they had perhaps not tested the operation of their navigation menus with potential users.

Furthermore, the final row of data in Table 8.2 reveals another aspect of the design of the Website structures – that only 33.3% of the Website designs separated out site and branch navigation. This, coupled with the fact that 3 (42.9%) of the Websites that did separate out site navigation chose to make it hard for users to return to the Home Page by using a less-than-obvious logo or banner for the ‘Home’ Hyperlink that would display the Home Page and that 1 (7.1%) of the Websites that did not separate out site navigation chose to use a menu item called “Mission Statement” to display the Home Page, means that 19% of the Websites

under consideration had confusing means of allowing users to return to the Home Page.

8.2 *Hyperlinks*

The second aspect of Website structural complexity – that of the design of Hyperlinks – is related to the way in which Hyperlinks allow users, usually with the click of a mouse, to access any other Webpage available on the Internet. Henriquez (2000, 5) notes that “links exercise a considerable influence on what material a reader sees, and in what order”. For the purposes of this thesis, these Hyperlinks are classified either as being ‘internal’ (where they access a Webpage within the local Methodist church Website under consideration) or ‘external’ (where they access a Webpage that is not part of the local Methodist church Website under consideration).

Internal Hyperlinks

With the use of internal Hyperlinks to navigate from the Home Page to other Webpages, it should be the case that a user will be able to understand his or her position within a Website by navigating to branch and leaf Webpages. Additional complexity that could begin to make a user feel ‘lost in hyperspace’ could be introduced when internal Hyperlinks were used across branches of the Website tree. It could be argued that internal Hyperlinks could help users to retain a sense of location by calling up new Webpages in a new Browser window if they go across branches – e.g. from ‘Sermons’ to ‘Druglink’ in Figure 8.1 – though Nielsen (2000, 67) suggests that “the strategy is self-defeating because it disables the Back button, which is the normal way users return to previous sites”.

One way of using internal Hyperlinks to help users not to feel ‘lost in hyperspace’ is to give users the ability to return to a familiar place within a Website by providing an internal Hyperlink on every Webpage to enable users to return to the Home Page. According to Krug (2000, 66), this “offers reassurance that no matter how lost I may get, I can always start over”. One way of providing this facility is to place the Website’s or organisation’s logo on each Webpage and to make it double as an internal Hyperlink to the Home Page; another is simply to have a textual “Home” Hyperlink on every Webpage.

External Hyperlinks

Further navigational complexity arises because Hyperlinks can also allow a user to be taken

to an external Website. Although such external Hyperlinks take users to a different Website, this may not be obvious to users (even though Browsers do tend to display the Website address) and so may cause a user to become confused or even to have to spend a great deal of time relocating their place within the local Methodist church Website if they wish to return to it (for example, if the user closes the Browser window by mistake). One way of avoiding the potential confusion that users might experience when finding themselves looking at different Websites is to make it clear when individual Hyperlinks are external – either by indicating that on the Webpage in some way, such as by a pop-up or differently-styled pointer, or by ensuring that all External Hyperlinks appear on Webpages which are clearly labelled as being for the purpose of linking to other Webpages.

Although it could also be argued that – if local Methodist church Websites really are to be relevant to their corresponding churches’ mission priorities – only a limited number of external Hyperlinks will generally be necessary for local Methodist church Websites (e.g. relating to other local Websites), the reality is that the number of external Hyperlinks will depend to a great extent on the ethos of the Website and on the local Methodist church’s mission priorities. The research of Sears, Jacko and Dubach (2000, 257) does suggest limiting external Hyperlinks because they found that those with “more computer or Internet experience and those who access the Internet more than three times per week were more likely to disagree that an ideal site should contain links to other sites ... than were less experienced participants. This may be due to the fact that experienced users are familiar enough with the Internet and the search engines to locate information without ‘surfing’ from one site to the next.” Nielsen (2000, 70) also suggests that “by carefully selecting good external sites to link to ... users are going to love you for your links”. This advice might seem to be good, but the quality of Hyperlinks will always be subjective and cannot therefore be effectively assessed with the data available for this thesis.

Hyperlink Properties

The appearance and positioning of Hyperlinks have already been studied in section 7.3, but some further issues arise for Hyperlinks – whether internal or external – that are related to Website structure. One such issue is the correctness of Hyperlinks – something that may not always be checked by web design software for internal Hyperlinks and cannot realistically always be expected to be accurate for external Hyperlinks, where Webpages can be changed

at any time. Austin (2003, 37) notes the need to ensure that all Hyperlinks to other web addresses are correct: “regularly check the validity of your Web links, to avoid irritating your visitors with a ‘The page cannot be displayed’ message”. For both internal and external Hyperlinks, an assessment therefore needs to be made as to whether any of the Hyperlinks do not work at all, or whether any Hyperlinks might lead to an incorrect Webpage being displayed. For external Hyperlinks, because Domain Names tend to be more stable than the names or content of individual Webpages, a strategy for minimising potential problems with Hyperlinks becoming out of date is to make sure that all external Hyperlinks refer to Domain Names (e.g. <http://www.anychurch.co.uk>, rather than to specific Webpages (e.g. <http://www.anychurch.co.uk/services/sunday>). This strategy should be applied except where specific Webpages and data must be referenced (e.g. when accessing maps).

Table 8.3 (overleaf) shows the design principles for Hyperlinks that are felt to be important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 21 Websites under consideration⁴ conform to them.

A study of the Webpages within the Websites under consideration showed that, despite 23.8% of Websites having Webpages that did not have an internal Hyperlink to display the Home Page in the same Browser window, most of the Webpages (76.2%) did actually have internal Hyperlinks that would cause the Home Page to be displayed; there were only a few exceptions and these Webpages tended to be in a different format. What seems to have happened in the problematic cases is that Webmasters incorporated information or Webpages provided by other people into their Websites and, in doing so, did not format this additional content to fit in with the existing Website format. The suggestion is therefore of a lack of web design software or skills on the part of the people designing these few anomalous Webpages without internal Hyperlinks to the Home Page and that the Webmasters either do not have the time, inclination or ability to make these few Webpages conform to their normal Website design templates.

⁴ It is 21, rather than 22 Websites because one of the Websites under consideration only had one Webpage, which had no internal Hyperlinks, and one of the Websites had no external Hyperlinks.

Table 8.3

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
All Webpages should have an internal Hyperlink to display the Home Page in the same Browser window	16 (76.2%)	5 (23.8%)
External Hyperlinks should all be clearly marked – either individually or on Webpages of links	5 (23.8%)	16 (76.2%)
Internal Hyperlinks should all be correct	16 (76.2%)	5 (23.8%)
External Hyperlinks should use Domain Names unless specific Webpages or data are necessary	14 (66.7%)	7 (33.3%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Hyperlinks

A study of the internal Hyperlinks within the Websites under consideration showed that majority of the Websites (76.2%) had all of their internal Hyperlinks working correctly, in that the Webpages that would be expected to be displayed when the Hyperlinks were ‘clicked’ were indeed displayed. Nevertheless, a significant minority of Websites (23.8%) contained internal Hyperlinks that failed to work in some way – by doing nothing, causing blank Webpages to be displayed or causing errors to be displayed. It was not possible to tell from the Website Source Code, or from the data collected in the Research Questionnaires, why these internal Hyperlinks were faulty – it could be because the Webmasters failed to test the Websites fully, failed to notice the errors or did not have the ability to correct the errors by editing the Source Code or making changes with their web design software.

A study of the external Hyperlinks within the Websites under consideration showed that only a minority of the Websites (23.8%) clearly marked external Hyperlinks as such – either by displaying them on ‘Links’ Webpages, by stating that they accessed other Websites, or by showing them as Internet addresses. The majority of Websites (76.2%) therefore failed to clearly mark external Hyperlinks in some way – by displaying text links or logos without explaining where they led to (often for maps) – though many of these had a mix of clearly marked and badly marked external Hyperlinks. Failure to be consistent, assumptions as to the conventions that users might understand, or failure to see the confusion that might be caused by not distinguishing between internal and external Hyperlinks could all be factors in

the way in which external Hyperlinks were presented.

With regard to external Hyperlinks using Domain Names unless specific Webpages or data are necessary, the majority (66.7%) of the Websites did conform to this strategy. Of those Websites that did not conform (33.3%), this was generally because a few of the external Hyperlinks unnecessarily failed to use Domain Names – perhaps because the Webmaster was not vigilant enough when copying in or typing in the Hyperlink, or perhaps because the Webmaster just copied the external Hyperlinks from a Browser and so ended up with more than a Domain Name in some cases – i.e. a Webpage name – and either did not feel that this was a problem, or forgot to shorten it to the Domain Name. One of the Websites actually used an IP Address, rather than a Domain Name or a Webpage name, which is of concern because IP Addresses can change even when a Domain Name does not.

The above findings are evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. This is because of the inconsistencies and errors that have been noted in the implementation of both internal and external Hyperlinks.

8.3 *Website Mapping*

The final aspect of Website structural complexity – Website Mapping – is more to do with lessening any sense of users feeling ‘lost in hyperspace’ than with Website complexity itself. Lowe and Hall (1999, 5) suggest that the World Wide Web is a form of hypermedia and Lowe and Hall (1999, 139-140) go on to suggest that “if a map is used correctly, it can provide not only an understanding of a hypermedia applications structure at varying levels of detail, but also orient the user within the structure (i.e. ‘you are here’).” Therefore, as a way of helping users to find their way around a Website, it can be very helpful to provide a ‘map’ in the form of a Webpage which shows how the Website is structured. Such a map is not, however, necessary if a Website only consists of the Home Page. Neither is a Website map necessary if a Website only contains a Home Page and a set of ‘leaves’ which are all accessible from the Home Page – for such a case, the Home Page itself doubles as the Website map. For larger Websites though, Levy (2001, 60) suggests that it is “a good idea” to have a Website map as “a visual index of every section and subsection on the site”.

Table 8.4 (overleaf) shows the design principles for Website mapping that are felt to be

important for local Methodist church Webmasters to adopt and the way in which the 22 Websites under consideration – 7 with just ‘leaves’ and 15 with ‘leaves’ and ‘branches’ – conform to them;

Table 8.4

<i>Design Principle</i>	<i>Websites Conforming</i>	<i>Websites not Conforming</i>
Websites with just Home Page and ‘leaves’ should not have a Website Map	7 (100%)	0 (0.0%)
Websites with Home Page, ‘branches’ and ‘leaves’ should have a Website Map	1 (6.7%)	14 (93.3%)

Conformity to Design Principles for Website Mapping

Some notable findings of the assessment of the use of Website mapping as shown by the data in Table 8.4 were as follows:

- 100% of the Websites that had less than 2 levels (i.e. those with either just a Home Page or with a Home Page and ‘leaves’) did not have Website maps.
- Only a small minority (6.7%) of the Websites under consideration that had 2 or more levels (i.e. Home Page, ‘branches’ and ‘leaves’) actually incorporated a Website map.

The lack of Website maps for Websites with less than 2 levels reflects good design practice, because such Websites with just a Home Page clearly do not need Website maps and, if all of the Webpages are accessible from Hyperlinks on their Home Pages, neither do Websites with just a Home Page and ‘leaves’. However, the lack of Website maps for Websites with 2 or more levels reflects poor design practice because it increases the possibility of users feeling ‘lost in hyperspace’, even if only by losing their sense of which Webpages are available within the Website and which of those they are using at any one time. The reasons for such a small occurrence of Website maps could include Webmasters not having thought of providing Website maps, not feeling that their Websites needed Website maps, or not using Web design software that enables Website maps to be automatically generated. It is not entirely clear from the research data whether the lack of Website maps is due to conscious decisions having been made by Webmasters not to provide them, is due to Webmasters not having thought

about such a facility, or is due to Webmasters not knowing how to generate Website maps automatically⁵ with their web design software. Nevertheless, as the one Website that did have a Website map was generated with Microsoft® Frontpage® – versions of which 6 other Websites were designed with – almost 50% of the Websites with 2 or more levels that did not have Website maps could have had them produced automatically by Webmasters. The lack of Website maps for Websites with 2 or more levels is, therefore, evidence of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

8.4 *Concluding Remarks about Website Structural Complexity*

This chapter has built upon the examinations in Parts 1 and 2 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology and Website provision respectively, along with the preceding chapters in Part 3 related to Website design, continuing the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This has been done, in this last of four chapters in Part 3 of this thesis, by considering whether there are significant inequalities in the aspects of the design quality of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration related to the Website structural complexity which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In considering Website structural complexity, a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites were revealed related to tree complexity, Hyperlinks and Website mapping. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, with the other chapters in Part 3 and with Part 4 of this thesis – which focuses on the effectiveness of Websites – these findings form part of the conclusions that will be drawn, in the context of the macro-missiological framework provided in Part 1 of this thesis, about the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites.

5 Manual generation of a Website map would be too much of an overhead due to the need to update the Website map every time a Webpage was added, removed, renamed or moved within the tree structure.

PART 4 – WEBSITE EFFECTIVENESS

Part 4 of this thesis, building upon the examinations in Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, Website provision and Website design respectively, continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by considering Website effectiveness. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

The aim of this part of the thesis is to consider whether there are significant inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. When considered alongside the definitions of ‘effective’ and ‘effectiveness’ given by Chambers Reference Online (2006b)¹, this suggests that the Websites under consideration will be found to be effective if they are known to produce the desired results or effects in terms of aiding the fulfilment of the churches’ mission priorities. Therefore, local church Websites that are produced without sufficient effort to relate them to the churches’ mission priorities, or without proper account being taken of feedback from Website users and statistics, will be considered to be ineffective to some degree. The single chapter in this part of the thesis reflects this rationale in examining the effectiveness of the local church Websites under consideration. Before the contents of this part of the thesis are summarised, it is necessary to explain the assumption that has been made about Website deployment.

Assumption as to the effect on local church mission when Websites are deployed

In carrying out the research and evaluation related to Website effectiveness, it has been assumed that, for these purposes, local church Websites are essentially neutral in their effect on the mission of a local church. In explaining the reasons for making this assumption, it must be noted that the deployment of any technology or tool will have some effects, however

1 **effective** *adj* **1** having the power to produce, or producing, a desired result. **2** producing a pleasing effect. **3** impressive; striking. **4** in, or coming into, operation; working or active. **5** actual, rather than theoretical. ... **effectively** *adverb* **1** in an effective way. **2** in reality; for all practical purposes. **effectiveness** *noun*.

minor, on the enterprise in hand – even if only in terms of the resources brought to bear in order to carry out the deployment. A clear example of the effects of deploying a technology is the use of the motor car; a person who has never driven a car and then buys one will experience a whole host of effects as a result of the decision to use the car, including the need to devote time and money to learning to drive, and the need to devote ongoing resources to servicing, fuelling, insuring and taxing the car. The ability to drive the car should, of course, have the impact of saving a person’s time and energy by enabling a person to drive between places without the need to walk or to use other forms of transport, but the decision to purchase the car has effects on car manufacturers and retailers and the ongoing use of the car has effects on the environment and on the wider society – which may include killing someone in an accident – as well as on the owner. Another example is the possession of a nuclear deterrent; the argument that possessing such a capability encourages nations not to go to war has some degree of credibility given the fact that nuclear-armed nations have never fought a nuclear war, but the development and maintenance of such a capability is a drain on resources and there is always the concern expressed by Booth (1985, 34) that “if nuclear deterrence does someday break down, we will leave the realm of strategic thinking and tumble headlong into a nightmare.”

Barbour (1992b, 3) notes that: “Appraisals of modern technology diverge widely. Some see it as the beneficent source of higher living standards, improved health, and better communications ... Others are critical of technology, holding that it leads to alienation from nature, environmental destruction, the mechanization of human life, and the loss of human freedom.” In the context of this study of the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites for local Methodist churches, it is not possible to argue that the provision of a Website has a wholly neutral effect because some human resources will need to be devoted to producing the Website, even if there is no monetary cost to the local churches concerned. Similarly, the design of a local church Website demands resources and, as has already been demonstrated in Part 3 of this thesis, the design of the Website can affect the way in which it is used. However, in examining the effectiveness of Websites, this thesis does assume that local church Websites are essentially neutral in terms of their impact on the mission of a local church. This is because, as will be explained in more detail in section 9.4 of this thesis, Websites deployed in the local church context are seen not as drivers of mission, or as tools for mission, but as virtual technological representations to the Website users of the missions

of the corresponding local churches; Barbour (1992b, 3) argues that “technology is ambiguous, its impacts varying according to the social context in which it is designed and used”. The assumption being made about the impact of Websites on the mission of local churches is analogous to a situation in the commercial environment whereby Website users are able to purchase the same products from Websites that they can find in shops; just as such a commercial Website would offer an additional way of making purchases, but would not affect the choices that could be made, so it is assumed that a local church Website changes the way in which the church can be engaged with, but does not alter the underlying mission priorities of the local church in relating to its particular local context.

Contents of this part of the thesis

This part of the thesis draws upon the work in Part 1 of this thesis – which addressed macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining missiological and methodological considerations – in order to evaluate whether the Websites of the local Methodist churches under consideration are effective in terms of reflecting their respective churches’ mission priorities. In particular, the work done in chapter 1 on deriving a framework for studying local church mission priorities and the work done in chapter 2 on considering mission in relation to the use of technology will be built upon here.

CHAPTER 9 – EFFECTIVENESS OF WEBSITE DESIGNS FOR MISSION

Building upon the examinations in Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, Website provision and Website design respectively, this chapter continues the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. The focus of this chapter is the consideration of whether there are significant inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

The first step in the evaluation of Website effectiveness in this chapter involves studying the way in which the Internet is of use in the local church context. The next step is to use the information provided in Part 3 (section D) and Part 4 (section D) of the Research Questionnaires, along with the content of the Websites of the local churches under consideration, in order to draw conclusions about the Webmasters' perceptions as to the effectiveness of their Websites for the mission of their local churches and about mission priorities in the context of these particular local churches. Next, an assessment is made as to the effectiveness of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration in terms of supporting the mission priorities of these churches. Finally, there is an evaluation of the feedback that is solicited by Webmasters about their local church Websites and about whether the feedback received is used effectively. This involves considering data from Part 4 (section C) of the Research Questionnaires in order to evaluate how effectively Website design feedback is used by the local church Webmasters.

9.1 Relating the Mission of Local Churches to the Internet

Although the mission of many local churches is largely centred around particular geographical areas, the Internet gives new opportunities for local churches to engage in mission with

people in a wider sphere – culturally, geographically and socially. Some implications for local churches of the Internet's existence and use will therefore now be considered.

Mission in the Global/Local Context of the Internet

A key trend that is being encouraged by the Internet and is affecting the rhythms and lifestyle patterns of people in the contemporary world is that of globalisation. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which globalisation is not a very recent phenomenon, in that countries have colonised other countries for many centuries and, in doing so, have both exported and imported language, customs and cultural nuances. Indeed, Robertson (1992, 8) notes that “processes and actions to which the concept of globalization now refers have been proceeding, with some interruptions, for many centuries”. However, the phenomenon of globalisation in the contemporary world is very different from how it was in previous times. This difference arises not just because of the way in which the driving force of global endeavour has shifted away from governments and government-financed bodies into the hands of commercial and other non-government organisations; the advent of technologies that have served both to increase the speed of travel and the speed of communications around the world, and the availability of these services to ‘the masses’ at relatively little cost has meant that people are able to travel, trade and communicate globally in faster, cheaper, more user-friendly ways than were ever possible before. Ritzer (2004, xiii) suggests that “fewer and fewer areas and phenomena throughout the world are unaffected by globalization” and a key technology that is drawing people into the global sphere is the Internet; Frissen (1997, 113) suggests that: “The Internet is the archetype of the explosion in network technologies and network connections ... Social and policy networks or configurations can effectively be represented in electronic networks. Cyberspace is the ‘real’ space.” Indeed, as Frissen’s comment about ‘real’ space alludes, the Internet has actually brought a totally new dimension to globalisation in that it has given individuals an opportunity not only to engage in global commerce as they have never done before, but also to engage with – or even to form – global communities that could not otherwise exist.

Despite the trend towards globalisation, the world still has many different cultures and sub-cultures and many local churches comprise the worldwide Church. Seeing the life of Christ as a locally-focussed series of events with implications for the whole of humanity, Snyder (2001, 224) asserts that: “The gospel is global good news. Thinking globally, God acted

locally.”; pointing to the present-day mission of the worldwide Church, Arias (2001, 64) asserts that “in order to be global, mission has to be contextual!” The way in which many local churches have decided to embrace the new Internet technologies and to develop Websites is an example of the deployment of a new technology for local mission; these decisions should have naturally led to questions as to the nature of the Websites and of the communities to which the churches are trying to reach out in mission. Nevertheless, despite the continuing tendency of individuals and institutions to set up Websites, an apparent conflict seems to be introduced in terms of mission priorities when local church Websites are considered: on the one hand, local churches have a clear mandate to focus their missionary efforts within their geographical communities yet, on the other hand, a Web presence immediately gives local churches a platform to broadcast to anybody in the whole world who is able to access their Websites. Thus, local churches can have a worldwide presence – and potentially engage in worldwide mission – simply by providing Websites and using the Internet. One ‘local’ church that has a very professional-looking Website is Holy Trinity Brompton (2004) {updated as Holy Trinity Brompton (2006)}; this Website not only enables people to access resources related to the congregation that is situated geographically in a particular location in London, but also provides for the purchase of resources and helps people to find out about courses developed by the church, such as ‘Alpha’ and ‘The Marriage Course’. This Website might be thought to be an example of ‘glocalization’, which Ritzer (2004, xiii) describes, saying “the interaction of the global and the local produces something new – the glocal”, but the international ministry of Holy Trinity Brompton through courses such as ‘Alpha’ began before the church’s Website was as highly-developed as it is now, so that the Website has not initiated the glocal, but has given both global and local people far easier access to resources and information that they would still have had access to. For local churches with a more limited geographical influence than Holy Trinity Brompton, it is not clear exactly what approach should be taken when implementing Websites: should local churches see the global presence afforded by a Website as an added dimension to their mission, or should they largely ignore the global implications of having a Website and focus only on their immediate or traditional geographical catchment area? In his study of interconnectedness of Websites through Hyperlinks, Huberman (2001, 39) suggests that “the link structure of the Web implies the existence of communities that share some common affinities ... the exploration of the link structure of documents on the Web can reveal the underlying relationship between people and organisations.” It would therefore seem sensible for local

churches to determine the nature of their community (and therefore the types of people that they expect to have links with and the reason for these links) and to feed that information into the formation of their mission priorities and statements. This, in turn, will shape their strategy for Website development.

Whatever geographical community a local church relates to, there is still the question of the nature of the virtual community that its Website might create. The very existence of the Internet and Websites means that things will change and the sense of community attached to a local church with a Website will be different; as the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council (2004, 5) notes: "Networks have not replaced neighbourhoods, but they change them. Community and a sense of community are often disconnected from locality and geography." Inevitably, the virtual community will be different to the local church community that already exists because: a) even if all members of a local church congregation have access to the Internet, they may not choose to use the local church Website; b) a local church Website might not attract some people who would be willing to contact the church through other means – e.g. by attending a soup kitchen; and c) a local church Website might attract people who do not see themselves as being part of that local church outside of their contact through the Website. Redford (1999, 222) warns that: "The greatest difficulty with the use of this technology is that missions becomes limited to communication ... there is no replacement for having a physical presence in the real world ... Virtual mission practice will have its place in virtual contexts, but it cannot take the place of real mission practice in real contexts." What tends to happen, then, when people engage with Christian Websites is that they become part of a unique community that has both a physical (offline) dimension and a virtual (online) dimension; Careaga (2001, 133) notes that "in her studies of an online Christian community, Heidi Campbell found that most members of that group saw the virtual community as a supplement to their local church." Furthermore, the Intern for Public Life and Social Justice at Methodist Church House, Lambert (2007), suggests: "Online communities can offer support, certainly, but it is often support of a temporary nature, whereas churches should offer long-term support. A further criticism of online churches is their lack of volunteering opportunities. In actual churches people often feel a greater sense of belonging after having got involved through helping out in some way." Research is also beginning to suggest that the quality of relationships formed online is different to that of relationships formed face-to-face; Randerson (2007) has noted research at Sheffield Hallam

University which suggests that “social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace do not help you to make real friends ... social networking sites allow people to broaden their list of nodding acquaintances because staying in touch online is easy.” Thus, although the use of Website technology can add another dimension to the mission of a local church, it would not be possible, given the current uses of Websites and the Internet, to envisage the mission of the physical local church being entirely superseded by a virtual local church in mission through Website technology alone.

Believers who do not Belong

A further question that the Internet raises about the mission of local churches in a British society which Davie (1994) characterises as “believing without belonging”, is that of whether churches are becoming redundant. For centuries, people have felt a need for a Church, so that even people such as Luther, who felt that the Catholic Church was very flawed, saw the need for what McGrath (1994, 411) calls “an institutional church (as) a divinely ordained means of grace”. Even in more recent times, people have still seen a need for local churches and Van Engen (1991, 101) suggests that “local congregations are branch offices of the kingdom, the principal instrument, anticipatory sign, and primary locus of the coming kingdom.” In the 21st Century, as our culture continues to change, Ward (2002, 23-24) suggests that: “The liquid or postmodern era reshapes the notion of identity and therefore of community in significant ways ... The plight of the individual seeking to establish an enduring sense of self in the shifting waters of liquid modernity leads to significant changes in the way that community operates.” Websites, with their potential for endless change to the extent that multiple visits on the same day might give users very different experiences – or might even result in a message such as “Web page not found” – seem to epitomise this trend towards a constantly shifting culture and to represent very well the liquidity of human experience and communities. Indeed, Schement and Stephenson (1996, 280) suggest a scenario whereby “Americans may increasingly imagine the religious experience as a personally isolated communion between the individual and God, join electronic congregations in which the members know little about each other, and adopt a kind of religious practice that is centred in the home”, and Ward (2002, 48) envisions a future in which “connection to each other and to Christ will be enabled by an emphasis upon communication rather than gathering”. It could therefore be argued that similar trends are likely in Britain, which often takes its cultural lead from America, and that Website provision might be a good way of churches tapping into this

trend of networked religious practice – whether in the home or elsewhere. Indeed, the sponsoring of the setting up of St Pixels (2006a) – “the online church where you can meet others, talk about serious and not-so-serious stuff, discuss what you do and don’t believe, go to regular services, and join a pioneering worldwide community” by the Methodist Church of Great Britain suggests that such networked religious practice is being taken very seriously within the Methodist Church {see Appendix 4, Figures A4.10(1) to A4.10(5)}.

St Pixels (2006b) offers its users opportunities to participate in worship: “the chance to gather with others in times of praise and prayer ... to interact with others there, offer up prayer requests and join in the Lord’s Prayer ... All are welcome.” Although such Websites might serve the needs of some people, experiences of communities that have involved Websites or the Internet suggest that there tends to be a need to support an ongoing community that may complement, or eventually limit, attempts to reach out to new members. Thus, Wellman (1997, 187) suggests that “computer-supported social networks are not destroying community, but are responding to, resonating with, and extending the types of community that have already become prevalent in the Western world” and Campbell (2004, 120) says of Clubbers Temple (2005) that “while Clubbers Temple can still be found online offering a club-style worship experience ... (it) has changed its focus from using new media for making converts to using it for sustaining and strengthening existing relationships and communities”. What therefore seems unlikely to happen in the local church situation is for the Website and/or Internet community to eventually *become* the local church community. This is because, without a transformation of mission priorities, or of people’s circumstances, it would seem to be highly unlikely that any physical group of people whose sense of community has formed through meeting each other in a church building will be transformed into a ‘virtual’ community of people which is united by the church Website and/or Internet communication. Indeed, although the man credited with inventing the World Wide Web, Berners-Lee (2000, 133) asserts that: “The Web is more a social creation than a technical one. I designed it for social effect – to help people work together – and not as a technical toy”, it is notable that Mickelson (1997, 176) asserts that “those using electronic support groups do differ from those using more traditional forms of support”. Furthermore, Graham (1999, 149) observes that: “(online) discussion groups and the like were found to be lacking in ... the communicative power that resides in physical touching and feeling.” For some people, this may not seem to be a bad thing, but others would miss the social interaction with real people

– whether before, during or after a service – that has traditionally been a part of corporate worship on Sundays and at other times. These factors may help to explain the assertion of The Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council (2004, 5) that: “Networks have not replaced neighbourhoods, but they change them ... Information and knowledge have speeded-up, shrinking the world, but these have not conferred a sense of community.” Therefore, it is unlikely that traditional forms of being Church – such as the ‘local church’ should ever be entirely supplanted by Websites; a local church Website, or a ‘virtual’ church which can be accessed at any time of the day or night, would thus only seem to have the possibility of becoming a substitute for, rather than a viable alternative to, local churches where people can physically meet together.

Therefore, given that local churches are limited in their resources and usually have a natural geographical focus, it would seem to be best for local churches to retain an identity focused on their natural geographical community – thus not specifically designing Websites to reach people outside of their local catchment area – but still to be ready and willing to respond to any wider geographical influence that they might acquire through a Website or by other means. Thus, just as local churches might ignore the implications of their church magazines being sent to former members or other people across the country – or even around the world – and just as Websites such as Kwik Fit (2006) allow anybody in the world to find out where their UK retail outlets are, but do not realistically expect people from outside of the UK – or even outside of the local area – to make special journeys to those retail outlets to use them, so it should normally be the case that unless clear mission opportunities arise from Website access, local churches should ignore the consequences of their Websites being accessible in different areas and countries when designing their Websites in order that such considerations do not cause a loss of focus on their local mission priorities.

Perhaps, however, local church Websites could have a dual role in terms of fostering a sense of belonging: by encouraging those who do not want to interact with people physically to belong to the virtual church community through Website interaction and by helping people who do value physical interaction to move, through Website interaction, from virtual belonging into belonging to a physical congregation by attending a local church. Therefore, although it would seem to be unwise for a local church to expect to use a Website as anything other than an additional mission tool that will aid existing members and potentially attract

additional members to the local church community, the vast expansion of the Internet and the tendency for people to turn to Internet Search Engines in order to find Websites to meet their needs, suggests that there is definitely sense in providing for at least some of people's religious needs via local church Websites.

Internet Communities for non-Believers

If local church Websites might have a function in meeting the needs of those who believe without belonging to – or physically attending – a local church, then it might also be the case that local church Websites could provide for the needs of those who wish to belong to a local church community without believing. It has been shown that people can come to faith by belonging in some way to a local church community and experiencing the mission activities of the church; an example of this happening is when people attend the Alpha course, so that Gumbel (1999, 9) tells how “hundreds of men and women of all ages have come on the course ... and have found God”. As local church communities can play a significant part in bringing people to faith around the world today, it could be that the means which many Websites use in order to try to encourage a sense of community in their users – features such as chat rooms, registration and web logs (‘Blogs’) – might give opportunities for local churches to use their own Websites to conduct missionary activities among those who wish to belong without believing. However, the concern as to the quality of Internet communities remains; Graham (1999, 145) suggests that “exclusively electronic communication ... is a seriously limited form of communication between persons (so that) an Internet community ... is a second-rate form of community”. Therefore, although an extension of the mission of local churches in order to embrace virtual communities would seem to fit well with the life and teaching of Jesus – for the New Testament gives many examples of Jesus interacting with those who were seen as outcasts by the community or the established religion² – it could be the case that even Websites that are well-designed, have a clear focus on evangelism and have content that is culturally-relevant and aimed at making converts, will not actually manage to bring any non-believers to faith in Christ. However, it is still possible that local churches whose Websites do manage to instil a sense of community into non-believers could reap rewards in terms of people coming to faith and assenting to the authority of God and the

2 Examples of Jesus interacting with those who were seen as outcasts are the healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) and the conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:3-42). An example of encouraging others to behave in a similar way is the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Church because Graham (1999, 134) asserts that people's "common identity *as* a community is defined by their owing obedience to a mutually recognized authority".

Local Churches and their Virtual Presence

The explorations of the use of the Internet above suggest that employing the Internet as a technological tool for the mission of the local church seems as much in line with the thinking of St. Paul, who wrote "I become all things to all people, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible" (1 Corinthians 9:22a, Good News Bible), as it does with the thinking of Frost and Hirsch (2003, 63) who, having critiqued the nature of the mission of the local church, also asked "why not allow the rhythms and lifestyle patterns of the people we're trying to reach determine the shape our communal life and worship meetings take?"

However, with a tradition of leadership from ordained ministers or other church officers, many local churches may not instinctively want to allow the people that they are trying to reach out to in mission to influence their communal life and worship in the way advocated by Frost and Hirsch. Nevertheless, the way in which Butler and Butler (1993) describe mission in terms of presence, action, witness and spirituality might potentially be helpful if there is a reluctance on the part of local church congregations to allow the rhythms and lifestyle patterns of those outside of the church to influence the life of the church; these descriptors are particularly affirming in the local church context where there is a building (presence), a set of activities (action), the sharing of faith (witness) and engagement with God (spirituality).

Mission, when seen in this way, can thus be understood as being all that is done in the name of the church, with the important corollary that everything that the church does should be seen as of equal importance precisely because it is all part of the church's mission.

Therefore, it can be seen as a positive step for local churches to relate to the lifestyle of the people that they are trying to reach by seizing upon the new technologies of Internet access and Website provision in order to avail themselves of mission opportunities by enlarging their presence to encompass not only the physical sphere of the local church building, but also the virtual presence of the local church Website. The increasing provision of local church Websites would seem to fit well with the observation of Schement and Stephenson (1996, 272) that: "Organized religion has always depended on media in some form. One need only consider the prominent place given to pulpits, tapestries, and stained-glass windows in medieval churches to get a sense of the house of worship as a multimedia environment." Furthermore, as Huberman (2001, 9) seems to envisage an "electronic blanket that will

eventually cover and engage us in one form or another”, the provision of Websites by local churches might be a natural engagement with the trend within the wider society of increasing adoption and use of the Internet and World Wide Web by individuals and institutions. With the observations of this section in mind, the effectiveness of local church Websites will now be explored in the rest of this part of the thesis.

9.2 *Webmasters’ Views of Effectiveness of Websites for Mission*

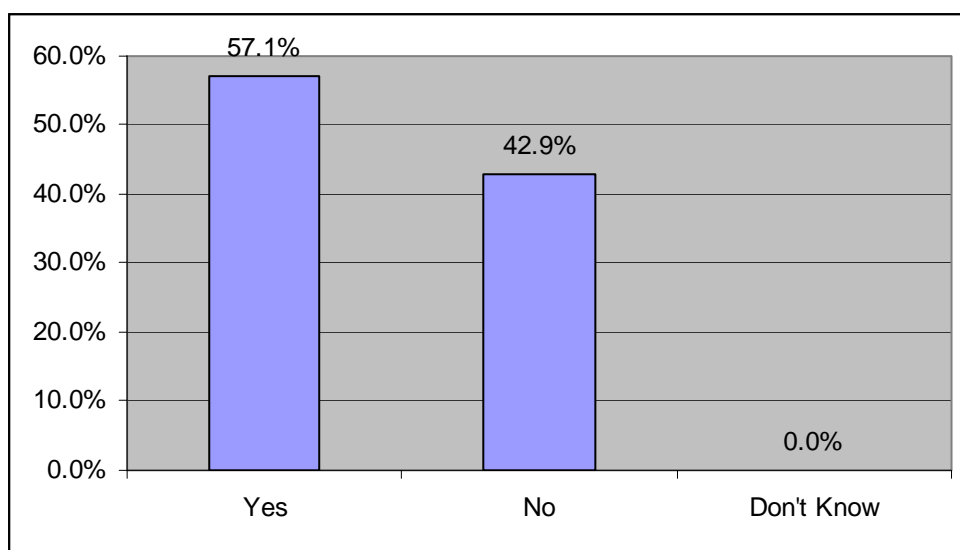
In order to be fully effective, a local church Website will not only have to enable people to feel that they are part of the local church community, but will also need somebody to assess the effectiveness of the Website and to take appropriate steps to remedy any ineffective aspects. Thus, Dorner (2001, 63) suggests that “online community works best if there is a ‘leading light’ – someone who wants to make the community happen ... these groups start with verve but only continue if they serve a real purpose and if the leading light is somehow rewarded”; if a local church community is to have a successful online dimension through its Website, the Webmaster must be able to determine how useful the Website is to the local church as a mission tool. Therefore, if a sense of community to be experienced in any but the shallowest sense – both by the local church members who belong through the Website and by those who belong in other ways – and to be sustainable in the long-term, there will need to be some form of two-way, or multi-way communication involving people from the physical local church community and Website users from the virtual local church community being in touch with the Webmaster so that the Webmaster is ‘rewarded’, even if only by being aware of the success stories of the Website.

Thus, having considered the new mission opportunities that the Internet gives to local churches and some of the implications for local churches which use the Internet for mission, data from Part 3 (question 3.10) and Part 4 (section D) of the Research Questionnaire will now be used in order to determine the Webmasters’ perceptions as to the effectiveness of their Websites for the mission of their local churches. This will involve considering: Webmasters’ knowledge of the existence of local church mission statements; Webmasters’ beliefs as to whether their Websites fit in with their churches’ mission statements; Webmasters’ views as to how their Websites support their local churches in mission; and Webmasters’ attempts to assess the effectiveness of their Websites for mission.

9.2.1 Existence of Local Church Mission Statements

If a Website is to be an effective tool for the mission of the local church, then it would seem to be sensible for the Webmaster to know whether or not the church has a mission statement; if there is a mission statement and the Webmaster is unaware of its existence, then the likelihood of the Website being in accordance with the church's mission priorities will be less than if the mission statement is known about and taken into account. Questions 3.10 and 4.21 of the Research Questionnaire therefore asked the ministers and Webmasters respectively: "Does the church have a mission statement?" The possible answers that could be given were 'Yes', 'No', and 'Don't Know'. Graph 9.1 shows the answers that were given by ministers – 22 in all – to question 3.10 on the Research Questionnaire and Graph 9.2 (overleaf) shows the answers that were given by Webmasters – 23 in all – to question 4.21 on the Research Questionnaire.

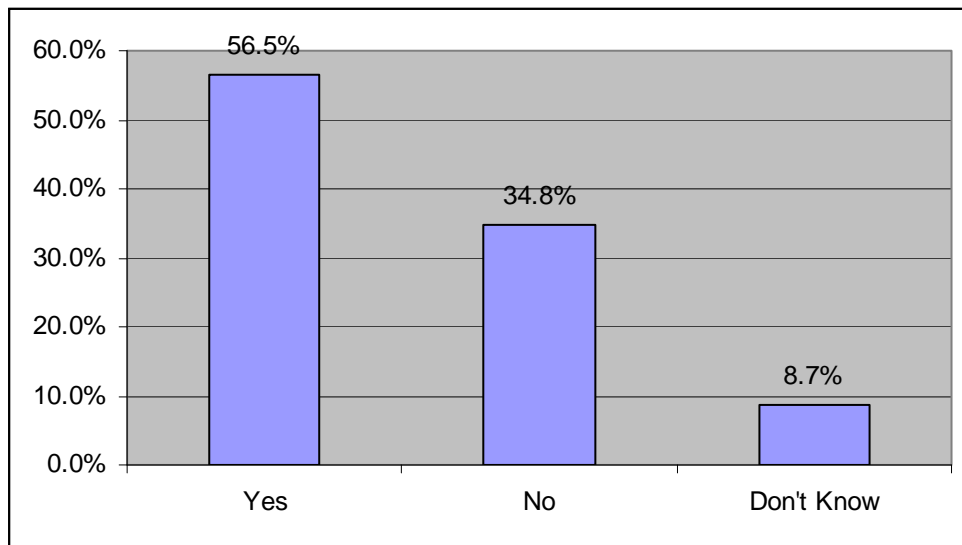
Graph 9.1



Ministers' Responses as to whether their Church has a Mission Statement

The similarity of shape of Graphs 9.1 and 9.2 could, at first glance, be taken to suggest that ministers and Webmasters do have similar knowledge as to the existence of mission statements for their churches. However, as a tool for understanding the potential impact of mission statements on the Websites produced by Webmasters for local churches, simple percentage values as shown in Graphs 9.1 and 9.2 are meaningless.

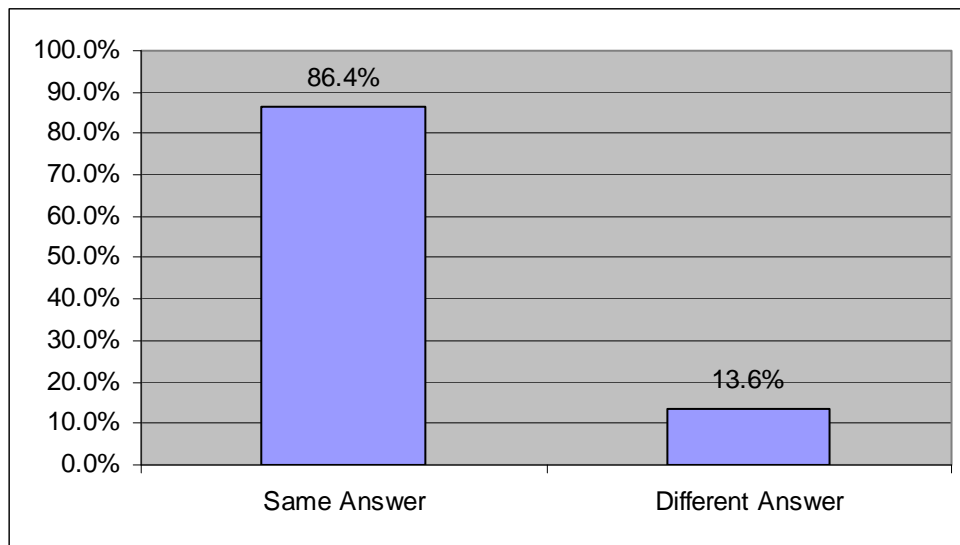
Graph 9.2



Webmasters' Responses as to whether their Church has a Mission Statement

Of more use in terms of understanding the potential influence that a church's mission statement might have on Website design would be an assessment as to whether Webmasters were able to correctly identify the existence – or lack of existence – of a mission statement, because such information could potentially influence Website design decisions. On the assumption that ministers, as church leaders, would be sure whether there was a church mission statement in existence or not, it was therefore decided to compare the ministers' and Webmasters' answers to their respective questions about the existence of a church mission statement. There were 22 local Methodist churches for which both the minister and the Webmaster gave an answer to their respective questions about the existence of a church mission statement. In the majority of cases (19 in all), the ministers and Webmasters gave the same answers, but of the answers that were different (3 in all), two involved the Webmaster answering 'Don't Know' and one involved a Webmaster saying that the church had a mission statement when the minister said that it did not. Graph 9.3 (overleaf) summarises whether the ministers gave the same answers as the Webmasters:

Graph 9.3



Responses to Questions about Existence of a Church Mission Statement

Given that none of the instances of ministers and Webmasters giving the same answers were ‘Don’t Know’, the responses to questions 3.10 and 4.21 of the Research Questionnaire summarised in Graph 9.3 suggest that a significant majority of Webmasters are sufficiently aware of the mission priorities of their local churches to be able to correctly state whether or not their church has a mission statement. Such a high level of awareness of the existence, or non-existence, of mission statements could be taken as a contradiction to the suggestion that there are inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. However, this data should be interpreted with care as it is likely that either the minister or the Webmaster would have been able to see the answer already given to that question by the other person and that may well have influenced some of the answers that were given – perhaps where one of the respondents might have answered ‘Don’t Know’, sight of the other person’s answer could have resulted in an answer of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ which was identical to the other person’s.

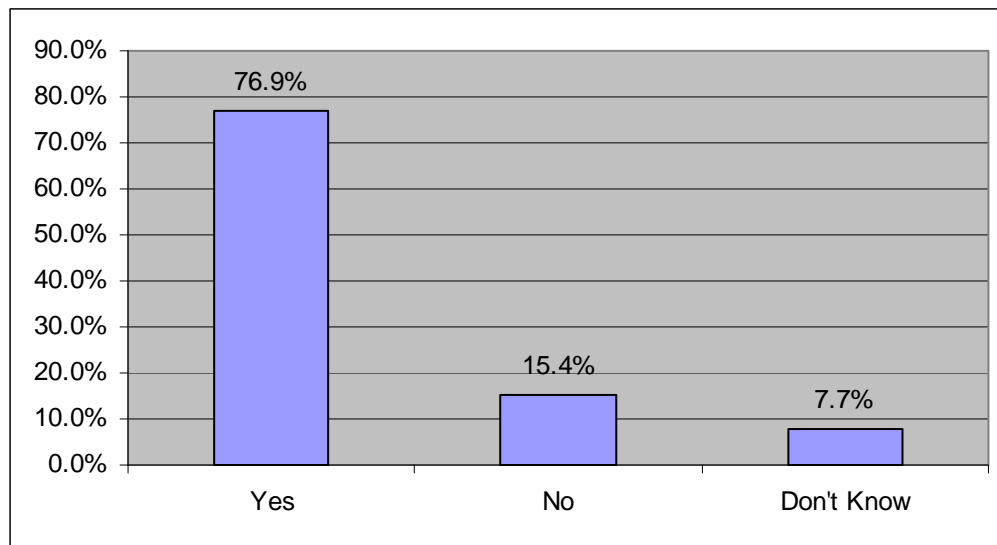
9.2.2 Link Between Websites and Mission Statements

If a local church Website is to relate to the life of the corresponding local church in a way that is in tune with the mission priorities of that church, then it would seem to be sensible to assume that the Website was not entirely divorced from the church’s mission priorities as encapsulated in the mission statement. Indeed, although they were writing about commercial

marketing rather than Christian mission, the belief of Drummond and Ensor (2001, 134) that: “the mission statement ... operates as a guiding light that acts as a reference point when making strategic decisions in general and when forming objectives in particular” does suggest that it is essential that a local church’s Website should be a response to that church’s mission statement. Indeed, given the assertion of Lancaster, Massingham and Ashford (2002, 407) that: “the application of the marketing concept and tools has widened from its original primary application in marketing consumer goods in profit-seeking organizations to industrial markets, service markets and not-for-profit organisations.”, it would also seem sensible to assume that if a Website is to be an effective tool for the mission of the local church, the Webmaster should be aiming to make sure that the Website fits in with the priorities of that church’s mission statement. Question 4.22 of the Research Questionnaire therefore asked those Webmasters of churches which did have mission statements whether their Website fitted in with them. Graph 9.4 (overleaf) shows the responses.

The responses to question 4.22 of the Research Questionnaire suggest that a significant majority of Webmasters believe that their Websites fit in with their churches’ mission statements. Such a high incidence of the alignment of Websites with mission statements could be taken as a contradiction to the suggestion that there are inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. However, this data is only indicative of the Webmasters’ perception of their own Websites and so is not an objective assessment. In addition, the fact that Webmasters assented to the term ‘fit in’ might not mean that the whole of the content of their Websites relates to their churches’ mission priorities; the term ‘fit in’ can be interpreted in different ways such that if, for example, any local church Website would ‘fit in’ with a mission statement that said ‘there will be a Website’, and a local church Website with a small amount of evangelistic content could be said to ‘fit in’ with a mission statement saying that ‘the church will evangelise’. Of particular note in this context is that, of the mission statements that were returned with the Research Questionnaires, none actually suggested that the churches should have Websites, which could imply that the existence of the Websites was therefore either not seen as a priority or perhaps not envisioned when the mission statements were formulated – though, to be fair, only 60% of the mission statements went into sufficient detail that a Website would actually merit a mention.

Graph 9.4



Percentage of Websites that 'fit in' with Mission Statements (Webmasters' Views)

9.2.3 How Websites Support Local Churches in Mission

Given the potential for inconclusive responses to question 4.22 of the Research Questionnaire, question 4.23 asked Webmasters how they believed that their church Website supported the mission of the church. In all, 16 Webmasters responded to this question and the following points summarise in brief the responses that were given by each Webmaster:

- 1) Publicity to outsiders;
- 2) Promotes all Churches Together activities;
- 3) Honestly stating what the church is like;
- 4) Tells people where we are and what we have to offer;
- 5) Increases awareness of church in community / access from around the world;
- 6) Advertises mission-based and community-orientated church / evangelism tool;
- 7) Makes mission statement widely available / community outreach & wider world;
- 8) Provides information for enquirers & those moving into the area / ecumenical;
- 9) Uses the same statements and language;
- 10) Making presence known / advertising worship and events / prayer requests;
- 11) Notices & church magazine / publicity of holiday clubs (worldwide) / site links;
- 12) Reaching out to wider community / keeping church & community informed;
- 13) Integral;

- 14) Planned links / scripture / showing facilities available to church and community;
- 15) General outreach;
- 16) Mission / vision explained.

Eight (50%) of the responses (points 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14 and 15) focus on particular aspects of mission and thus suggest that the Websites are intended to highlight aspects of the church's mission, rather than reflecting the whole of the church's mission. Of these, only three of the responses (points 5, 7 and 11) directly suggest that the Websites are a means of relating to people outside of the local church community.

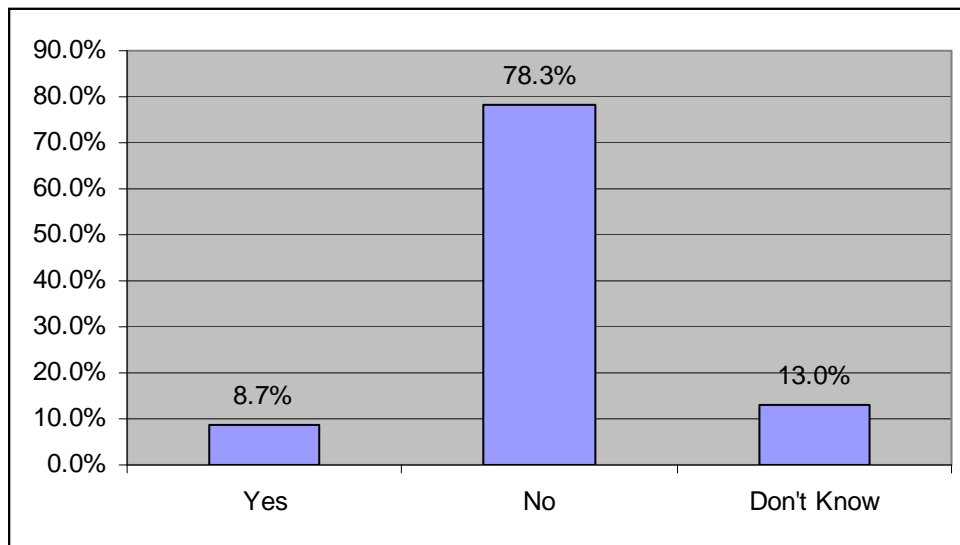
Eight (50%) of the responses (points 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13 and 16) focus on the church's mission in general and might therefore suggest that the Websites are intended to reflect the church's mission as a whole, rather than highlighting particular aspects of it. Of these, only one response (point 13) seems to be directly stating that the Website is an integral part of the church's mission, though it is not clear whether this means that the Website is part of the church's mission or is integral to all areas of the church's mission and, given the number of responses to question 4.23 – 16 of a possible 22, or 72.7% – all of which quoted ways of supporting the mission of the church, it would not be fair to deduce from the other responses that those Websites are not intended to be integral to the church's mission.

The Webmasters' answers to question 4.23, do suggest that there are links between the mission of the local Methodist churches under consideration and the corresponding Websites. However, it is still not clear from the Webmasters' answers how well the individual Websites relate to the mission of their local churches. It is not therefore possible to draw any conclusions from this as to whether there are inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

9.2.4 Attempts to Assess the Effectiveness of Websites for Mission

Question 4.24 of the Research Questionnaire asked whether the Webmasters had made any attempts to assess the effectiveness of their Websites for mission. Graph 9.5 (overleaf) shows the responses of the 23 Webmasters who answered the question.

Graph 9.5



Webmasters' Responses as to whether Websites' Effectiveness for Mission is Assessed

The high incidence of Webmasters' indications – as shown in Graph 9.5 – that no attempt was being made to assess the effectiveness of their local church's Website for mission³ suggests that there may be inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. However, although Cato (2001, XIII) asserts that a Website is “a reflection of you in the role you have and the context of your world ... The whole message is on your website; you and your website are not separate things”, failure to assess the effectiveness of church Websites can only really be interpreted as a failure in monitoring the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites, rather than as conclusive proof of a lack of effectiveness of the Websites themselves.

9.3 Local Methodist Church Mission Priorities

In all, 20 ministers gave information in their Research Questionnaires about the mission priorities of churches with Websites. In order to analyse this information, the data submitted about mission priorities for the four areas of 'Our Calling' in response to question 3.11 of the Research Questionnaire will first be studied, then the data submitted about detailed mission

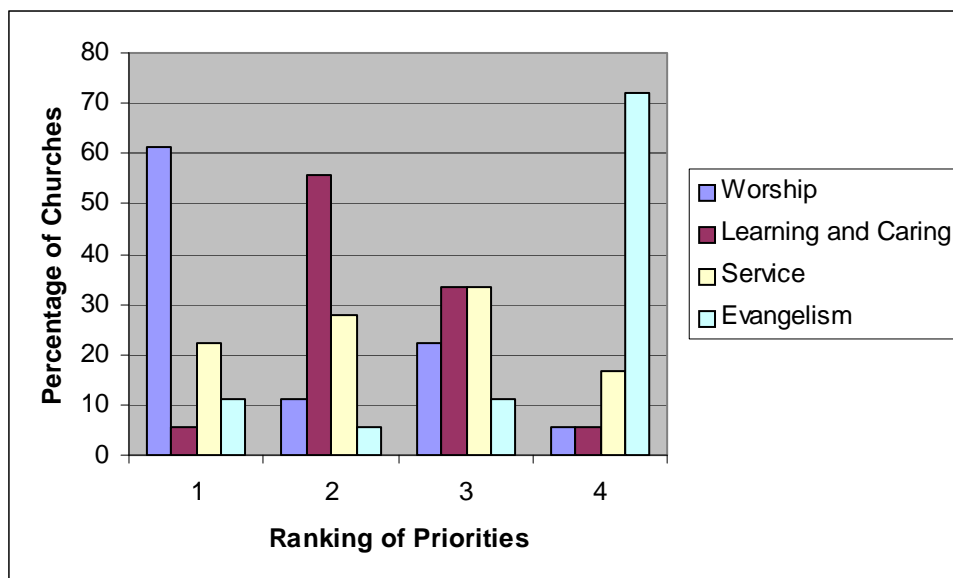
3 Of the 20 Webmasters who said that they knew the answer to question 4.24 on the Research Questionnaire, 2 (10%) responded “yes” and 18 (90%) responded “no”. The suggestion is clearly that, for the majority of local Methodist churches under consideration, there was no attempt to assess the effectiveness of the corresponding Websites for mission.

priorities within the four mission areas of ‘Our Calling’ in response to questions 3.12 to 3.15 of the Research Questionnaire will be studied.

9.3.1 Mission Priorities for the four areas of ‘Our Calling’

In order to enable some conclusions to be drawn about the mission priorities of the local Methodist churches under consideration, Research Question 3.11 asked ministers to rank the priorities of the four mission areas defined by ‘Our Calling’ for the churches under consideration with a unique number between 1 and 4. In all, 18 of the respondents did this ranking correctly – by giving four unique numbers – and the results are shown as percentages in Graph 9.6:⁴

Graph 9.6

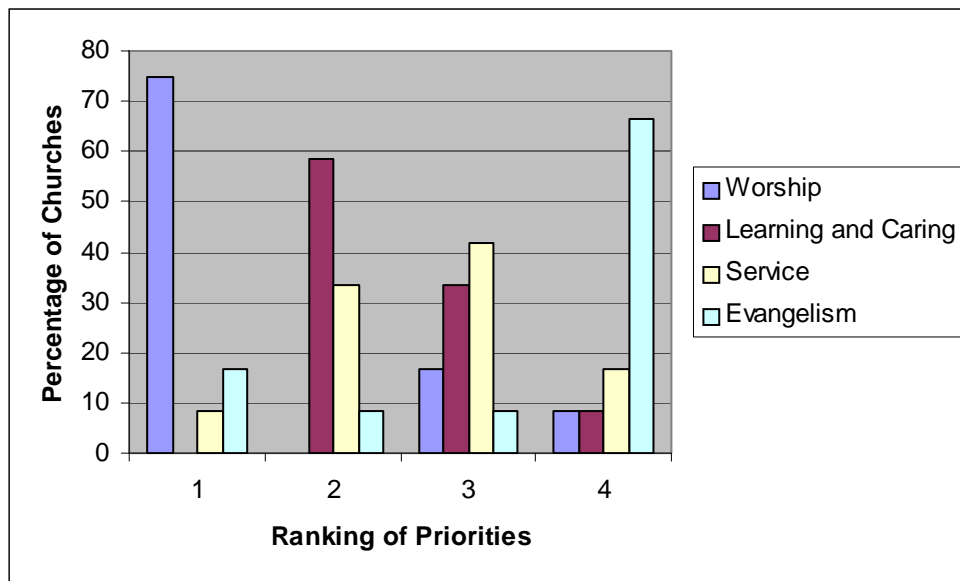


Ministers’ Ranking of Mission Priorities (All Churches)

For comparison, graphs were also produced for the ministers’ ranking of the mission priorities of the 11 Methodist churches – Graph 9.7 (overleaf) – and of the 7 ecumenical churches under consideration – Graph 9.8 (overleaf).

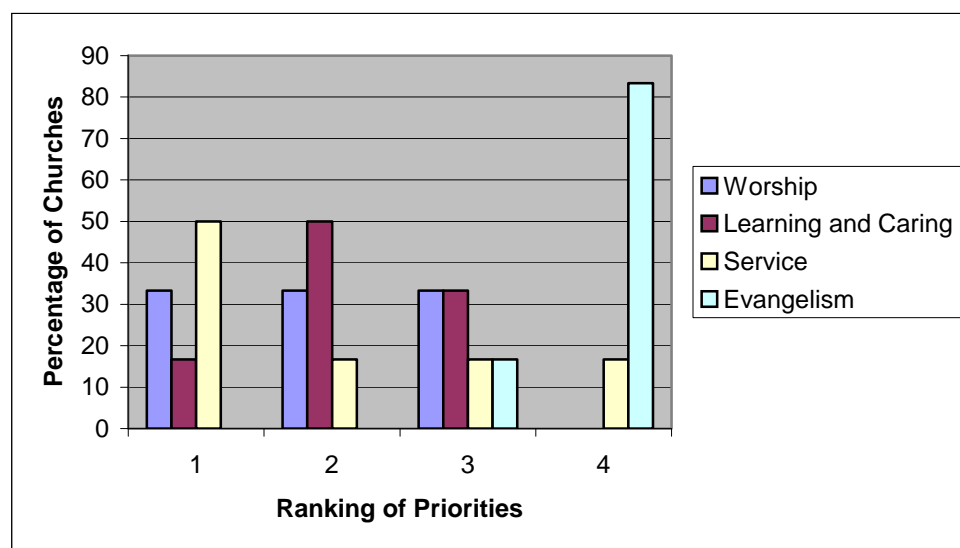
Graph 9.7

⁴ Of the two ministers who did not complete question 3.11 as requested, one ranked all 4 mission priorities as “in theory equal” and the other ranked evangelism as 2 and the other mission priorities as 1.



Ministers' Ranking of Mission Priorities (Methodist Churches)

Graph 9.8

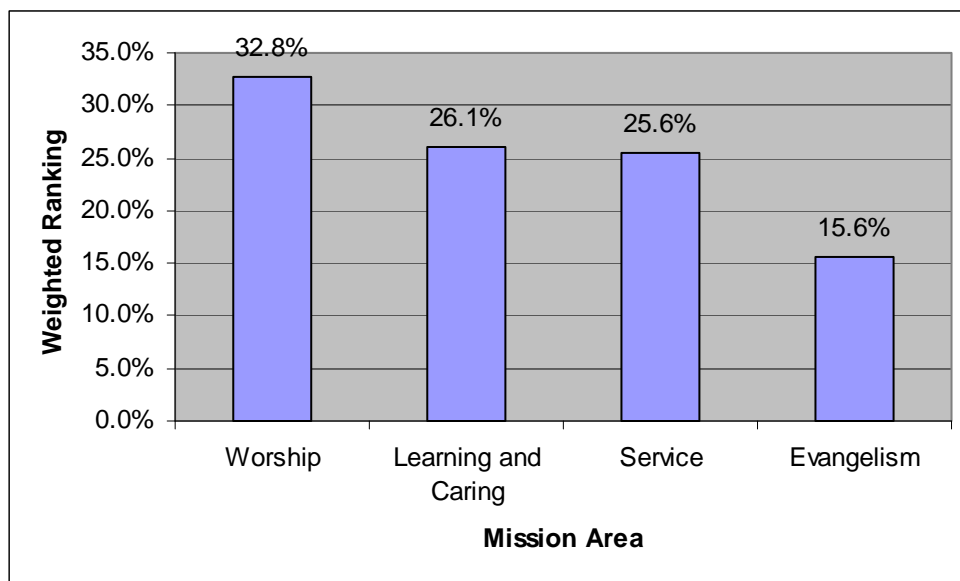


Ministers' Ranking of Mission Priorities (Ecumenical Churches)

What is particularly notable about Graphs 9.7 and 9.8 is that they show that the ministers perceived the priorities of the Methodist and of the ecumenical churches differently, such that the mission priorities of the 11 Methodist churches seem to be broadly similar to those of the whole sample of 18 churches, whereas the mission priorities of the 7 ecumenical churches seem to be significantly different to those of the whole sample of churches – with the ecumenical churches seemingly having ‘service’ as more of a priority and ‘worship’ as less of a priority.

By weighting the responses, it was felt that it should be possible to get a better sense of the priority attached to each of the churches' four mission areas by their ministers. Such a weighting exercise was therefore carried out using a form of Likert scale – as described by De Vaus (2002, 122) – and using a weighting of 4 for the mission area that was ranked 1st, 3 for the area ranked 2nd, 2 for the area ranked 3rd and 1 for the area ranked 4th, thereby producing Graphs 9.9, 9.10 and 9.11⁵ (see below, page 221 and page 222 respectively), which are all expressed in terms of percentages for easier comparison between the graphs. These graphs clearly show the similarities between the priorities of the Methodist churches and the whole sample of churches, but also clearly show the differences in priorities between the sample of 11 Methodist Churches and the sample of 7 ecumenical churches.

Graph 9.9



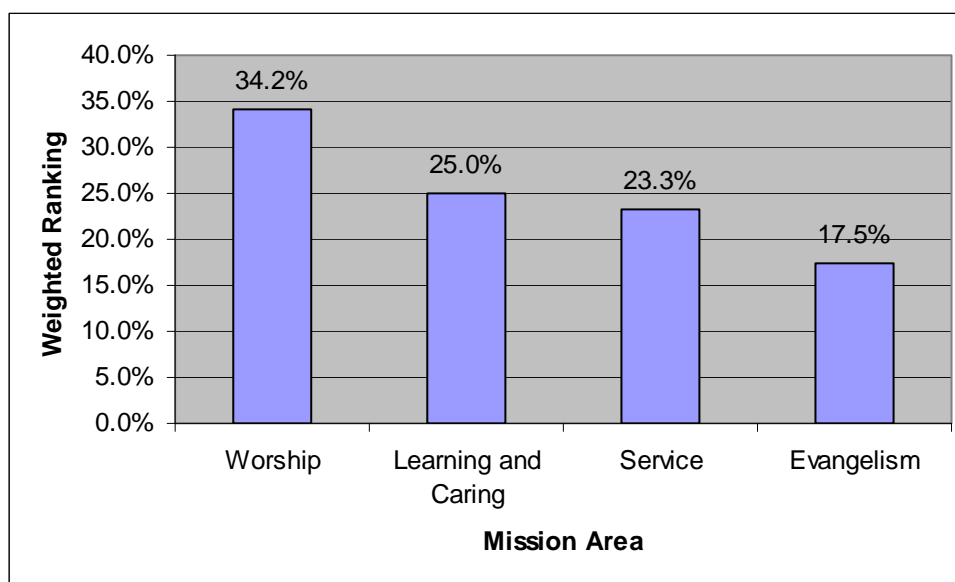
Weighted Ranking of Mission Priorities (All Churches) – as a percentage

Graph 9.9 suggests that the ministers of the churches under consideration perceived that 'worship' was given the highest priority and 'evangelism' the lowest priority, with 'service' and 'learning & caring' coming in between and having roughly equal priority. If ministers believed that mission equated to evangelism and had related that thinking to the perceived priorities of their churches, then the responses should have been very different, with

⁵ Graph 9.9 omits the two sets of data which did not give four unique rankings and Graphs 9.10 and 9.11 omit one set of data each, so the total sample size is 17, with 10 Methodist and 7 ecumenical churches.

‘evangelism’ being the highest priority. Perhaps structuring the Research Questionnaire around ‘Our Calling’ and thereby breaking ‘mission’ into four areas, all requiring a response, along with the effect of recent thinking along the lines of Booker’s (2003, 1-2) that “Mission is not always evangelism, and some aspects of mission (responding to social injustice, for example) are very clearly not evangelism”, meant that the ministers’ responses did accurately reflect the mission priorities of the churches. However, the findings in terms of the high priority of ‘worship’, lower priority of ‘service’ and ‘learning & caring’ and lowest priority of ‘evangelism’ could, perhaps, stem from the ministers’ perceptions as to what they and their congregations do in each of the four mission areas: ‘worship’ could be perceived as having a high priority due to prevailing patterns of regular worship on Sundays at most churches; the less-regular and less well-attended ‘service’ activities (e.g. charitable giving) and ‘learning & caring’ activities (e.g. house groups and bible studies) might lead to a perception of a lower priority; a perception of ‘evangelism’ only happening at special events such as ‘missions’ and ‘rallies’, rather than being a routine priority of the life of the church, could lead to a perceived lowest priority.

Graph 9.10

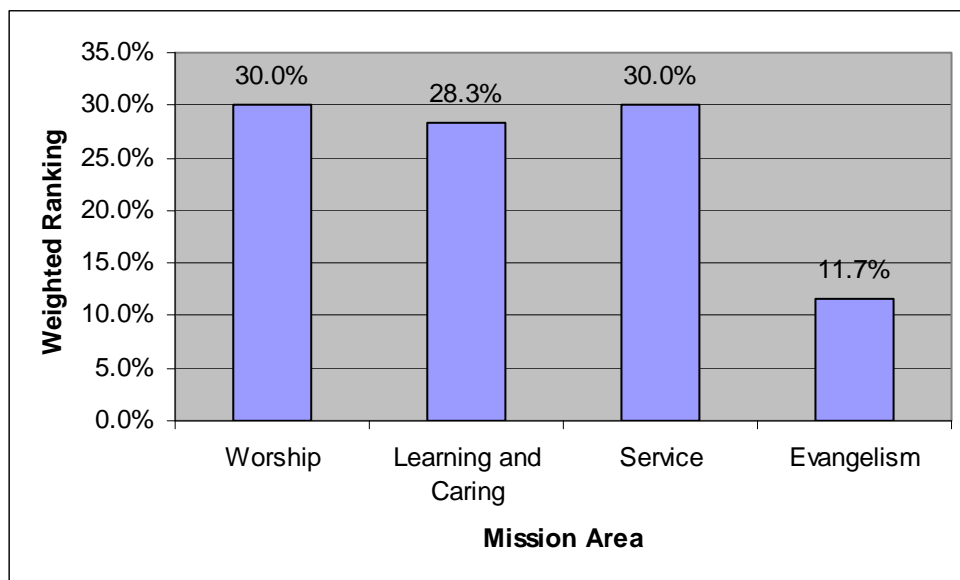


Weighted Ranking of Mission Priorities (Methodist Churches) – as a percentage

Graph 9.10 and Graph 9.11 (overleaf) separately show the weighted ranking of mission priorities for Methodist and ecumenical churches in order to try to determine any significant differences in perceived priorities between these groups of churches.

Despite the mission priorities suggested by Graph 9.9, it seems that Graphs 9.10 and 9.11 suggest a significant difference between the perceived mission priorities of Methodist and ecumenical churches. For Methodist churches, there seems to be a perception that the highest priority is given to ‘worship’, about two thirds as much priority to ‘service’ and ‘learning & caring’ as to ‘worship’ and just over half as much of the priority of ‘worship’ to ‘evangelism’. However, for the ecumenical churches, there seems to be a perception of roughly equal priority being given to ‘worship’, ‘learning & caring’ and ‘service’, with only about a third as much priority being given to ‘evangelism’ as to the other mission areas.

Graph 9.11



Weighted Ranking of Mission Priorities (Ecumenical Churches) – as a percentage

Given the amount and nature of data that has been gathered for this thesis, it is not possible to comment with any degree of certainty as to why the churches’ mission priorities might be perceived by their ministers in that way that they are.

Sections 9.3.2 to 9.3.5 of this chapter will now explore the mission priorities in more depth. As an aid to easily identifying the rankings in Tables 9.1 to 9.4 inclusive, it should be noted that the most frequently occurring rank for a particular aspect of a mission priority is shown in orange and the next most frequently occurring rank is shown in yellow. It should also be noted that Tables 9.1 to 9.4 do not greatly help in terms of gaining an understanding of the

importance of aspects of ‘Our Calling’ in individual local Methodist churches – which might be important because all of the churches under consideration have Websites, so it might be expected that the mission priorities would be reflected in some way in the content of the Websites – but, later in this chapter, section 9.4 will investigate the relationship between mission priorities and Websites in more depth.

9.3.2 Mission Priorities for Worship

Research Question 3.12 asked the ministers to state how important particular aspects of worship were considered to be for the church under consideration. Table 9.1 shows the ministers’ responses expressed as percentages, along with a weighting,⁶ by which the responses are ordered:

Table 9.1

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>
<i>Regular Services</i>	74%	21%	5%	0%	0%	469
<i>Music</i>	60%	30%	10%	0%	0%	450
<i>Communion</i>	50%	45%	5%	0%	0%	445
<i>Prayers</i>	50%	40%	10%	0%	0%	440
<i>Preaching</i>	50%	40%	10%	0%	0%	440
<i>Diversity</i>	47%	42%	11%	0%	0%	436
<i>Festivals / ‘Specials’</i>	45%	35%	20%	0%	0%	425
<i>Baptisms</i>	20%	60%	15%	5%	0%	395
<i>Funerals</i>	10%	60%	20%	5%	5%	365
<i>Drama</i>	10%	45%	35%	10%	0%	355
<i>Weddings</i>	5%	30%	45%	20%	0%	320
<i>Healing</i>	10%	25%	45%	10%	10%	315
<i>Poetry</i>	0%	20%	65%	10%	5%	300
<i>Meditation</i>	0%	25%	45%	25%	5%	290

Importance of Aspects of Worship, with Weighted Scores

The weighted scores shown in Table 9.1 indicate something of the relative importance of aspects of worship within the sample of churches under consideration as perceived by the respondents – so that ‘Regular Services’ seems to be the most important and ‘Meditation’ the least important. However, the closeness of some of the weightings (e.g. ‘Prayers’ vs. ‘Preaching’ and ‘Weddings’ vs. ‘Healing’) does show that the relative importance of some

aspects of worship is by no means clear-cut.

9.3.3 Mission Priorities for Learning and Caring

Research Question 3.13 asked the ministers to state how important particular aspects of learning and caring were considered to be for the church under consideration. Table 9.2 shows the ministers' responses expressed as percentages, along with a weighting,⁷ by which the responses are ordered:

Table 9.2

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>
<i>Children's Work</i>	50%	40%	10%	0%	0%	440
<i>Bible Study</i>	35%	60%	0%	5%	0%	425
<i>Fellowships</i>	35%	50%	15%	0%	0%	420
<i>House Groups</i>	40%	45%	5%	10%	0%	415
<i>Social Activities</i>	25%	60%	15%	0%	0%	410
<i>Faith Development</i>	30%	45%	20%	5%	0%	400
<i>Youth Work</i>	30%	40%	25%	5%	0%	395
<i>Service Times</i>	30%	50%	15%	5%	0%	385
<i>Bible Reading Notes</i>	10%	65%	15%	10%	0%	375
<i>Prayer Groups</i>	40%	10%	35%	15%	0%	375
<i>Cell Groups</i>	16%	42%	21%	21%	0%	353
<i>Membership Classes</i>	10%	30%	45%	15%	0%	335
<i>Interfaith</i>	11%	16%	42%	26%	5%	302

Importance of Aspects of Learning & Caring, with Weighted Scores

The weighted scores shown in Table 9.2 indicate something of the relative importance of aspects of learning & caring within the sample of churches under consideration as perceived by the respondents – so that 'Children's work' seems to be the most important and 'Interfaith' the least important. However, the closeness of some of the weightings (e.g. 'Bible study' vs. 'Fellowships' vs. 'House groups' and 'Bible Reading Notes' vs. 'Prayer groups') does show that the relative importance of some aspects of learning & caring is by no means clear-cut.

6 A simple weighting scheme of Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1 was used.

7 Again, a simple weighting scheme of Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1 was used.

9.3.4 Mission Priorities for Service

Research Question 3.14 asked the ministers to state how important particular aspects of service were considered to be for the church under consideration. Table 9.3 shows the ministers' responses expressed as percentages, along with a weighting,⁸ by which the responses are ordered:

Table 9.3

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>
<i>Caring (Visiting)</i>	65%	30%	5%	0%	0%	460
<i>Caring (Practical)</i>	55%	35%	10%	0%	0%	445
<i>Charitable Giving</i>	45%	50%	5%	0%	0%	440
<i>Use of Premises</i>	45%	45%	10%	0%	0%	435
<i>Pre-School</i>	45%	40%	5%	10%	0%	420
<i>Ecumenical Work</i>	35%	45%	20%	0%	0%	415
<i>Charity Work</i>	30%	45%	20%	0%	5%	395
<i>Community Links</i>	15%	60%	15%	0%	0%	360
<i>Campaigning</i>	15%	25%	35%	25%	0%	330
<i>Environmental Work</i>	5%	25%	40%	25%	5%	300
<i>Politics</i>	5%	20%	45%	25%	5%	295
<i>Church School</i>	15%	10%	35%	25%	15%	285

Importance of Aspects of Service, with Weighted Scores

The weighted scores shown in Table 9.3 indicate something of the relative importance of aspects of service within the sample of churches under consideration as perceived by the respondents – so that 'Caring (Visiting)' seems to be the most important and 'Church School' the least important. However, the closeness of some of the weightings (e.g. 'Caring (Practical)' vs. 'Charitable Giving' vs. 'Use of Premises' and 'Environmental Work' vs. 'Politics' vs. 'Church school') does show that the relative importance of some aspects of service is by no means clear-cut.

9.3.5 Mission Priorities for Evangelism

Research Question 3.15 asked the ministers to state how important particular aspects of evangelism were considered to be for the church under consideration. Table 9.4 (overleaf)

⁸ Again, a simple weighting scheme of Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1 was used.

shows the ministers' responses expressed as percentages, along with a weighting,⁹ by which the responses are ordered.

Table 9.4

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>
<i>Friendship</i>	45%	55%	0%	0%	0%	445
<i>Contact with Minister</i>	25%	55%	20%	0%	0%	405
<i>Social Activities</i>	20%	60%	15%	5%	0%	395
<i>Nurture Courses</i>	20%	45%	30%	5%	0%	380
<i>Evangelistic Publicity</i>	10%	45%	35%	5%	5%	350
<i>Testimonies</i>	0%	35%	45%	15%	5%	325
<i>Evangelistic Events</i>	10%	15%	55%	15%	5%	310

Importance of Aspects of Evangelism, with Weighted Scores

The weighted scores shown in Table 9.4 indicate something of the relative importance of aspects of evangelism within the sample of churches under consideration as perceived by the respondents – so that ‘Friendship’ seems to be the most important and ‘Evangelistic Events’ the least important. However, the closeness of some of the weightings (e.g. ‘Contact with Minister’ vs. ‘Social Activities’) does show that the relative importance of some aspects of evangelism is by no means clear-cut.

9.4 Effectiveness of Website Content in Supporting Mission

In section 9.3.1, the weighted rankings of mission priorities for the local Methodist churches under consideration were shown as percentages in Graphs 9.9 to 9.11. However, that information in itself said nothing about the way in which the local Methodist church Websites under consideration relate to the corresponding churches' mission priorities. Given the assertion of Drummond and Ensor (2001, 250) that: “Two dimensions determine the success of a strategy: the strategy itself and the organization's ability to implement it”, this section therefore derives a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the local church Websites in supporting the achievement of their churches' mission priorities.

Garrett (2003, 41) suggests that “often, site objectives exist only as an unspoken

⁹ Again, a simple weighting scheme of Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1 was used.

understanding among those building the site”. The clear danger in such an approach is that the finished product – perhaps a local Methodist church Website – will not be a useful tool for mission even if a Webmaster has spent many hours producing it. In order to minimise the possibility of producing a Website that proves to be irrelevant or under-used, an early task for those seeking to produce effective Website designs should be to gain an understanding of the requirements that the Website is intended to satisfy. This task should not involve gaining an understanding of the information that will be made available or sought as input, or thinking about the physical design of Webpages; an understanding is initially required which considers Website requirements as being to do with: a) the organisation for which the Website is being produced; and b) the potential users of the Website. Niederst (2003, 47) suggests that: “there is something that you hopefully do know when you begin the design process: your target audience”. An understanding of the nature of a Website’s target audience (i.e. the intended users) might mean that the design of a Website in terms of its layout and functionality could be said to be about giving these users a good experience, in keeping with the assertion of Jenson (2002, 42) that “when designing any consumer product, some target user is always in mind, whether conscious or unconscious, to help guide your decisions”. The techniques of designing Websites for good usability have already been explored in Part 3 of this thesis and, on the assumption that the mission of a local church must inherently involve a knowledge of the target audience (i.e. of the community and congregation), the rest of this chapter will assume that the needs of the target audience have been assessed during the process of drawing up local churches’ mission priorities and will therefore consider the relationship between the mission priorities of the local Methodist churches and the content of the corresponding Websites under consideration.

As has already been noted in section 9.1, it is unlikely that a local church Website will ever actually *become* the local church, but such a Website can represent the local church to the wider community and can encourage people to become involved with it. Randall (1994, 105) asserts that “all organisations need to communicate with the outside world all the time” which, because a Website is a means of communicating both within a church and outside of it, suggests that a Website could be considered to be a marketing tool and to function in a similar way that an advertisement represents a product or service and encourages people to use it. Although Ellul (1965, 407) asserts that: “Advertising must affect all people; or at least an overwhelming majority. Its goal is to persuade the masses to buy”, the view of Dyer

(1982, 72-73) is that “the whole question of the influence of advertising, particularly on us as individuals, is one of continuing debate ... In addition to influencing some of the general values and beliefs of society, advertising interacts with and affects other forms of communication”.

In a commercial situation, the purpose of a Website might be to increase awareness of an organisation and its services, or even to support an organisation’s primary goals by using e-commerce to sell goods and services. What, then, might the role of the local church Website be? As has already been noted in Chapter 2, Redford (1999, 221) argues that “our missional approach must match the context in which we minister. ... We will need virtual tools and virtual communication to witness to those in a virtual context.” It was also noted in Chapter 2 that Jewell (2004, 43) suggests that “if our ministry with all of its technological resources is to bring about the building up of the body of Christ, success will be measured by the quality of Christian community. The deepening of Christian community and the formation of Christian persons require more than enthusiasm for technology.” The deepening of community is, however, an area in which determining the effectiveness of the local church Websites under consideration is difficult; although many social networking Websites encourage the development of a sense of community by the exchange of personal information and experiences – Facebook (2007), Friends Reunited (2007), YouTube (2007) and BeBo (2007) being just a few of these – the local church Websites under consideration focus on the provision of information, rather than providing facilities for the development of virtual communities. This is perhaps partly due to the fact that the Websites under consideration were developed before many of the social networking Websites were developed or widely used, but may also reflect a desire on the part of the local church Webmasters – whether conscious or unconscious – to advertise local churches with the aim of encouraging people to engage physically, rather than virtually, with the local churches represented by the Websites under consideration. Thus, the Websites under consideration are more consistent with the thinking of Lambert (2007): “they offer some kind of church experience for people who find it difficult to go to an actual church for whatever reason ... (and should not) be regarded as a substitute for actual churches.” Therefore, although Cato (2001, XII) suggests that a Website is “a reflection of you in the role you have and the context of your world”, if a local Methodist church Website is seen as a way of advertising the local church, then the local church Website should arguably promote all aspects of the church’s mission in order to

effectively represent the mission of the local church to those who access the Website. In considering the effectiveness of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration, it is therefore necessary to consider how a Website can effectively promote any organisation.

Pirouz and Weinman (1997, 67) suggest that “in designing a site to promote an idea, sell a product, compel users to dig deeper, or provide entertainment, you need to have an overall concept that creatively delivers the goods”. Local Methodist church Websites will be intended to do most, if not all, of these things so that a local Methodist church Website should effectively reflect the church’s mission priorities to the extent that the design process for a local Methodist church Website should have involved translating the church’s mission priorities into the structure of the Website and the content of the Webpages. Therefore, if the overall concept of the local Methodist church Website has not sprung from an understanding of the overall concept of the local Methodist church – i.e. the mission priorities – then it is likely that the Website’s effectiveness in terms of the degree of correspondence between the church’s mission priorities and its Website will be small. Thus, in designing an effective local Methodist church Website, it would be important to bear in mind the assertion of Constantine and Lockwood (1999, 6) that “a system must be capable, at least in principle, of doing what it is supposed to do”. When Websites are designed commercially, there may be a formal method for determining the priorities of the organisation concerned and of translating them into the Website structure and content but even if a formal process is not used for designing a local Methodist church Website, it should still be the case that an effective local Methodist church Website in some way reflects the mission priorities of the church to which the Website relates.

Returning to the concept of advertising, it is interesting to note the observation of Dyer (1982, 78) that “it is hard to pin down the social effects of advertising in any precise numerical sense, (but) it might be possible to measure the effectiveness of single measures”. However, one difficulty in determining the effectiveness of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration was that, even though standardised data was collected about the mission priorities of the local churches, each of the corresponding Websites was constructed in a different way. Nevertheless, Cato (2001, 73) suggests that Website designers should be “breaking down the design into primary areas ... (related to) high level objectives of the user”. In studying the ‘Amazon’ Website, Cato (2001, 74-76) suggests that the primary areas

of an organisation's Website will be reflected in terms of the priority that they are given on the Website's Homepage. Applying this thinking to local Methodist church Websites would suggest that Homepages should reflect the local churches' mission priorities as well.

However, although the 'Our Calling' model was adopted in order to gain comparable data for each local Methodist church in responses to the Research Questionnaire, the methods used by the Webmasters for relating their Website designs to the churches' mission priorities may not have involved 'Our Calling'; each of the four areas of 'Our Calling' will therefore be represented in some way in that data that was obtained about the churches' mission priorities, but some of the Homepages may not seem to relate directly to 'Our Calling'. Nevertheless, Cato (2001, 78-79) also suggests that designers "use scenarios drive the design ... Consider objectives and sub-objectives for each screen ... Provide appropriate actions to meet the objectives." Applying Cato's method to local Methodist church Website design suggests that the local Methodist church Websites under consideration should reflect the mission priorities of the corresponding churches – that the design of such Websites, like the company Website referred to by Rodin (1999, 191), "isn't separate ... it is part of the daily fabric of ... corporate life". A simple way to measure the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites in terms of relating to the corresponding churches' mission priorities is therefore to assume that the mission priorities of the local Methodist churches under consideration – as reported in the responses to questions 3.11 to 3.15 of the Research Questionnaires – are perfectly reflected in these churches' Websites in the sense of a direct correlation with the number of Webpages addressing these mission areas. It might therefore be expected that research would find the number of Webpages shown in Table 9.5, which reflects the weighted rankings of mission priorities:

Table 9.5

	<i>Mission Area</i>			
	Worship	Learning & Caring	Service	Evangelism
All Churches	32.8%	26.1%	25.6%	15.6%
Methodist	34.2%	25.0%	23.3%	17.5%
Ecumenical	30.0%	28.3%	30.0%	11.7%

Potential Number of Webpages if related to the Priority of Mission Areas

However, there are problems inherent in simply comparing the weighted rankings of mission

priorities for the churches with the number of Webpages addressing them:

- The weighted rankings are for groups of churches (all churches, Methodist and ecumenical) but more meaningful data might be obtained by evaluating the mission priorities and Websites of individual churches;
- Many of the churches' Webpages do not address a single area of mission, so it is hard to categorise some Webpages;
- Some of the Websites under consideration include a lot of archived material, such as sermons, which skews the results to some degree;
- The total number of Webpages under consideration runs into hundreds, so it would take a long time to evaluate them all – especially for the individual mission aspects listed in questions 3.12 to 3.15 of the Research Questionnaire.

In order to assess whether the local Methodist church Websites under consideration reflect the mission priorities of the corresponding churches, it was therefore decided to:

- assume that the content of an effective local Methodist church Website should reflect the corresponding mission priorities reported in Research Questionnaire sections 3.11;
- assume that a local church would 'set out its store' in the top-level¹⁰ Webpages so that Webpage options would directly relate to the church's mission priorities;
- assess which mission area each of the Webpages was intended to address by determining which mission area the bulk of the content on the Webpage was related to.

On the basis of these assumptions, an assessment of the bulk of the content on each of the top-level Webpages was performed,^{11,12} the results of which are shown in Table 9.6 (overleaf), with yellow shading indicating where the ranking of local Methodist church

10 A 'top-level' Webpage is one that is directly accessible from the Homepage.

11 This means that, for the assessment of the main mission area of Webpages, only the content of the Homepage was assessed for Websites that had no other Webpages. However, for Websites with multiple Webpages, all Webpages directly accessible from the Homepage were assessed, as well as main mission emphasis of the Homepage itself (if it had sufficient text or other information to be categorised).

12 Three churches had to be omitted from the assessment as some, or all, of their mission priorities had been ranked equally despite the ministers being asked to give unique rankings.

mission priorities is the same¹³ as the ranking of the main mission areas on the corresponding high-level Webpages.

Table 9.6

<i>Church</i>	<i>Mission Priorities</i>							
	<i>Church</i>				<i>Webpage</i>			
	<i>W</i>	<i>LC</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>LC</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>E</i>
<i>Notting Hill</i>	1	2	3	4	4	1=	1=	3
<i>Trinity, Harrow (LEP)</i>	1	2	4	3	4	1	2	3
<i>St. Andrews, Bushey Heath</i>	1	3	4	2	4	1=	1=	3
<i>Abbots Langley</i>	3	2	1	4	3	1	2	4
<i>Ley Hill</i>	4	3	2	1	3=	1=	3=	1=
<i>Trinity, Knebworth (LEP)</i>	1	3	2	4	4	2	1	3
<i>Ludwick Way, Welwyn GC</i>	2	3	1	4	3=	1=	3=	1=
<i>Shenley</i>	2	3	1	4	1=	1=	1=	1=
<i>Oxlease, Hatfield</i>	1	2	3	4	1=	3=	3=	1=
<i>Marlborough Road</i>	1	2	3	4	2=	1	2=	2=
<i>Digswell (LEP)</i>	2	1	3	4	3=	1	3=	2
<i>High Street, Harpenden</i>	1	3	2	4	3=	1	3=	2
<i>Southdown, Harpenden</i>	1	2	3	4	3=	1	2	3=
<i>Hoddesdon</i>	1	2	3	4	3=	1	2	3=
<i>Harlington</i>	1	3	2	4	3=	2	3=	1
<i>St. Mark's / Putnoe (LEP)</i>	2	3	1	4	1	2	3	4
<i>Amphill</i>	1	4	2	3	1=	2=	1=	2=
<i>Deanway United (LEP)</i>	3	2	1	4	4	1	2	3
<i>Panshanger (LEP)</i>	3	2	1	4	4	1	2=	2=

Mission Priorities for Churches and Local Church Webpages

The yellow shading on Table 9.6 suggests that there are some similarities between the mission priorities reported in the responses to question 3.11 on the Research Questionnaire

¹³ In saying that a mission priority ranking is the same as a Website ranking, it must be noted that equal Website rankings can be related to the comparable mission priority rankings so that, for example, a mission priority ranking of 3 would be equal to a website ranking of 2= of {1, 2=, 2=, 2=}, or of {1, 2=, 2=, 3}, or of {1=, 1=, 2=, 2=}.

and the information contained in the corresponding high-level Webpages. As there are 19 churches in Table 9.6, then shading all of the cells yellow would indicate that the ranking of the 76 mission priorities corresponded to the ranking of the Website content. Such a measure would indicate a perfect (100%) relationship between the mission priorities of the churches under consideration and the content of the high-level Webpages on the corresponding local Methodist church Websites. However, the actual number of boxes shaded yellow is only 26.3% (i.e. 20 of 76), which suggests that the relationship between the mission priorities of the churches under consideration and the content of the high-level Webpages on the corresponding local Methodist church Websites is poor and the differences in shading for the different churches give some support for there being inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

Taking a different tack with the data in Table 9.6, in which the relationship between mission priorities of the local Methodist churches under consideration and their corresponding Webpages is considered for individual Websites, it is notable that for only 5 of the Websites under consideration (22.7%) is there a relationship between the highest-ranked of the local church mission priorities (i.e. priority 1) and the highest-ranked of the main mission areas on the corresponding Websites as defined by the bulk of the content on the high-level Webpages. This also suggests that the relationship between the mission priorities of the churches under consideration and the content of the high-level Webpages on the corresponding local Methodist church Websites is poor and gives some support for there being inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

9.5 *Effectiveness of the Use of Website Feedback*

By their very nature, as collections of data related to dynamic organisations, local church Websites – like many other Websites – will need to change from time to time. Such changes may simply involve alterations to individual Webpages, but at certain points in time it may also be felt to be necessary for Webmasters to undertake more significant design changes to Websites as a result of changes in mission priorities or feedback received from users either as part of testing an initial design prior to its release or as part of an ongoing process of

evaluation. Accordingly, Levy (2001, 72): suggests that is important to “re-evaluate a site’s overall design and colour scheme regularly” and such activities should therefore be planned into a Website’s production and maintenance cycle.

This section therefore concentrates on the feedback that Webmasters receive about their Websites because the way in which such feedback is solicited and treated can be indicative of the effectiveness of a Website in terms of how it is adapted to the needs of its users.

Feedback about Websites can either be in the form of information consciously given to Webmasters (for example, the results of usability testing or the input received from a ‘feedback’ Webpage) or in the form of statistics gathered automatically as a Website is used (for example, information about which pages are accessed and where those accesses come from). In considering data from Part 4 (section C) of the Research Questionnaire in order to evaluate how effectively Website feedback is used by the local church Webmasters, this section will build upon the earlier work in this part of the thesis and will thus complete the evaluation of whether there are inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design.

Types of Website Feedback Sought

The wide availability of Website design software which costs little or nothing to obtain and the relative ease of arranging for a Website to ‘go live’ means that the production of a local church Website is now relatively easy. Nevertheless – as has already been hinted at in section 9.2 – it is always important when producing any Information Technology (IT) solution, to consider those who will be using it. Pharro (2004, 17) suggests that: “Many IT projects are used to help drive change in businesses in the hope that the IT will play a major role in streamlining processes and cutting down on unnecessary work. The problem is that change goes way beyond the hardware and software that makes up the final system; much of the work revolves around the people who will use the system day in day out”. Pharro’s observation is applicable to local Methodist church Websites because the production of such a Website without some consideration as to what its potential users might require is, at best, an oversight (i.e. if users still access the Website despite their requirements being ignored) and, at worst, (if users stop accessing the Website) a total waste of the Webmaster’s time and effort, as well as a waste of any other resources that the Webmaster or the local church has

committed to the project.

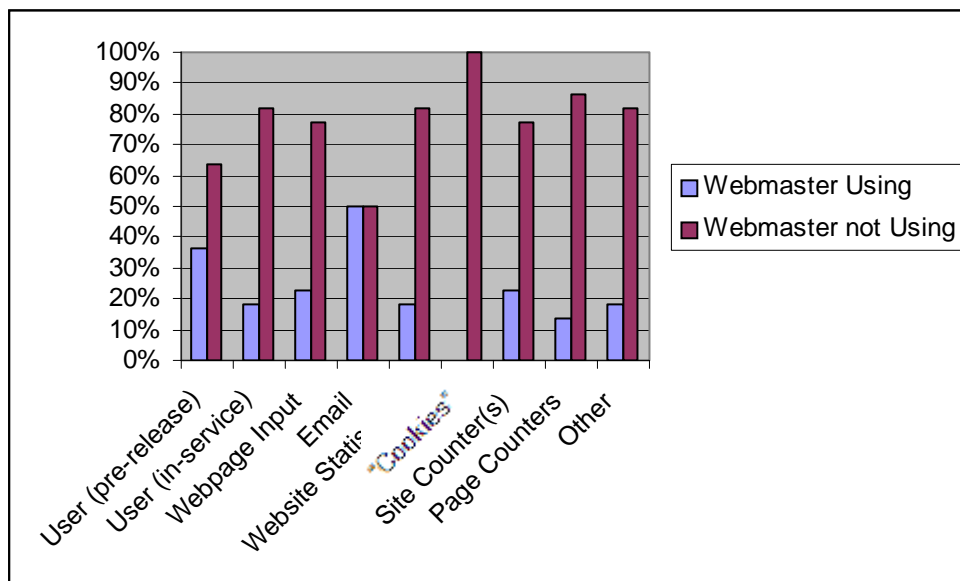
Garrett (2003, 43) notes that there are “success metrics: indicators we can track after the site has been deployed to see whether it is meeting our own objectives and our users’ needs”. Soliciting feedback is therefore a crucial part of Website design – and should certainly be a part of the process of designing local Methodist church Websites. Pharro (2004, 18) also suggests that “the problem for the IT department is finding a way to manage not just ... writing the software, but making sure that the users are trained and ready for the new way that the business works.” However, planning for the implementation of a local Methodist church Websites to be used – as for any Website – is a different problem to that faced by an IT department with an identifiable set of users because the potential users of a Website are not an easily identifiable set of people who can be trained or consulted before using it. Indeed, as Garrett (2003, 11) notes: “a Web site is a ‘self-service’ product. There is no instruction manual to read beforehand, no training seminar to attend, no customer service representative to help guide the user through the site.” It can therefore be very important for a sample of potential Website users – ranging from beginners to those who are very experienced – to have a chance to be involved in the initial specification and design of a local Methodist church Website, as well as being invited to use a prototype of the Website and to suggest changes that would make it easier for them to use. Even if this process has not happened, then Webmasters should still try to find out how users feel about their Websites, for example by inviting user feedback about their Website from users by way of a Webpage through which comments may be submitted.

In order to assess the ways in which the Webmasters for the local Methodist church Websites under consideration solicit feedback about the design of their Websites, question 4.16 of the Research Questionnaire asked which ways of soliciting feedback they employed. For the 22 Research Questionnaires which Webmasters completed, the answers are presented in Table 9.7 and Graph 9.12 (both overleaf).

The data gathered in response to question 4.16 of the Research Questionnaire and summarised in Graph 9.12 (overleaf) and Table 9.7 (overleaf) suggests that many of the Webmasters do not gather sufficient feedback from users about their local Methodist church Websites. Of particular note is that none of the Webmasters use Cookies to get feedback

about their Websites – perhaps because these need more technical knowledge and ISP support to set up than some other methods. Of the other methods of getting Website feedback, it is of particular concern that less than 40% of Webmasters do any pre-release testing with potential users – especially as Cato (2001, 193) suggests that “testing with representative users throughout the development is the only real way of finding out the real issues of useability before going live”.

Graph 9.12



Types of Feedback and how Webmasters use them

Table 9.7

Type of Feedback	Webmaster Using	Webmaster not Using
User (pre-release)	8 (36.4%)	14 (63.6%)
User (in-service)	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)
Webpage Input	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)
Email	11 (50.0%)	11 (50.0%)
Website Statistics	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)
Cookies	0 (0.0%)	22 (100%)
Site Counter(s)	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)
Page Counters	3 (13.6%)	19 (96.4%)
Other	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)

Types of Feedback and how Webmasters use them

Furthermore, as James (2003, 52) suggests that “user testing is the most commonly employed form of user research” it is also of concern that less than 20% of Webmasters do any in-service testing either. The feedback that is solicited includes two relatively straightforward methods of input, these being email (50%) and Webpage input (just over 20%). Website statistics and counters of various types are also used, but again with a fairly low usage of between about 10% and 25%. The ‘other’ techniques that were used were people-centred: requests for people’s views; meeting church members; verbal feedback; informal comments. In addition, as was noted in section 6.11, 5 out of the 20 local Methodist church Websites under consideration which allowed email contact (i.e. 25.0%) had an email contact for the Webmaster on every Webpage – which would perhaps suggest to users that the priority was for feedback about the Website itself, rather than feedback related to the church’s mission.

The findings from the responses to question 4.16 of the Research Questionnaire are evidence of potential inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission. This is because, of the eight feedback techniques that Webmasters were asked to comment about, only one (email) is used by at least 50% of the Webmasters and one more (pre-release user testing) is used by more than 30% of Webmasters. The implication is that proper account is not being taken of potential feedback from Website users and statistics.

Impact of Feedback on Website Design

There would seem to be little point in soliciting feedback about a local Methodist church’s Website design unless there was also an intention to make use of that feedback in order to enhance the user experience. Question 4.17 of the Research Questionnaire therefore asked Webmasters how any feedback that they receive influences the design of their local Methodist church Website. The 16 Webmasters who indicated that they did get feedback about their Websites made the following comments in response to question 4.17 as to how that feedback affects their Website:

- 1) No comment;
- 2) Review feedback and decide if action required;
- 3) Few suggestions need changes, but have included some new material;
- 4) Hasn’t influenced the design, only the content;
- 5) Not enough feedback to be of use;

- 6) Generally implement ideas where practicable;
- 7) Very much – e.g. taking views on board and adding photos;
- 8) Feedback influences the design considerably;
- 9) Valid feedback contributes to design adjustments;
- 10) Valid feedback contributes to design adjustments;
- 11) Changes in format and content;
- 12) Incorporate appropriate suggestions;
- 13) Very responsive;
- 14) Very slow getting feedback, but it is favourable and constructive;
- 15) No comment;
- 16) Try to fit it in if possible.

All but 2 (12.5%) of the 16 Webmasters made a comment as to how feedback is responded to, so at least 87.5% of the Webmasters are responding to feedback in some way. Eight of the Webmasters (50%) made comments suggesting that they were vetting the feedback that they were receiving in some way so as to decide whether any changes were necessary and 13 of the responses (81.3%) suggest that feedback does actually result in changes to their Websites. The findings from the responses to question 4.17 of the Research Questionnaire do not seem, at first glance, to give any evidence of inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission. However, the fact that 50% of Webmasters vet the feedback that they get raises the question as to whether Webmasters can be objective and impartial in assessing the validity of feedback and the need, or not, for change. In addition, a small minority of Webmasters (18.7%) may not be making any changes even when they do get feedback about their local church Websites.

9.6 *Concluding Remarks about Website Effectiveness*

This chapter considered whether there are significant inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design within the Methodist Church. This work built upon the examinations in Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this thesis of macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology, Website provision and Website design respectively, continuing the consideration of the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. In considering

Website effectiveness, the focus was on the effectiveness of the Website designs for mission and the effective use of feedback about Website designs. Some evidence to suggest inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission was found in both areas, though some of the data that was returned about the effectiveness of Website design seemed inconsistent in that many Webmasters claimed that their Websites fitted in with their churches' mission, yet few Webmasters claimed to make attempts to assess the effectiveness of their Websites. The actual correspondence between the mission priorities of the churches and the content of the high-level Webpages on the local Methodist church Websites under consideration was found to be poor and, as the majority of the Webmasters were found not to be accessing all of the means of Website feedback that are available to them, it was suggested that there is a real possibility that Websites are less effective for mission than they might otherwise be, as well as there being potential for local church Websites to be ineffective without anybody realising it. In conjunction with the preceding work in this thesis, these findings form part of the conclusions that will be drawn, in the context of the macro-missiological framework provided in Part 1 of this thesis, about the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites.

CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction to this work, it was stated that the argument of the thesis plays a part in the integration of the fields of missiology and information technology, making an original contribution to knowledge because of the way in which macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology are considered along with the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. This has been achieved by addressing the thesis that there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. Thus, Part 1 of the thesis addresses macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining missiological and methodological considerations – thereby placing into their theoretical context the empirical studies in Parts 2 to 4. Parts 2 to 4 of the thesis then address the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches by respectively considering: Website provision for local Methodist churches; design quality of the local churches' Websites with respect to 'best practice'; effectiveness of local church Websites with respect to the churches' mission priorities, along with an evaluation of whether the feedback that is received by Webmasters about their Websites is used effectively. In addition, this work entailed gathering new data about local church mission priorities and Websites, resulting in original statistical information. Thus, as a result of all of this work, new insights were revealed concerning the deployment of information technology in the context of Christian mission and, in particular, new insights into the deployment of Website technology in the context of local Methodist churches.

It was an enthusiasm for mission in the context of the London North West District of the Methodist Church that led to this research being carried out and a suspicion that local Methodist churches could use Websites more effectively for mission that led to the formulation of the thesis examined in this work. In the process of researching and writing up this work, data has been gathered about Christian mission and local church Websites that has not been gathered before, original statistical information has been produced and a number of conclusions have thus been drawn which make an original contribution to the field of missiology – more specifically, into the way in which Websites have been deployed, developed and used within one District of British Methodism – by combining the theoretical

missiological and technological considerations in Part 1 of this work with the empirical research and analysis described in Parts 2 to 4.

The introduction to this work noted the recent trend of the construction of Websites for local churches in the context of the World Wide Web becoming a mainstream communication medium, and that organisations can be seen as being foolish if they do not have a Web presence. The new opportunities for the mission that the World Wide Web presents for local churches were also noted, along with the question as to whether or not technological ‘toys’ would actually enhance the mission of the Church. Four assumptions that were made were also explained: 1) that each local church has a set of mission priorities; 2) that Website design quality has missiological significance; 3) that it is not problematic using the values and standards of Website design that are used to assess commercial and secular Websites to assess Websites for local churches; and 4) that local church Websites are essentially neutral in their effect on the mission of a local church. The methodology employed in carrying out the research and in writing up this thesis has proven to be very valuable way of drawing conclusions related to the provision of Websites for a sociologically, economically, geographically and missiologically diverse set of local churches and drawing conclusions about the design and effectiveness of the technically diverse set of Website designs related to those churches under consideration which do have Websites.

Although an examination of the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites in local churches of different denominations in a wider geographical area could not be included in the scope of this thesis – because the data available was limited to the London North West District of the Methodist Church – the socio-economic diversity of that District suggests that the findings of this thesis are more widely applicable within British Methodism. Furthermore, although Methodism organises itself in a distinctive ‘connexional’¹ manner – whereby the Methodist Conference makes certain decisions, but bodies and officers in District, Circuits and local churches are also able to make decisions – this research has suggested that the driving force behind Methodist Website provision is largely found within local churches. This, along with the conclusions drawn from the ecumenical Websites studied, suggests applicability of the results of this research in the wider Church. There is

therefore likely to be a real need within the Church to ensure that the deficiencies highlighted in this thesis in terms of Website provision, design and effectiveness are addressed in order to maximise the potential of Websites as tools for Christian mission. Addressing these deficiencies would help to ensure that the efforts of the many individuals who currently provide local church Websites, or who may do so in the future, are not wasted and that the opportunities available to local churches through the World Wide Web are used as effectively as possible for the purposes of mission.

A number of conclusions have been drawn. The key conclusions drawn in Parts 1 to 4 of this work – through both the theoretical missiological studies and the analysis of the empirical data that was collected – are outlined below.

PART 1 – MISSIOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Part 1 (chapters 1 to 3) of this study addressed macro-missiological issues related to the use of technology by examining missiological and methodological considerations – thereby placing the empirical studies that would address micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches in Parts 2 to 4 into their theoretical context.

In order to set the work in its context of the use of information technology – specifically Websites – and the Christian mission of local Methodist churches, chapter 1 considered the nature of Christian mission – in both the context of the universal Church and of local churches – in order to arrive at a framework for studying the mission priorities of the local Methodist churches under consideration.

Chapter 2 then demonstrated the connectedness of the empirical studies of Websites in this thesis with the theoretical considerations of missiological effectiveness by first considering the missiological significance of strategies and techniques as tools employed in mission, then considering implications of the relationship between technology and Christian mission, moving on to consider key missiological themes relating the mission of God to ecclesiology

1 The Methodist Church of Great Britain calls its organisation ‘connexional’ as a way of denoting its own inter-connected structure through the Conference, Districts, Circuits and their officers – a very different structure to that, for example, of the Church of England, Roman Catholic or congregational churches.

and information technology and finally considering the issues raised by mission in the context of the Internet and Websites. The work done in chapter 2 was vital to this thesis because of its examination of macro-missiological questions related to technology. This work highlighted the danger of a Church preoccupied with technology concentrating more on the projection of its own image to the wider world than on the substance of what it is about. However, it also became clear that the concept of contextualisation is an important one in coming to an understanding as to what might make a strategy, technique or technology significant in missiological terms; a world view that includes an evolving model of contextualisation is especially significant in terms of thinking about technology and mission because it enables a refutation of the idea that new strategies, techniques and technologies are somehow incompatible with mission and enables Internet and Website technologies to be seen as part of a succession of new technologies which have impacted upon the societies of the world and to which the Church in mission has had to respond. Furthermore, although the possibility of forming virtual Internet communities of worshippers and of accessing Christian resources via Websites does offer opportunities for the Church, it was noted in chapter 2 that the Church may choose to embrace or ignore such technologies – though neither decision can be seen as neutral because both have implications in terms of the way in which the Church is perceived by those who belong to it and by those who do not. Indeed, the Church may therefore find itself in a dilemma: as contemporary culture embraces new technologies such as Websites, the cultural shift might seem to suggest that there is little choice but for the Church to embrace them and any resistance or slowness in the Church employing them might be interpreted as a sign of the irrelevance of the Church and of its message to contemporary society, yet over-keenness in employing such technologies in the Church context might serve to alienate established church members because of the change to what they are used to happening in the Church. It was also noted in chapter 2 that the presence of numerous Websites related to churches and Christianity suggests that Internet and Website technology can be harnessed in the service of mission; it was noted that questions have even arisen as to whether the use of the Internet will ultimately make local churches unnecessary and whether the introduction of Websites for the purposes of mission will ultimately result in a self-service Church which understands mission solely as involving the maintenance of its Websites. However, it was also noted that the experiences of those working in the field of mission and information technology suggest that there are positive and negative aspects – benefits and drawbacks – of maintaining Christian communities in Cyberspace; although

online churches do attract people through offering additional church experiences, it is hard to see them becoming substitutes for physical churches rooted in their local communities. Nevertheless, it was further noted that the introduction of any technology into the Church will, at the very least, have the effect of changing the way in which things related to the use of that technology are done, but the wider effects in terms of the impacts on theology, on the way in which people perceive the Church's message, and on the future viability of the Church are harder to foresee. Thus, it became clear that simply adopting new technologies for the purposes of mission is not all that needs to be done; the use of technology must have specific aims and measurable results.

Thus, the work in chapters 1 and 2 prepared the ground for the study of the use of Websites as tools for mission. The research methodology that was then described in chapter 3 ensured that work could then be undertaken on examining the thesis that there are significant inequalities in the provision, design and effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church and better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design; the methodology employed not only ensured that sufficient responses to the Research Questionnaires were received, but also ensured that data was collected in a format suitable for a detailed examination of the thesis.

PART 2 – WEBSITE PROVISION

Building upon the examination of macro-missiological and methodological considerations in Part 1 of this study, Part 2 of this study was the first of the three parts of the thesis which, in examining the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites for local Methodist churches, examined the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. In particular, Part 2 (chapter 4) considered whether there are inequalities in the provision of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist Church. The factors studied in conjunction with government-produced socio-economic data were: the nature of the churches; church membership; adult Sunday attendance; possible ecumenical influences; Website design capabilities; reasons given for not having a Website; causes for having a Website; Webmasters; and the financial cost of Website provision.

No identifiable factors linked to the government-produced socio-economic data were found that seemed to be causing or preventing Websites being provided, but some interesting factors influencing Website provision were highlighted and a number of inequalities in the provision of local Methodist church Websites were found. The research especially highlighted the following points that suggest problems with the provision of local Methodist church Websites:

- the fact that the age and gender profiles of the local church Webmasters were very different to the national age and gender profiles of people attending Methodist churches, suggesting that the availability of Website design skills might be a relatively rare commodity within many local Methodist churches.
- the significant numbers of Webmasters claiming less than average, or only average, competence, coupled with the presence of self-taught Webmasters in 100% of the churches examined, suggesting that Websites will only appear where people have an inclination not only to design Websites, but also to teach themselves the necessary skills and that many Websites will not be of better than an average standard.

It was also noted that there have been varying degrees of enthusiasm about the need for, or deployment of, local church Websites and that the local context is a key driver in indicating the needs for Website deployment – with the available local resources, combined with the presence or absence of local enthusiasm for the provision of Websites, determining the ability of local churches to respond to those needs. Indeed, it became clear that the pattern of Website provision for the local Methodist churches under consideration depended to a large extent upon the personnel available – in particular, not only on there being people who consider that having a local Methodist church Website is a good idea, but often also on people being willing to teach themselves the skills necessary to implement and maintain Websites. Given that, in the early 21st Century CE, Websites are routinely used by many people for information gathering, commerce, communication and other purposes, the dependence of Website provision for local Methodist churches on the seemingly random availability of appropriately-skilled personnel would seem to be unfortunate. Clearly, then, if the potential for the provision of local Methodist church Websites is to be maximised, strategies may need to be put in place by the wider Methodist Church – for example through more Circuit, District or Connexional (i.e. national) encouragement, training and support – in order to result in a more consistent approach to Website provision within the Methodist

Church.

PART 3 – WEBSITE DESIGN

Part 3 of this study was the second of the three parts of the thesis which, in examining the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites for local Methodist churches, examined the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. In particular, Part 3 (chapters 5 to 8) continued to build upon the examination of macro-missiological and methodological considerations in Part 1 of this study by considering whether there are significant inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. The local Methodist church Websites which were studied varied greatly in design quality, but a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites were found. The inconsistencies and weaknesses that were noted in the design of local Methodist church Websites mean that certain Websites could easily be perceived by users as being of little or no value and that the resources which are being expended on developing and maintaining the less well-designed Websites – or aspects of Websites – could therefore be being wasted or result in poorer mission outcomes than are possible. Given the effects that design can have on Website usability – and therefore on the likelihood of particular Websites being used regularly and on the likelihood of a local church's mission priorities being successfully implemented – the variations in the design skills of the Webmasters who participated in the research are of great concern. Clearly, then, if the design of local Methodist church Websites is to be done well, strategies may need to be put in place by the wider Methodist Church – for example through more Circuit, District or Connexional (i.e. national) training and support – in order to achieve better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. The key detailed conclusions that were drawn from the studies that were undertaken are summarised below.

Website Promotion

In considering Website promotion, a number of differences in the strategies for the local Methodist church Websites under consideration were highlighted: not all of the Webmasters chose the most effective Domain Names; there were clear differences in the way that some of the Webmasters used Keywords for searching and in the results achieved when using Search Engines to locate the Websites; there were clear discrepancies in the ways in which different

Websites were promoted with literature; there were discrepancies in Browser compatibility, which could be due to the software being used to generate the Source Code being incompatible with all of the Browsers, or the Browsers not being fully compliant with the relevant standards, or the Webmasters failing to design or test their Websites properly. Thus, the Webmasters' strategies for Website promotion revealed a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites.

Web Design Features

The study of the use of Web design features highlighted a number of differences in the designs of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration. In the most basic areas of text display, use of colour, use of graphics, use of sound and use of menus, there were inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites. Further design inequalities seemed apparent from differences in the use of search facilities, use of email and use of Blogs – although the use of these particular design features was quite limited and amount of data available was quite small. The studies of the use of simple animations, Flash® animations, video and documents proved inconclusive with respect to whether or not there were inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites, mainly because of the limited use to which these features were put and the nature of the data gleaned from the Research Questionnaires.

Website Layout and Style

The findings of the study of Website layout and style showed that there were significant differences in the designs of the local Methodist church Websites under consideration and revealed a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites in terms of the intuitiveness, consistency, compactness and completeness of the designs. The following conclusions were drawn:

- the findings of the assessment of aesthetics were that design differences affecting the pleasure that users might experience in using the Websites seemed more likely to be attributable to individual design choices than to differences in the design skills of the Webmasters concerned;
- the findings of the assessment of intuitiveness suggested that, despite the ability of the vast majority of Webmasters to design Websites logically, there were significant design differences affecting the ease of use that users might experience in using the

Websites, such as differences in the way in which Webmasters treated abbreviations and jargon and some differences in the way in which Webmasters applied data formats – especially information about times;

- the findings of the assessment of consistency discovered design differences affecting the standardisation of functionality within the Websites so that, although all of the Webmasters used consistent approaches to user input, the majority of the local Methodist church Webmasters failed to be consistent in their use of style and their use of Hyperlinks;
- the findings of the assessment of compactness revealed properties of the sizes of files describing the Websites which suggested that the majority of the local Methodist church Webmasters did not sufficiently consider optimisations to their Home Pages and to other Webpages in order to allow them to load faster; there were also differences revealed in optimised or non-optimised elements;
- the findings of the assessment of completeness showed design differences as to whether all elements comprising the Websites were present and suggested that the majority of Webmasters were not able to ensure the completeness of their Websites.

Website Structural Complexity

The study of Website structural complexity revealed differences in tree complexity whereby the way in which Webmasters designed menus was inconsistent both in terms of the number of entries on navigation menus and the separation of site and branch navigation. The study of Hyperlinks revealed inconsistencies and errors in the implementation of both internal and external Hyperlinks. The study of Website mapping revealed a lack of Website maps for Websites with 2 or more levels. Thus, a number of inequalities in the design of local Methodist church Websites were revealed.

PART 4 – WEBSITE EFFECTIVENESS

Part 4 of this study was the third of the three parts of the thesis which, in examining the provision, design and effectiveness of Websites for local Methodist churches, examined the micro-missiological issues related to local church Websites and the local mission priorities of individual churches. Therefore, chapter 9 continued to build upon the examination of macro-missiological and methodological considerations in Part 1 of this study by considering whether there are significant inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church

Websites as tools for mission which, if addressed, could result in better mission outcomes from the resources that are invested in Website design. In particular, the work built upon was the framework derived in chapter 1 for studying local church mission priorities and the conclusions drawn about relating mission to the use of technology in chapter 2 in terms of: contextualisation; Internet communities; belonging; the harnessing of Websites for mission; and change.

The focus was on the effectiveness of the Website designs for mission and the effective use of feedback about Website designs. Some evidence to suggest inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission was found in both areas, though some of the data that was returned about the effectiveness of Website design seemed inconsistent in that many Webmasters claimed that their Websites fitted in with their churches' mission, yet few Webmasters claimed to make attempts to assess the effectiveness of their Websites. The actual correspondence between the mission priorities of the churches and the content of the high-level Webpages on the local Methodist church Websites under consideration was found to be poor and, as the majority of the Webmasters were found not to be accessing all of the means of Website feedback that are available to them, it was suggested that there is a real possibility that Websites are less effective for mission than they might otherwise be, as well as there being potential for local church Websites to be ineffective without anybody realising it. The key detailed conclusions that were drawn from the studies that were undertaken are summarised below.

The examination of the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission began with an examination of the relationship between local churches and the Internet. The assumption that local church Websites are essentially neutral in their effect on the mission of a local church was first noted and explained. The differences between 'virtual' Website communities and 'real' local church communities were noted, as was the way in which, although the mission of many local churches is largely centred on particular geographical areas, the Internet gives new opportunities for local churches to engage in mission with people in a wider sphere – culturally, geographically and socially. Some of the implications for local churches of the Internet's existence were noted to be: 1) the trend of globalisation in the context of technological advances in the contemporary world alongside the many different cultures and sub-cultures and many local churches, so that global mission has to be

contextual; 2) changes to the sense of community attached to a local church with a Website since, by engaging with Christian Websites, people become part of a unique community that has both a physical (offline) dimension and a virtual (online) dimension; 3) the unlikeliness of Websites and/or Internet communities eventually becoming the local church community due to the absence of social interaction with real people on Sundays and at other times; 4) the ability of local church Websites to provide for the needs of those who wish to belong to a local church community without believing; 5) the possibilities for those who are being 'reached' by the Church to make a real impact on the nature and thinking of the local Church, but that local churches may not instinctively want to allow the people that they are trying to reach out to in mission to influence their communal life and worship.

There was then a study of the mission priorities of those of the local Methodist churches under consideration which had Websites in order to draw conclusions about mission in the context of these particular churches and then to evaluate whether the Websites of the local Methodist churches under consideration were effective in terms of relating to the churches' mission priorities. This involved assessing not only the Webmasters' perceptions as to the effectiveness of their Websites for the mission of their local churches, but also how effective the local Methodist church Websites under consideration were in terms of supporting the achievement of the mission priorities of the churches. As will be shown below, despite the Webmasters' own assertions about the way in which their Websites fit in with their local Methodist churches' mission priorities, the evidence on the Webpages themselves suggests some inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission.

The study of Webmasters' views of the effectiveness of Websites for mission suggested: a) that a significant majority of Webmasters were sufficiently aware of the mission priorities of their churches to have been able to correctly state whether or not their church had a mission statement; b) that a significant majority of Webmasters believed that their Websites fitted in with their churches' mission statements; and c) that there were links between the Websites and the mission priorities of the local churches. All of these findings seem not to indicate inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission.

The study of Webmasters' comments about ways in which their Websites supported the

mission of their churches also seemed not to indicate inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission because, although it was not clear from the Webmasters' answers how well their Websites related to the mission priorities of their local churches, over 70% of Webmasters did suggest ways in which their Websites supported the mission of their churches. However, there was a high incidence of indications that no attempt was made to assess the effectiveness of the local Methodist church Websites for mission – which, at the very least, suggests that there is potential for local church Websites to be ineffective without anybody from the corresponding local churches realising it.

Although the study of the effectiveness of Website content in supporting mission suggested that there were some similarities between the mission priorities reported in the responses to the Research Questionnaire and the information contained in the high-level Webpages, the fact that the actual correspondence between the mission priorities of the churches and the content of the high-level Webpages on the local Methodist church Websites under consideration was found to be poor and the differences in the relationship between the mission priorities of the churches under consideration and the content of the high-level Webpages on the corresponding local Methodist church Websites did give some evidence of inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission.

The final part of the examination of the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission evaluated whether the feedback that had been received about the Websites of the local churches under consideration was used effectively. The study of the types of Website feedback sought by Webmasters suggested that the majority of the Webmasters did not access all of the means of Website feedback that were available to them and highlighted inequalities in the methods of feedback that were solicited. The study of the impact of feedback on Website design suggested that the majority of Webmasters did respond to Website feedback in some way. However, even though most Webmasters did make use of feedback, insufficient attempts were often made to access feedback. These findings suggest potential for inequalities in the effectiveness of local Methodist church Websites as tools for mission because of the inequalities in soliciting feedback and the way in which proper account was not always being taken of feedback from Website users and statistics.

APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

This appendix contains the Research Questionnaire that was sent out to ministers in January 2004 in order to gather data about the mission and Websites of local Methodist churches. The items in double angled brackets – «Circuit» – are special ‘Merge Fields’ which were filled in using the Mail Merge facility of Microsoft® Word® in order to personalise the questionnaires and to save the ministers some time when they were filling out the questionnaire.

Research Project into

*The Use and Effectiveness of Websites
in Local Methodist Churches*

by Rev. Robert Foster

Research Questionnaire

Please complete Part 1 of this questionnaire, then:

If at least one of your churches **does not** have a Website, please:

Select ONE church WITHOUT a Website and fill in Part 2 of this questionnaire for it.

If at least one of your churches **does** have a Website, please:

- Select ONE church WITH a Website and fill in Part 3 of this questionnaire for it;
- Ask that church's Webmaster to complete Part 4 of this questionnaire for the same church.

Information is needed about churches WITH Websites and churches WITHOUT Websites, so if you have churches in both categories, please respond for one of each.

The layout and time needed for the Questionnaire is as shown in the following table:

Questionnaire Part	Approximate time that will be needed	Please tick when completed
<i>Part 1 (Churches that you work with)</i>	<i>4 minutes</i>	
<i>Part 2 (Church WITHOUT a Website)</i>	<i>6 minutes</i>	
<i>Part 3 (Church WITH a Website)</i>	<i>11 minutes</i>	
<i>Part 4 (About the Church Website)</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>	

Many of the questions have boxes to tick – unless otherwise instructed, please place a tick in one of the boxes. Where a more detailed answer is required, please feel free to continue your answer by attaching extra sheets – making sure that it is clear which question is being answered.

You will receive some feedback from the information gathered in these questionnaires in due course. I hope that this feedback will be of use both for churches with and without Websites.

Rev. Robert Foster

*Please return this questionnaire in the SAE provided by 29th February 2004 to:
Rev. Robert Foster, [address].*

Methodist Church Website Research

Part 1 – Churches that you work with

(Minister please complete this section)

A) Information about the Minister (please amend of necessary)

Name of Circuit: *«Circuit»* _____

Name of Minister: *«Title» «FirstName» «LastName»* _____

Address: *«Address1»«Address2»«Address3»«Postcode»*

Telephone: *«Telephone»* _____

Email: *«Email»* _____

B) Information about the Churches that you work with (your Section of the Circuit)

1.1) Please complete the following table for the Churches that you work with in the Circuit by using data from the “Statistics for Mission” form 2003 (sometimes known as “The October Count”):

Name of Church	Total Membership	Average Number of Adults at worship on Sunday	Does the Church Have a Website?
<i>«Churches»</i>			

[The “Total Membership” figures should be those recorded on the line marked 8 on the Statistics for Mission form 2003. The “Average Number of Adults at worship on Sunday” should be calculated from the figures in the first column of the table marked 18 on the Statistics for Mission form 2003.]

Methodist Church Website Research

Part 2 – Church WITHOUT a Website

(Minister please complete this section)

A) *Information about the Church and Community*

2.1) What is the name of the church without a Website?

2.2) What is this church's address (including postcode)?

2.3) How would you describe this church in denominational terms?

Methodist ☐

Ecumenical ☐ => Please state denominations:

2.4) How would you describe this church's nature? (you may tick more than one)

City Centre ☐

Community-Focused ☐

Estate ☐

Inner City ☐

Gathered ☐

Rural – Town ☐

Rural – Village ☐

Suburban ☐

Town Centre ☐

Urban ☐

Urban Priority Area ☐

Other – please state:

2.5) Does this church's congregation reflect the social make-up of the area in which the church is located?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't Know ☐

If you answered "No" or "Don't Know", please explain your answer more fully:

B) Electoral Information

[This information will be of great help in relating the research to government statistics.]

2.6) Which Local Authority District is this church located in (i.e. District Council name)?

2.7) Which Local Authority (electoral) Ward is this church located in (as on the electoral roll)?

C) Website Provision

2.8) Are there any people in this church's congregation with Website design capabilities?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

2.9) Please say why this church does not have a Website:

No Website felt to be needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Church uses another Website	<input type="checkbox"/>
No expertise	<input type="checkbox"/>	Too costly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hadn't thought of having one	<input type="checkbox"/>	Church hasn't got round to it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please state: <hr/>			

Methodist Church Website Research

Part 3 – Church WITH a Website

(Minister please complete this section)

A) *Information about the Church and Community*

3.1) What is the name of the church with a Website?

3.2) What is this church's address (including postcode)?

3.3) How would you describe this church in denominational terms?

Methodist ☐

Ecumenical ☐ => Please state denominations:

3.4) How would you describe this church's nature? (you may tick more than one)

City Centre ☐

Community-Focused ☐

Estate ☐

Inner City ☐

Gathered ☐

Rural – Town ☐

Rural – Village ☐

Suburban ☐

Town Centre ☐

Urban ☐

Urban Priority Area ☐

Other – please state:

3.5) Does this church's congregation reflect the social make-up of the area in which the church is located?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Don't Know ☐

If you answered "No" or "Don't Know", please explain your answer more fully:

B) Electoral Information

[This information will be of great help in relating the research to government statistics.]

3.6) Which Local Authority District is this church located in (i.e. District Council name)?

3.7) Which Local Authority Ward is this church located in (as on the electoral roll)?

C) Website Provision

3.8) Are there any people in this church's congregation with Website design capabilities?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

3.9) Whose idea was it for this church to have a Website?

Present Minister	<input type="checkbox"/>	Former Minister	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church Council Member	<input type="checkbox"/>	Member of Congregation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Person from Another Church	<input type="checkbox"/>	Person within Circuit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Person within District	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Friend" of the Church	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please state: <hr/>			

D) Mission Aims

3.10) Does this church have a mission statement?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

If 'Yes', please return a copy of the church's mission statement with this questionnaire.

3.11) In terms of mission priorities for this church, how would you rank the following? (Please give each a unique number between 1 and 4.)

Worship	<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning and Caring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evangelism	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.12) Do you agree that the following aspects of ***Worship*** are important for this church?

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Baptisms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drama	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Festivals / 'Specials'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Funerals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meditation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prayers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regular Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weddings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.13) Do you agree that the following aspects of ***Learning and Caring*** are important for this church?

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Bible Reading Notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bible Study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cell Groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faith Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fellowships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
House Groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interfaith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Membership Classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prayer Groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service Times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.14) Do you agree that the following aspects of *Service* are important for this church?

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Campaigning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring (Practical)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring (Visiting)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charitable Giving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charity Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Links	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ecumenical Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of Premises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.15) Do you agree that the following aspects of *Evangelism* are important for this church?

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Contact with Minister	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evangelistic Events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evangelistic Publicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nurture Courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Testimonies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Methodist Church Website Research

Part 4 – About the Website

(Webmaster please complete this section)

A) *Information about the person completing this section (the Webmaster):*

Name of Webmaster: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

4.1) Are you:

Male ☐ Female ☐

4.2) How old are you?

Under 15	<input type="checkbox"/>	15-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	25-34	<input type="checkbox"/>
35-44	<input type="checkbox"/>	45-54	<input type="checkbox"/>	55-64	<input type="checkbox"/>
65-74	<input type="checkbox"/>	75-84	<input type="checkbox"/>	85+	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.3) How would you describe your level of Website design expertise?

Beginner	<input type="checkbox"/>	Basic Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>
Average Competence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Advanced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expert	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other – please state: _____	

4.4) What was the main source of your knowledge of Website design?

Self-taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evening Class (or similar)	<input type="checkbox"/>
GCSE / O-Level	<input type="checkbox"/>	A/S-Level	<input type="checkbox"/>
A-Level	<input type="checkbox"/>	NVQ	<input type="checkbox"/>
BTEC	<input type="checkbox"/>	HND/HNC	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bachelor's Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Postgraduate Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training at Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	Experience at Work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please state: _____			

4.5) How many years' experience do you have of Website design?

_____ years

B) The Church Website

4.6) What is the church's Website address?

http://_____

4.7) What form does the church's Website take?

Church Webpage(s) on another organisation's Website ☐

Church's own Website of a Standard Format – Church supplies information ☐

Church's own purpose-built Website ☐

Other – please state: _____

4.8) Who initially designed the church's Website?

Current Webmaster ☐ Former Webmaster ☐

"Off the Shelf" via Internet ☐ Commercial company ☐

"Friend" of the Church ☐ Not Known ☐

Other – please state: _____

4.9) What were the approximate set-up costs of the church's Website?

Software £ Hardware £

Website Hosting £ Website Design £

Domain Name £ Other: _____ £

OR tick here if not known ☐

4.10) Who updates the church's Website?

Commercial company ☐ Current Webmaster ☐

"Friend" of the Church ☐ Nobody ☐

Other – please state: _____

4.11) Approximately how often is the church's Website updated?

Daily ☐ Weekly ☐

Monthly ☐ Every 1-3 Months ☐

Every 4-6 Months ☐ Every 7-12 Months ☐

Other – please state: _____

4.12) Please give details of the ongoing costs of maintaining the church's Website:

4.13) What software is used to support the church's Website? (please tick and give version in brackets)

Adobe InDesign®	<input type="text" value="(v)"/>	Macromedia Dreamweaver®	<input type="text" value="(v)"/>
Microsoft FrontPage®	<input type="text" value="(v)"/>	Not Applicable	<input type="text"/>
Other – please state: _____			

C) Church Website Design

4.14) Which of these features are used on the church's Website?

Plain Text	<input type="text"/>	Text Hyperlinks	<input type="text"/>	Buttons	<input type="text"/>
Italic Text	<input type="text"/>	Graphic Hyperlinks	<input type="text"/>	Photos	<input type="text"/>
Bold Text	<input type="text"/>	Clip Animations	<input type="text"/>	Clip Art	<input type="text"/>
Underlining	<input type="text"/>	'Flash' Animations	<input type="text"/>	Movies	<input type="text"/>
Coloured Text	<input type="text"/>	Email contacts	<input type="text"/>	Audio	<input type="text"/>
Data Entry	<input type="text"/>	Database Search	<input type="text"/>	Site Search	<input type="text"/>

4.15) Which Web Browsers has the church Website been tested with? (tick and give version in brackets)

Microsoft® Internet Explorer	<input type="text" value="(v)"/>	Netscape® Navigator	<input type="text" value="(v)"/>
Opera	<input type="text" value="(v)"/>	None	<input type="text"/>
Other – please state: _____			

4.16) Which of the following are used in order to get feedback about the church's Website?

User Evaluation (pre-release)	<input type="text"/>	User Evaluation (in-service)	<input type="text"/>
Webpage Input from Users	<input type="text"/>	Email from Users	<input type="text"/>
Website Statistics	<input type="text"/>	"Cookies"	<input type="text"/>
Site Access Counter(s)	<input type="text"/>	Page Access Counters	<input type="text"/>
Other – please state: _____			

4.17) If you get feedback about the church Website, how does it influence the design of the Website?

4.18) Please indicate ways in which the church's Website is promoted/advertised:

Church's headed paper	<input type="text"/>	Church's newsletter or magazine	<input type="text"/>
Noticeboards in Church	<input type="text"/>	Noticeboards outside the Church	<input type="text"/>
Minister's business cards	<input type="text"/>	Other Websites	<input type="text"/>
Local Newspapers	<input type="text"/>	Other – please state: _____	

4.19) What are your immediate goals for the church's Website?

4.20) What are your long-term goals for the church's Website?

D) Website Effectiveness

4.21) Does the church have a mission statement?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

4.22) If the church does have a mission statement, does the church's Website fit in with it?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

4.23) How does the church's Website support the mission of the church?

4.24) Is any attempt made to assess the effectiveness of the church's Website for Mission?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

If 'Yes', how is this done?

*Please return this questionnaire in the SAE provided by 29th February 2004 to:
Rev. Robert Foster, [address].*

APPENDIX 2 – COVERING LETTER FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

This appendix contains the covering letter that was sent out to ministers with the Research Questionnaire that was sent out to ministers in January 2004. The «FirstName» field is a special 'Merge Field' which was filled in using the Mail Merge facility of Microsoft® Word so as to personalise the letter for individual ministers.



**Centre for Missiology and
World Christianity**



Dear «FirstName»,

I

Research into The Use and Effectiveness of Websites in Local Methodist Churches

In today's technological society, an ever-increasing number of Methodist Churches are now seeing a need to have Websites. Therefore, with the backing of Rev. Anne Brown, Chair of the London North West District of the Methodist Church, I am in the process of undertaking some research within the London North West District into: a) the factors influencing the ability of churches to have Websites and b) the effectiveness of the church Websites which are already in existence. It is my hope that the results of this research will be of help not only to the Methodist Churches in our District, but also to other Methodist churches in the Connexion.

The aims of my research are two-fold:

- 1) Within the framework of the Methodist Church's "Our Calling" initiative, to assess how effectively Methodist church Websites are being used as tools for mission;
- 2) To identify the factors determining whether or not Methodist churches have Websites.

As part of this process, I need your help in providing some information about Websites for the churches of which you have pastoral charge. I am therefore enclosing a simple questionnaire for you to complete:

- Parts 1 to 3 (About the Churches) are for the person in pastoral charge ("the Minister") to complete;
- Part 4 (About the Website) is for the person responsible for a church Website ("the Webmaster") to complete.

The questionnaire has been trialled outside the London North West District and this has enabled me to determine that it should not take too long to complete – the average time should be around 20 minutes for a person in pastoral charge and 15 minutes for a Webmaster. It will be of great help if you are able to give up this relatively small amount of time in order to complete and return the questionnaire.

In return for your help I will, in due course, provide some feedback about the factors affecting the provision, design and effectiveness of Methodist Church Websites.

Yours faithfully,

Rev. Robert Foster

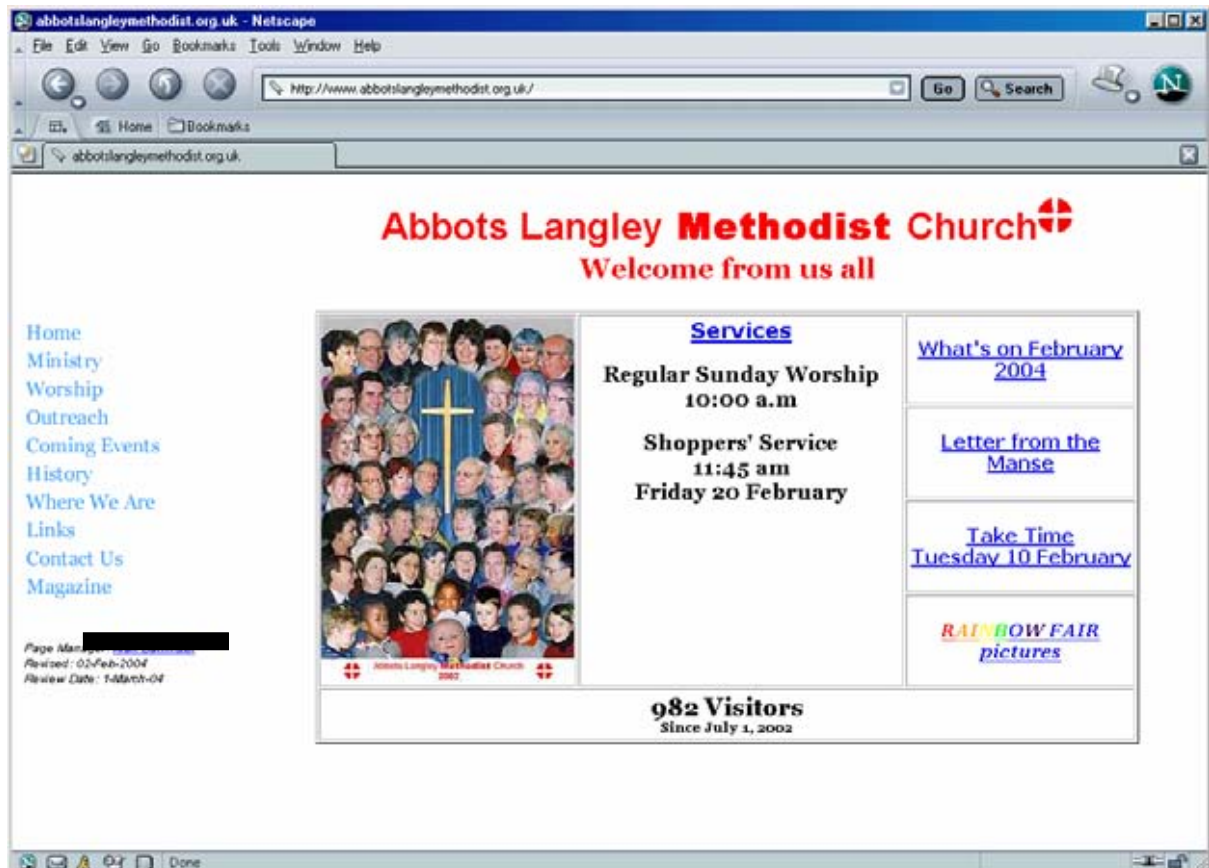
Rev. Robert Foster.

*Please return the questionnaire in the SAE provided by 29th February 2004 to:
Rev. Robert Foster, [address].*

APPENDIX 3 – CHURCH WEBSITE HOME PAGES

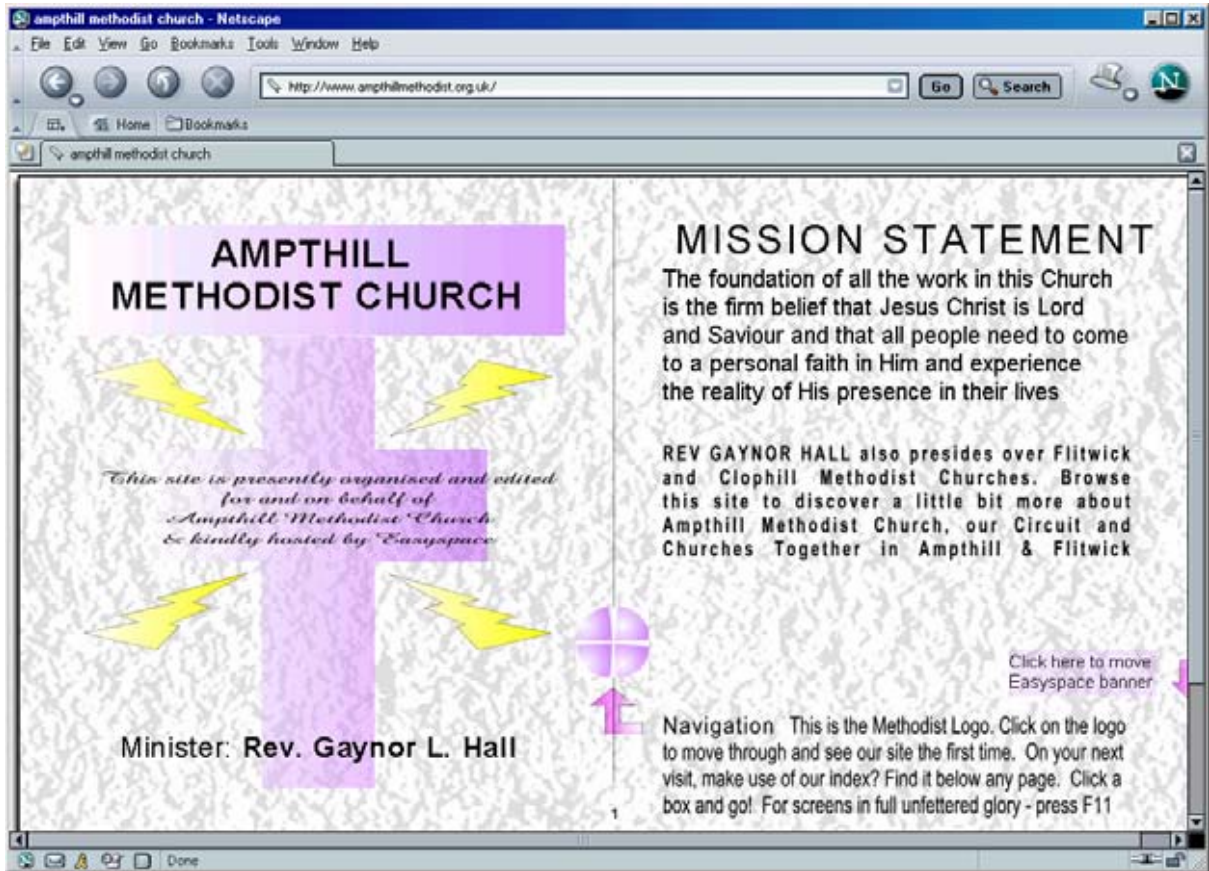
This appendix contains pictures of the Home Pages of local church Websites from the London North West District of the Methodist Church that were studied for this thesis.

Figure A3.1



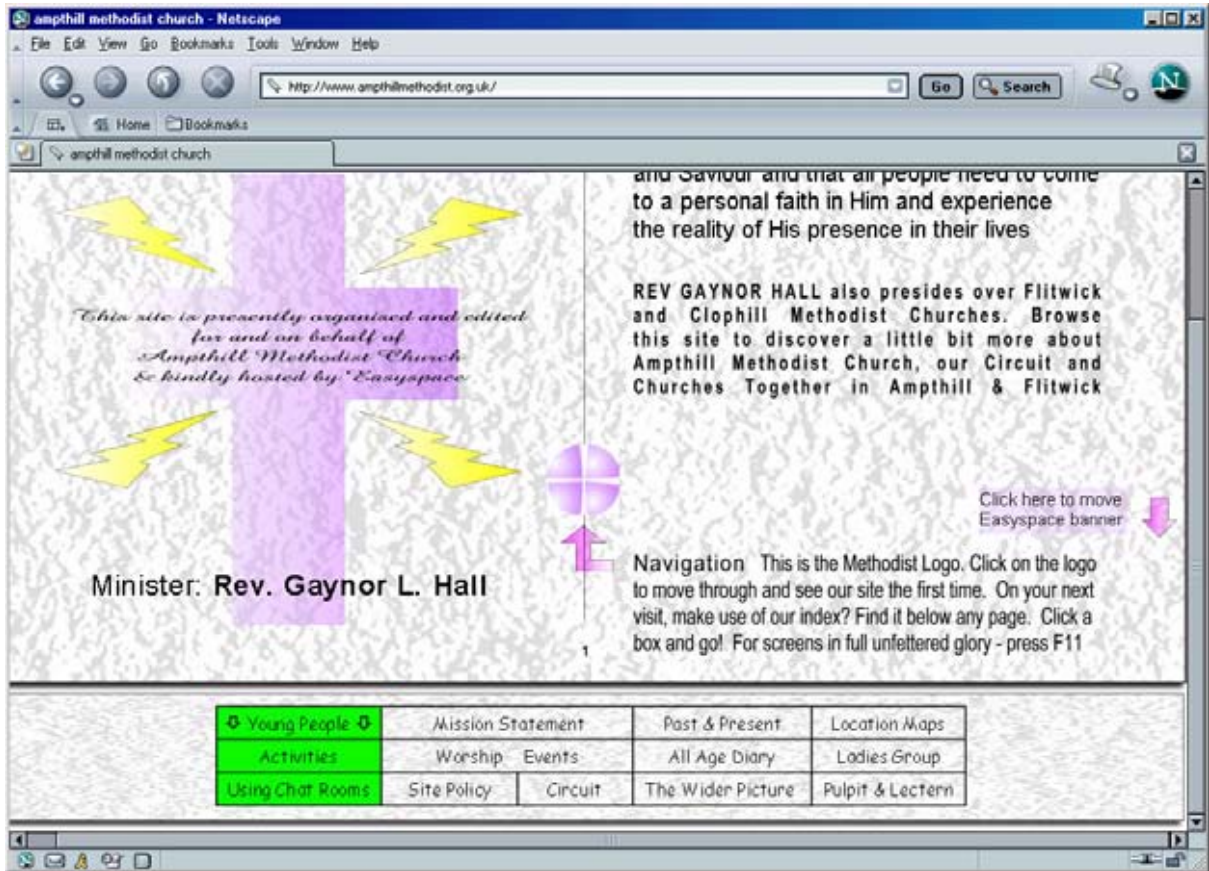
Abbots Langley Methodist Church – Home Page

Figure A3.2(1)



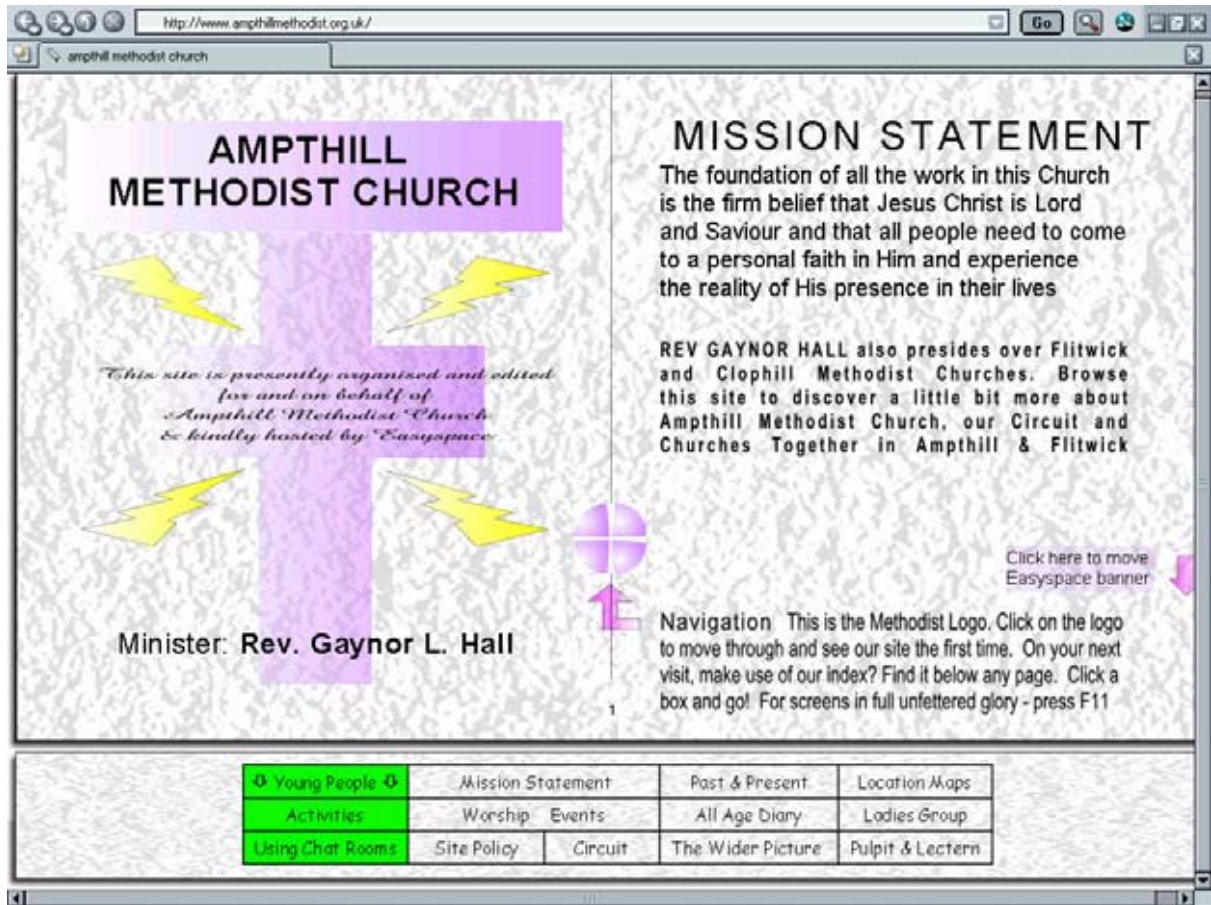
Ampt Hill Methodist Church – Top & Left of Home Page

Figure A3.2(2)



Amptill Methodist Church – Bottom & Right of Home Page

Figure A3.2(3)



Ampt Hill Methodist Church – Home Page after pressing “F11” Key

Figure A3.3(1)



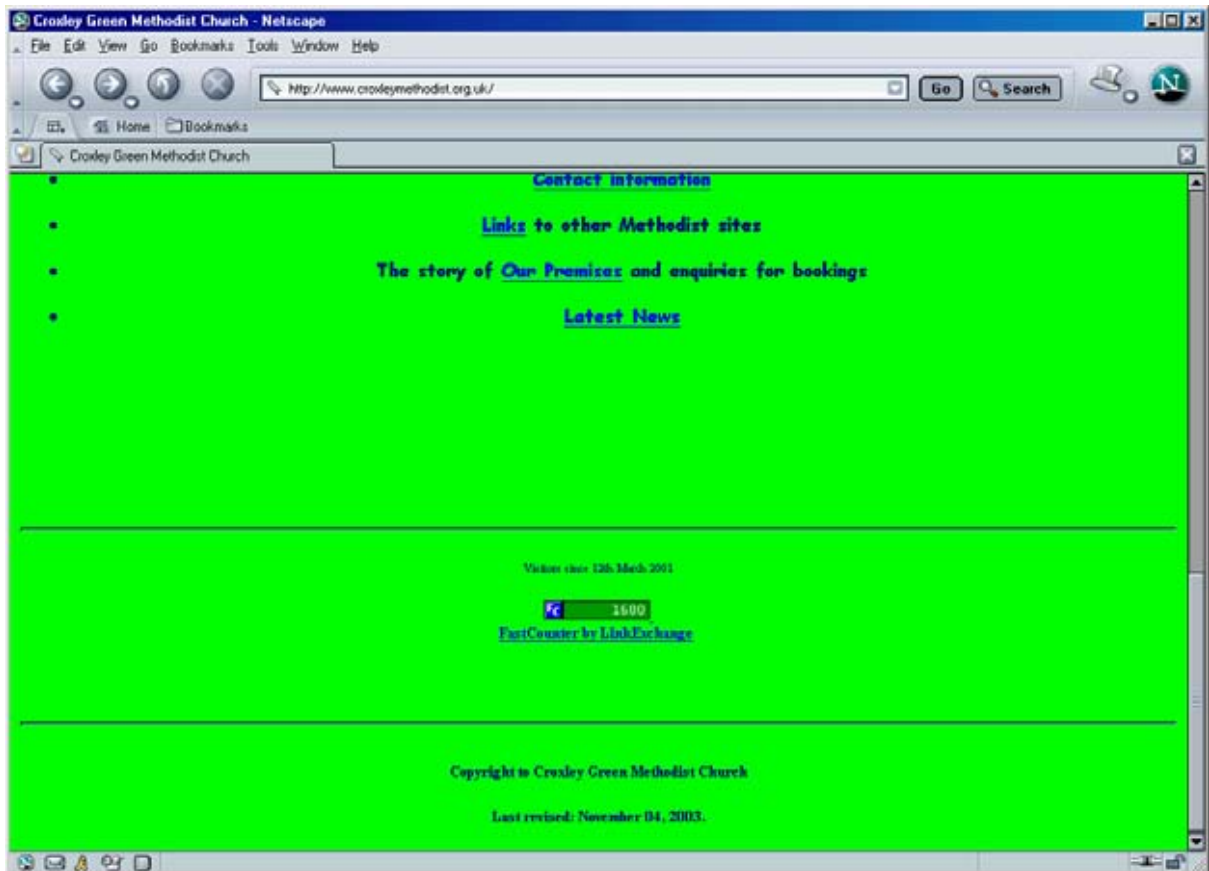
Croxley Green Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.3(2)



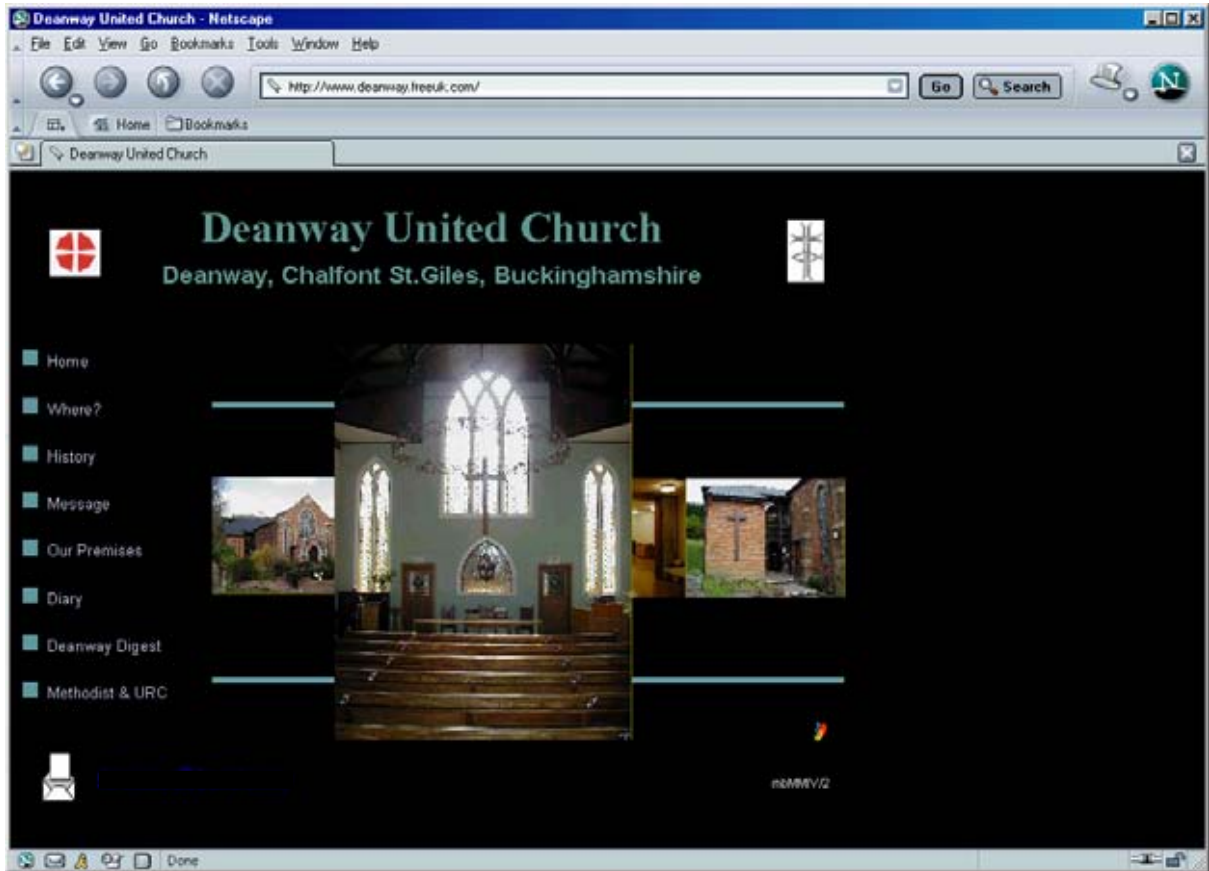
Croxley Green Methodist Church – Middle of Home Page

Figure A3.3(3)



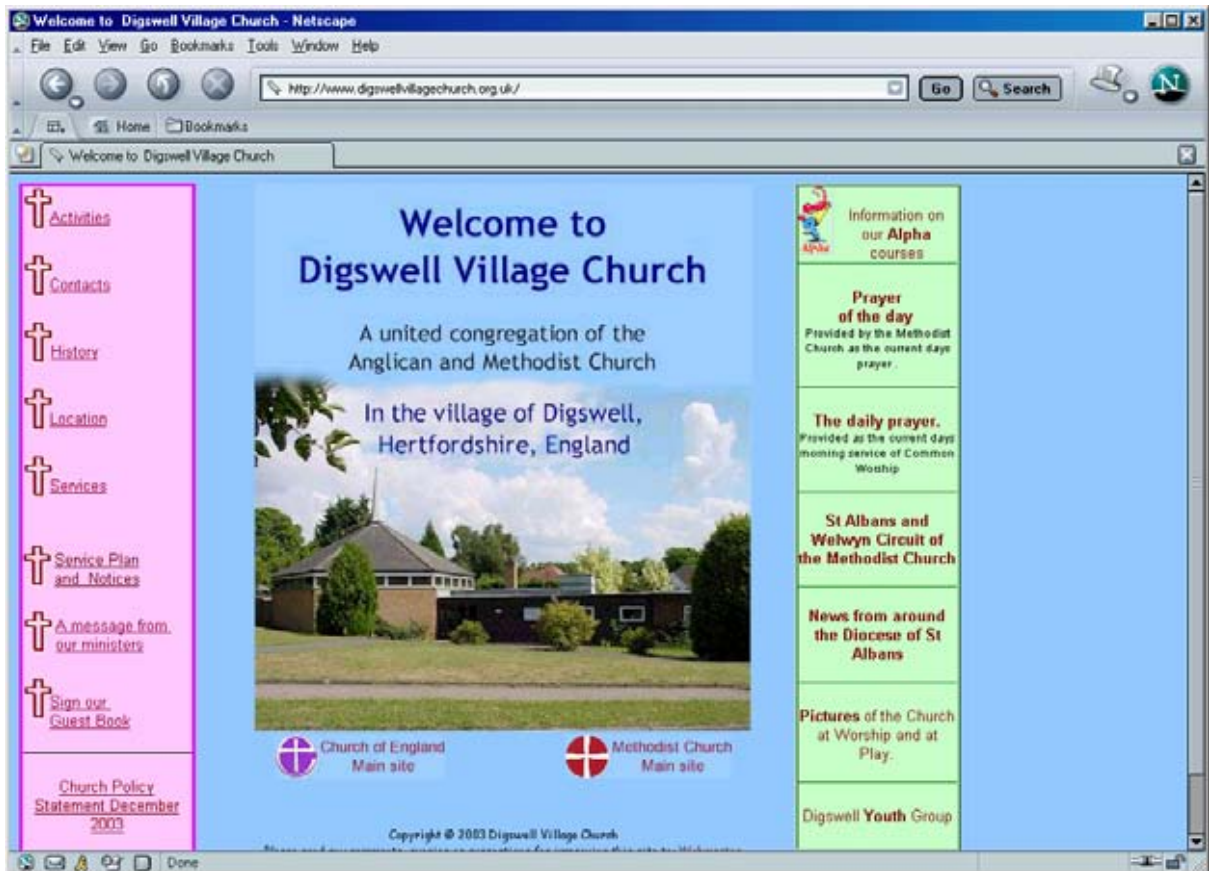
Croxley Green Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.4



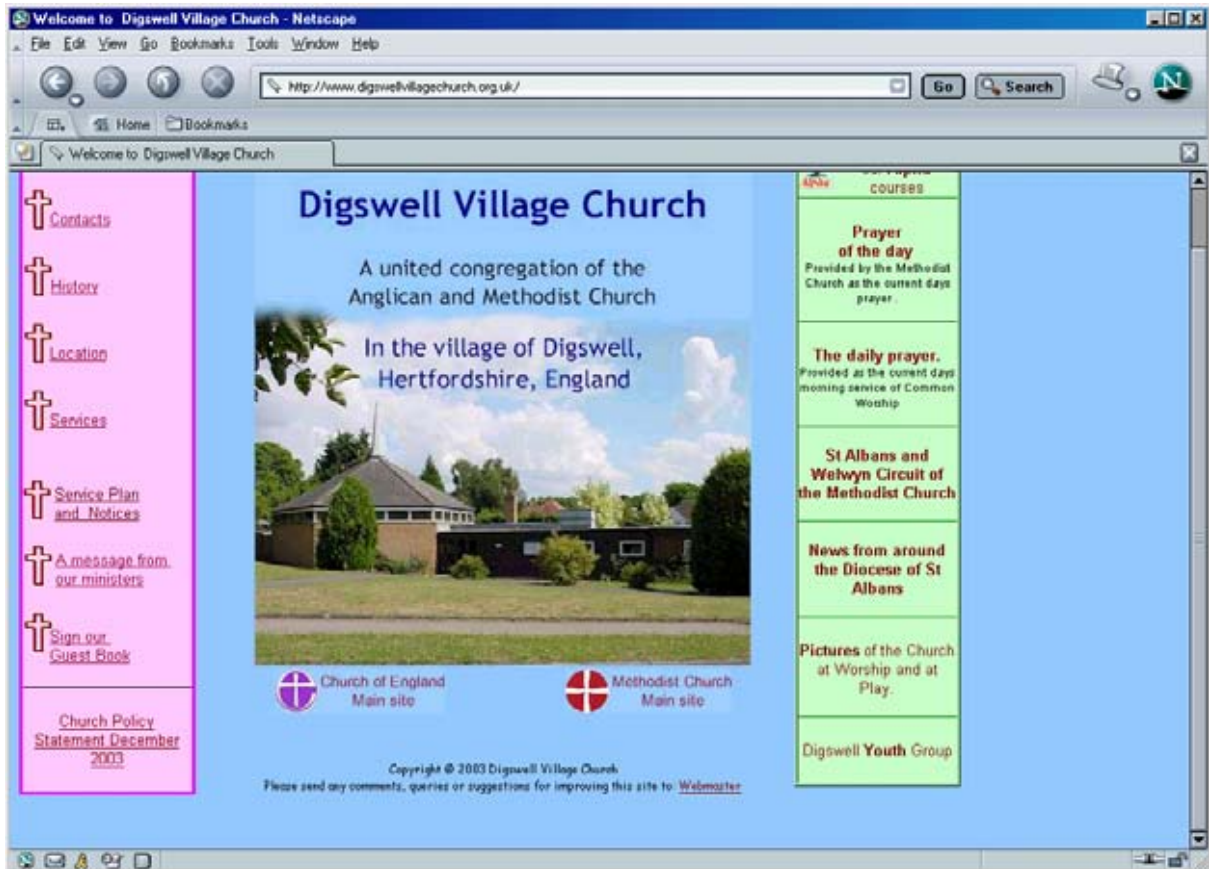
Deanway United Church – Home Page

Figure A3.5(1)



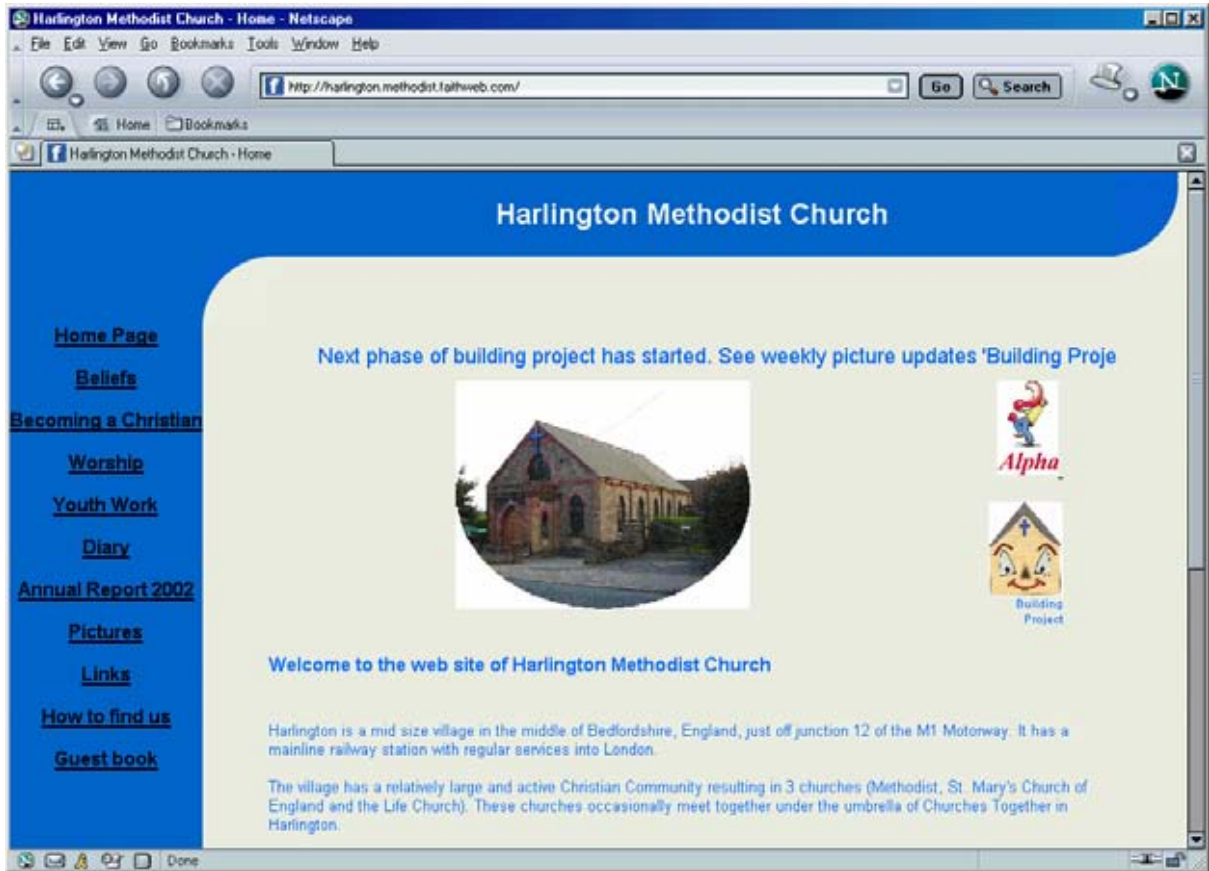
Digswell Village Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.5(2)



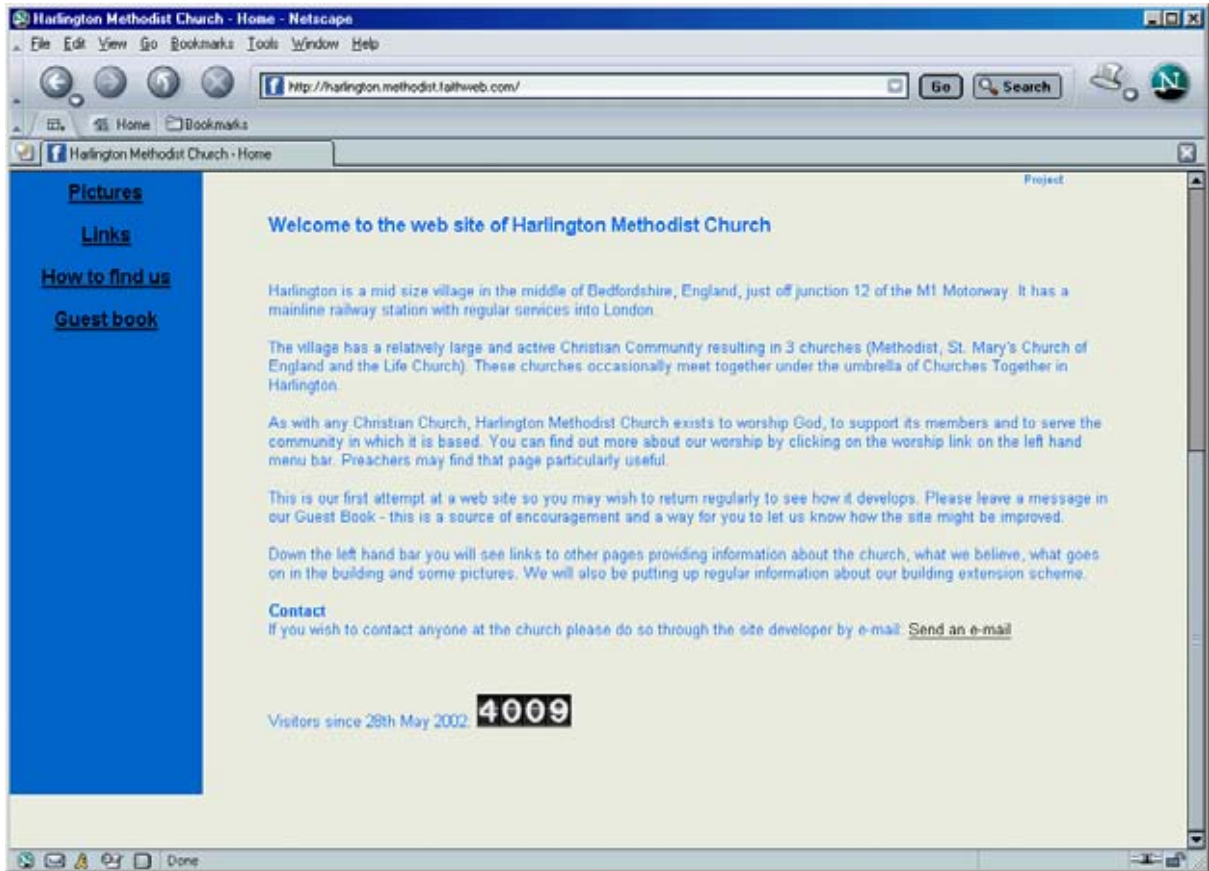
Digswell Village Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.6(1)



Harlington Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.6(2)



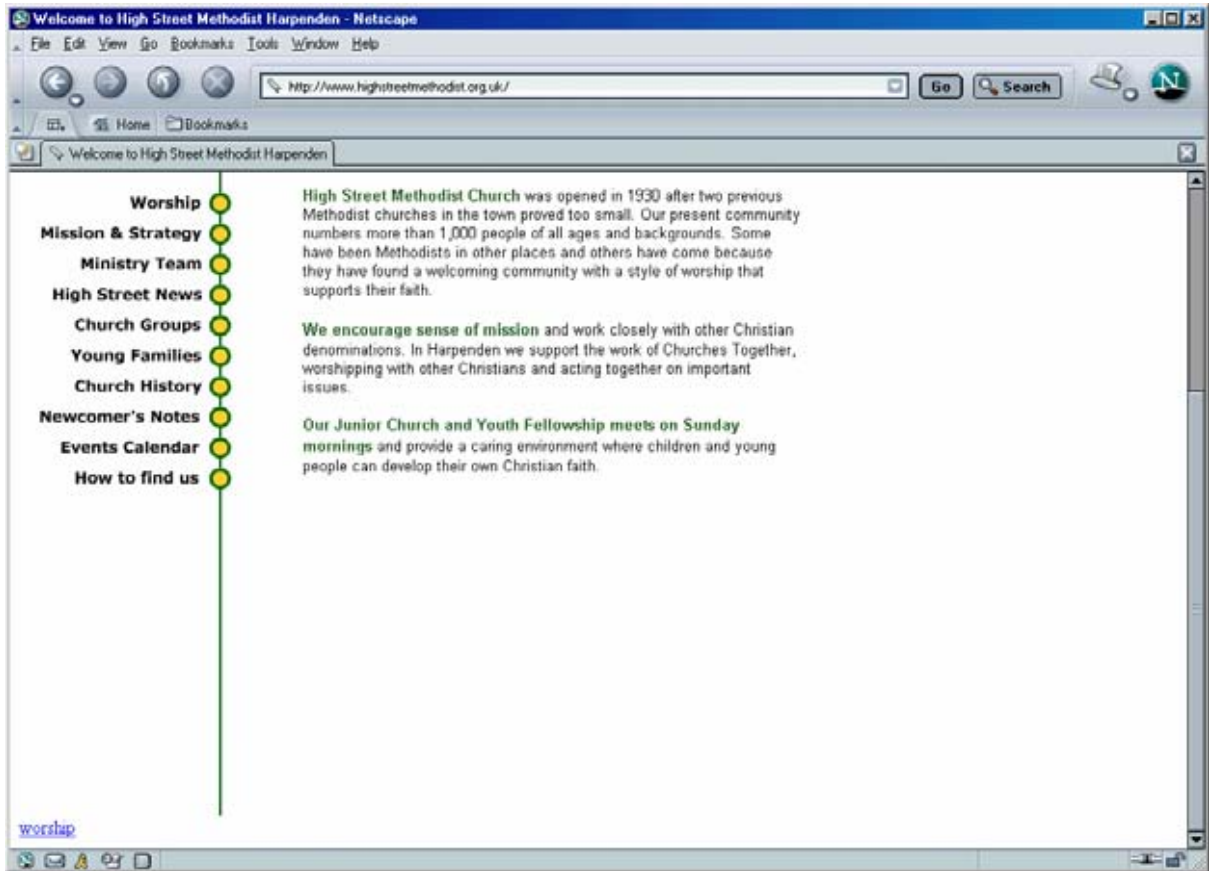
Harlington Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.7(1)



Harpenden High Street Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.7(2)



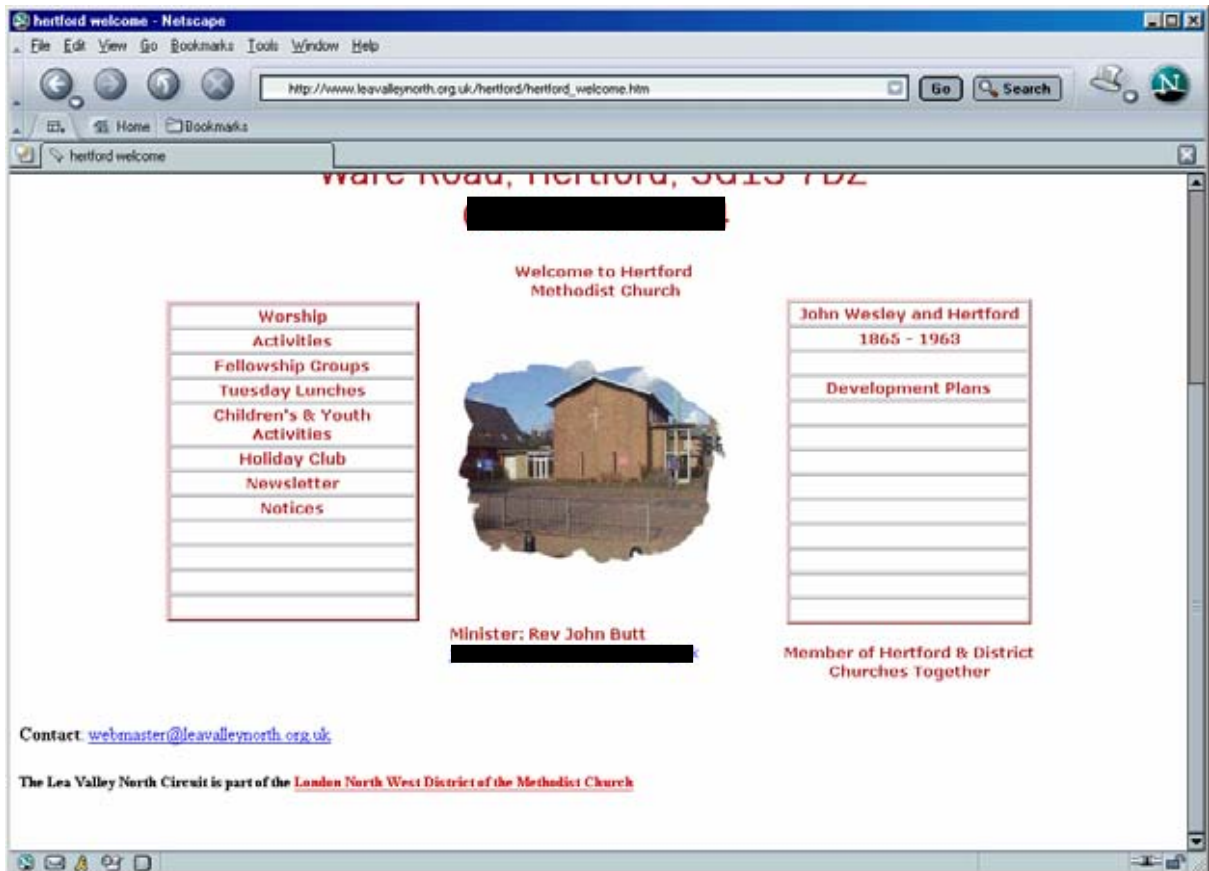
Harpenden High Street Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.8(1)



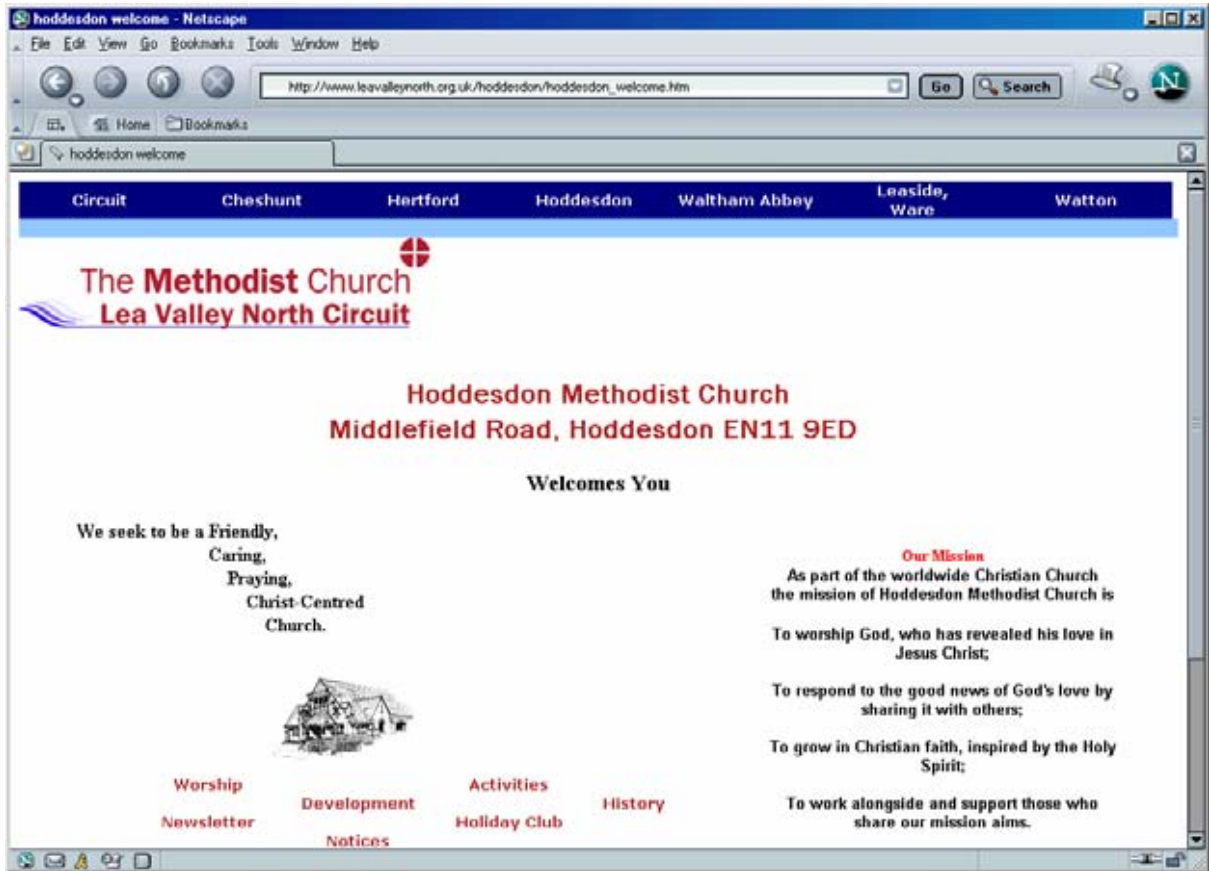
Hertford Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.8(2)



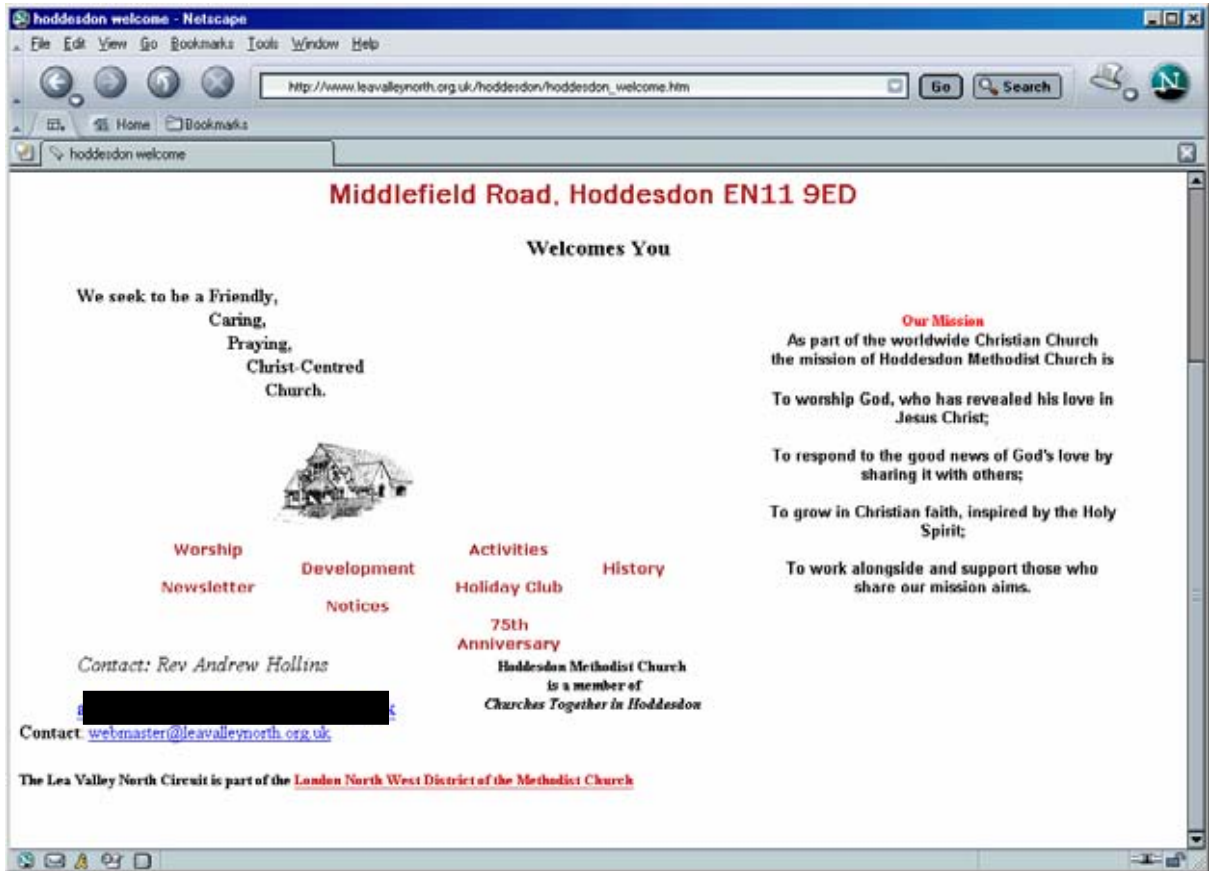
Hertford Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.9(1)



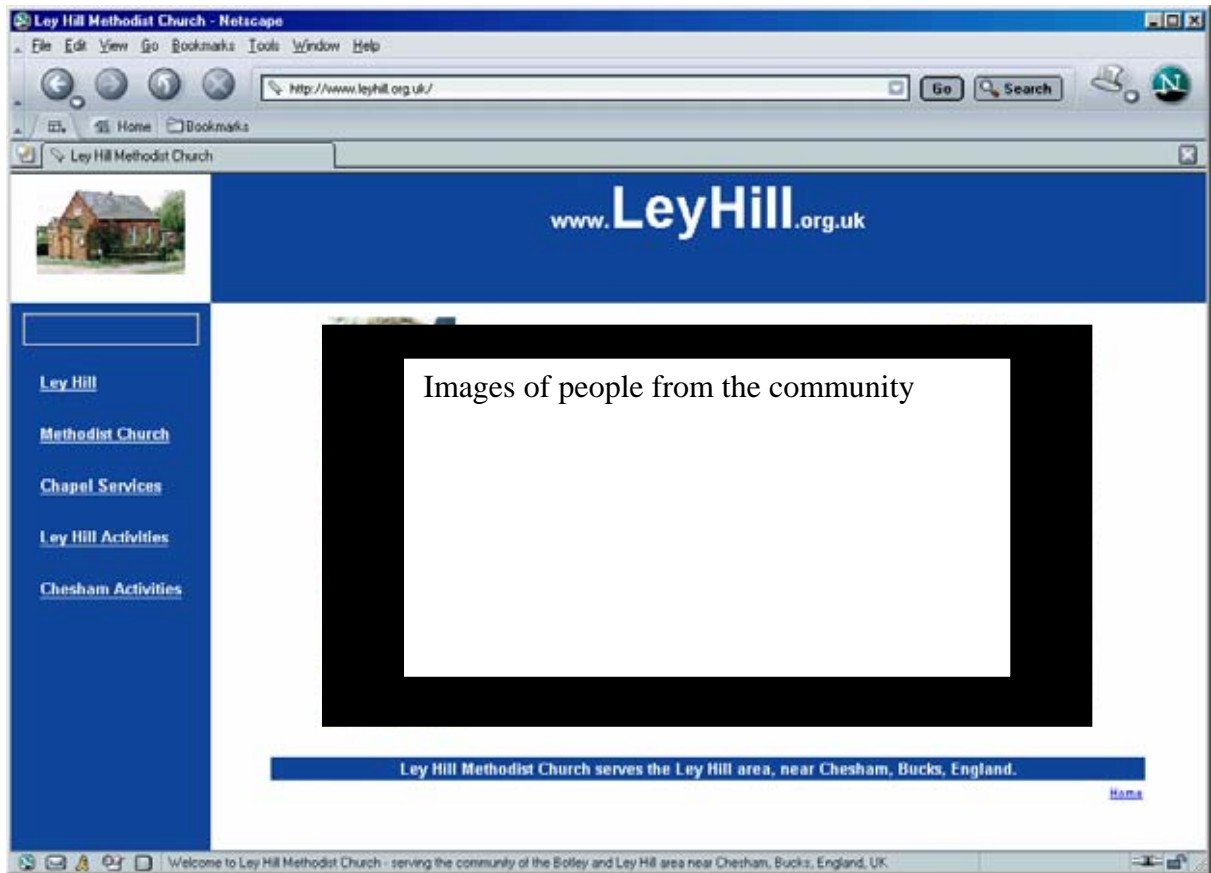
Hoddesdon Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.9(2)



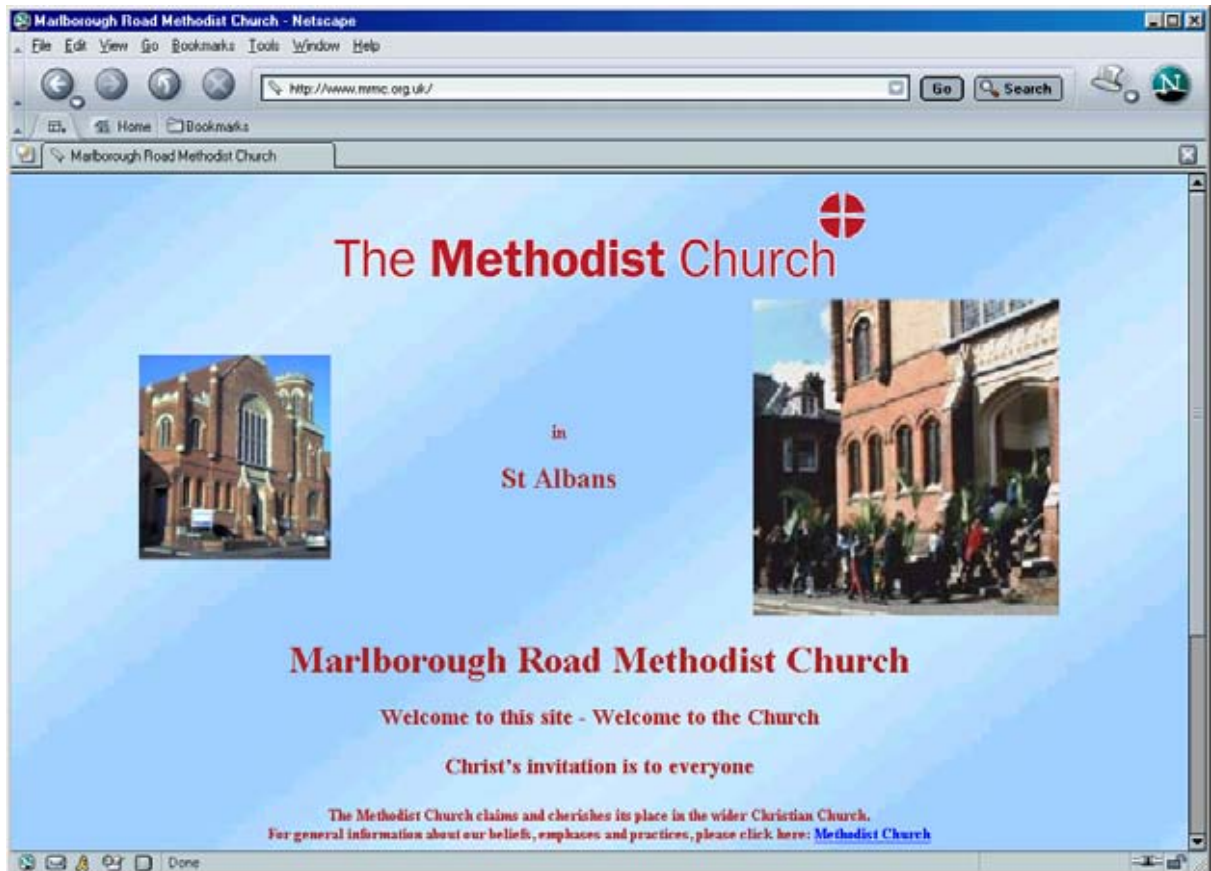
Hoddesdon Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.10



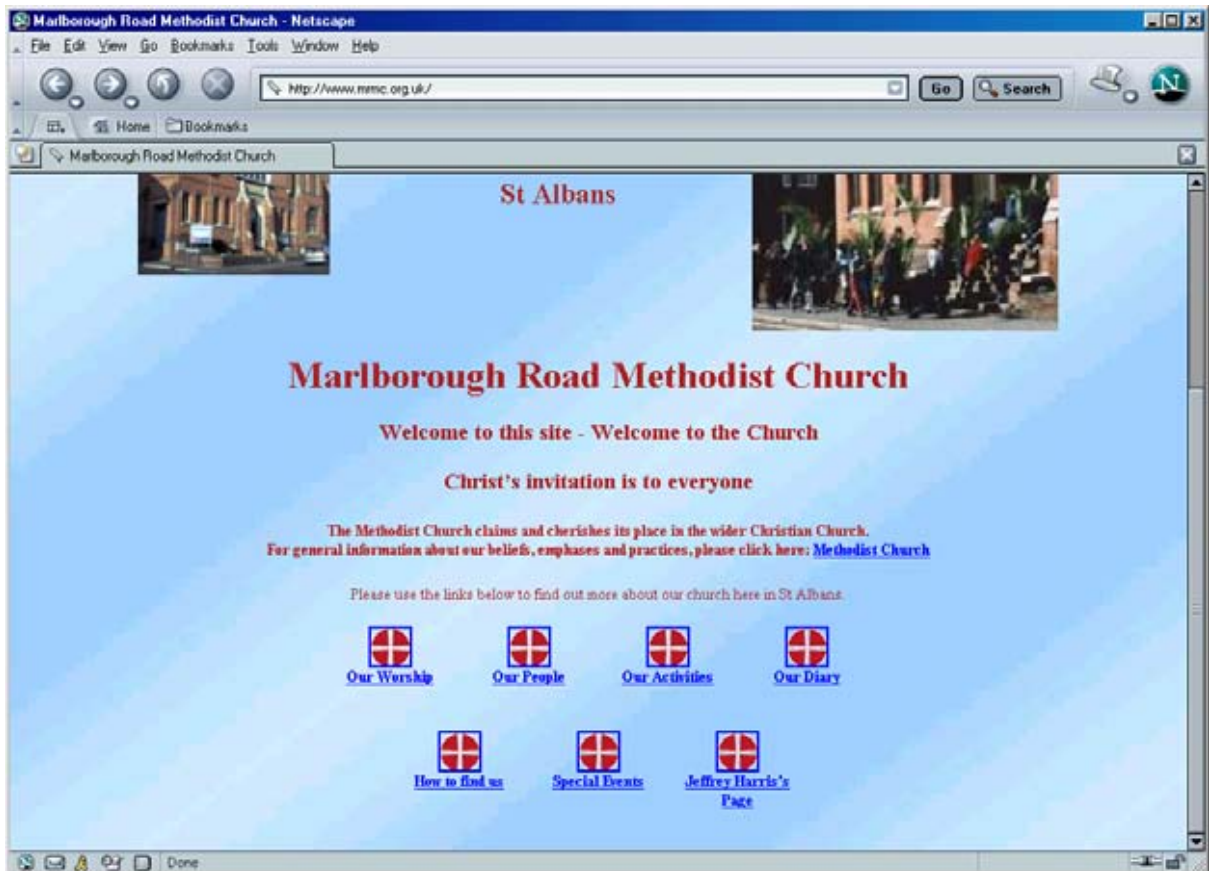
Ley Hill Methodist Church – Home Page

Figure A3.11(1)



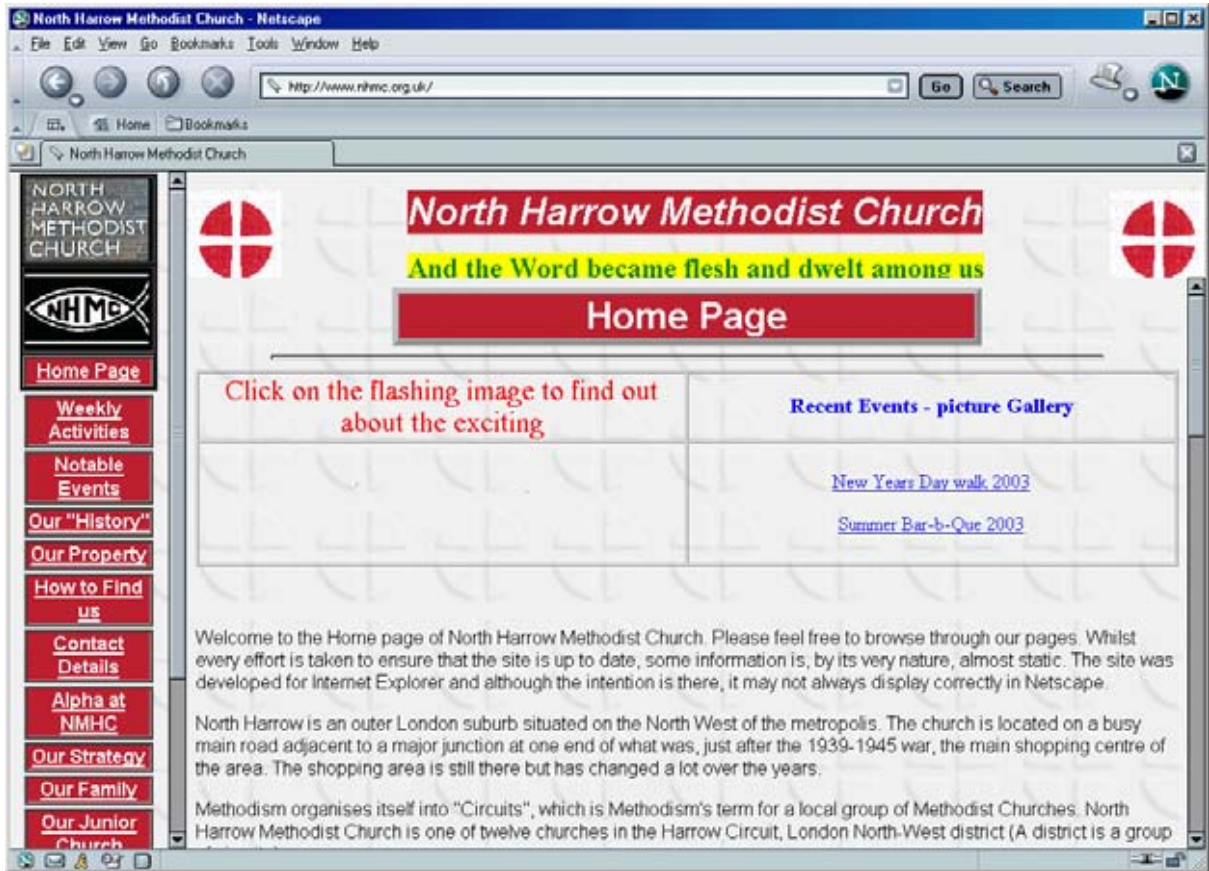
Marlborough Road Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.11(2)



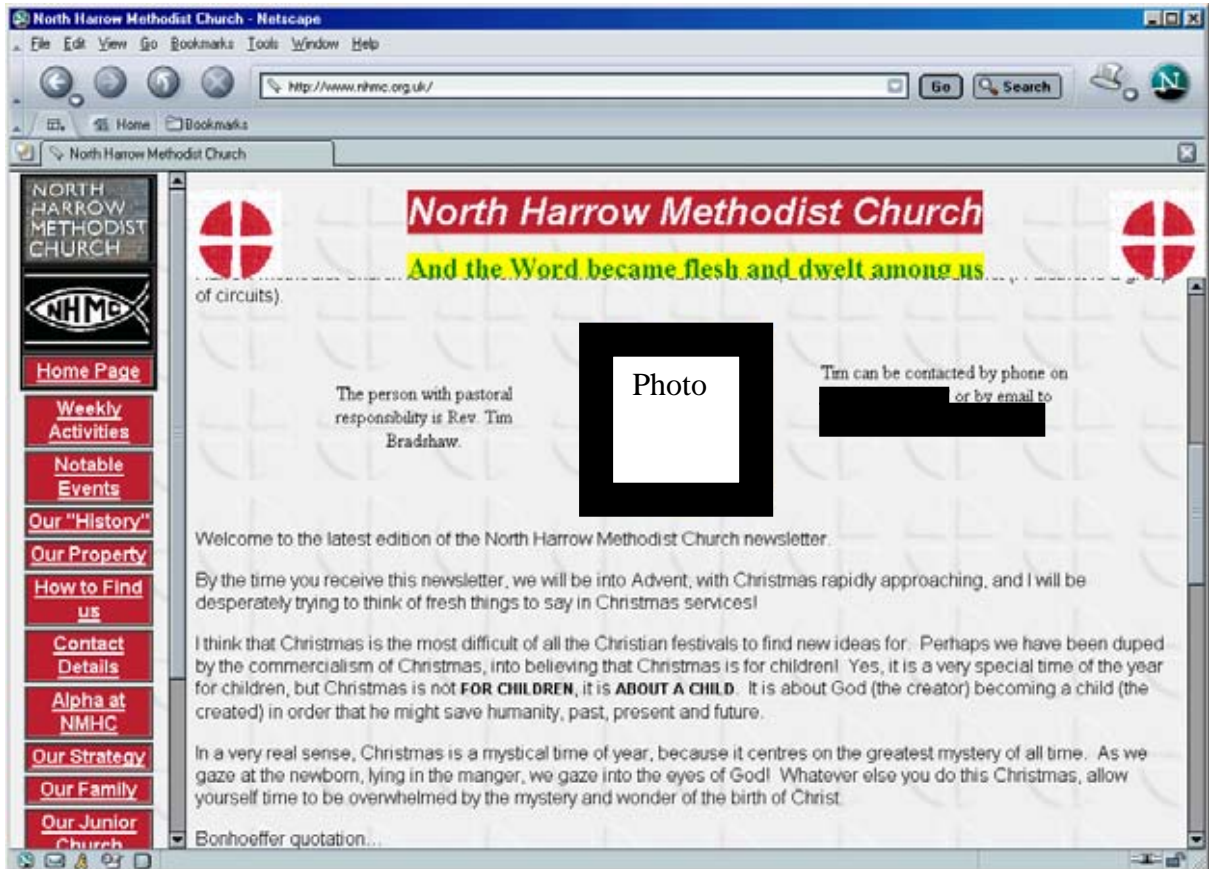
Marlborough Road Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.12(1)



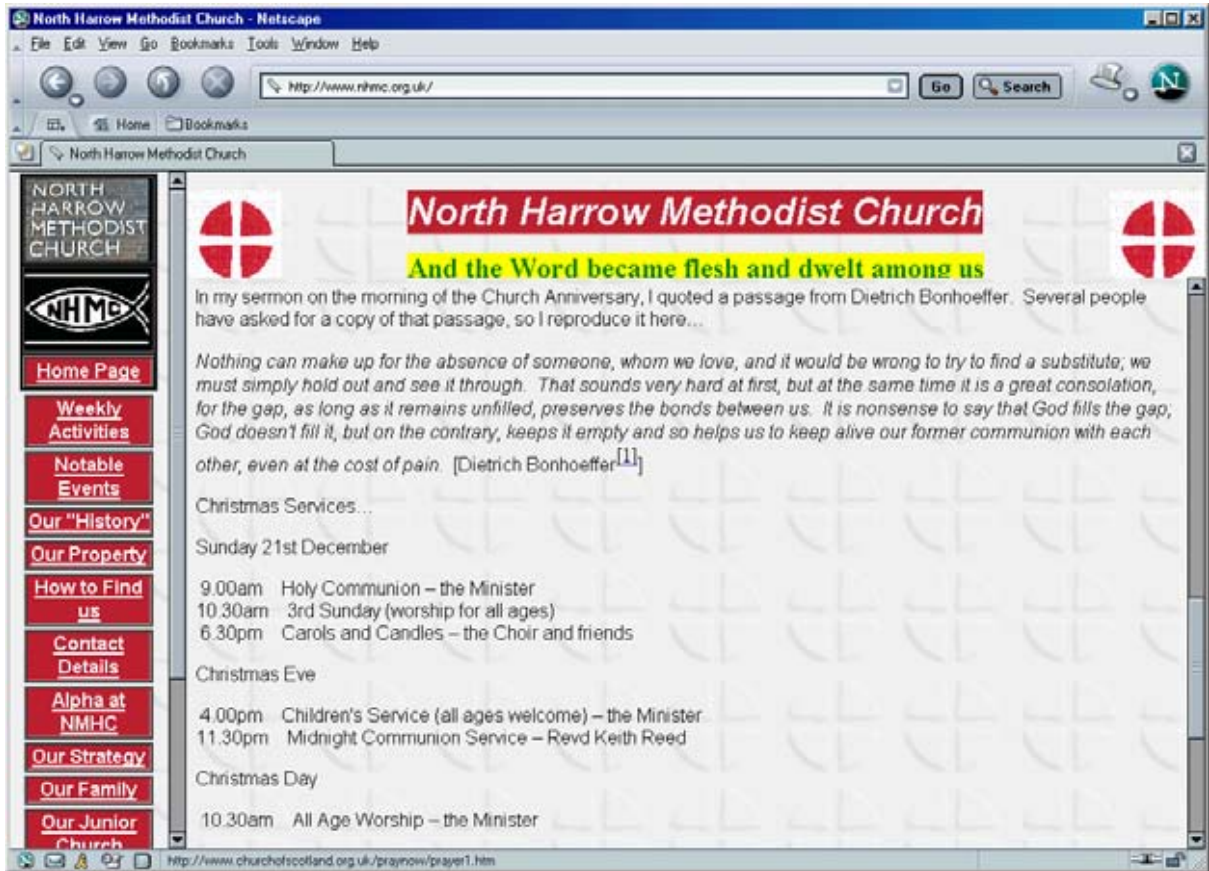
North Harrow Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.12(2)



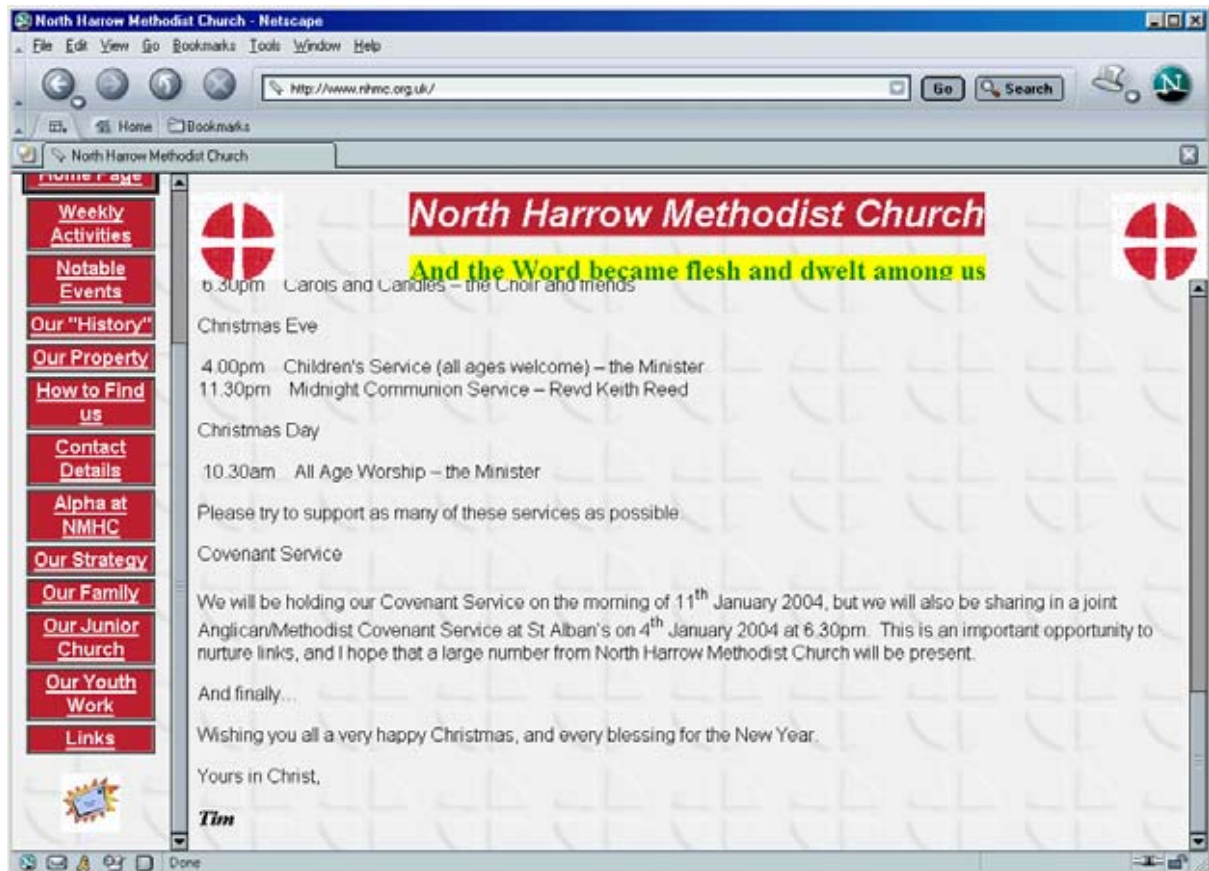
North Harrow Methodist Church – Part 2 of Home Page

Figure A3.12(3)



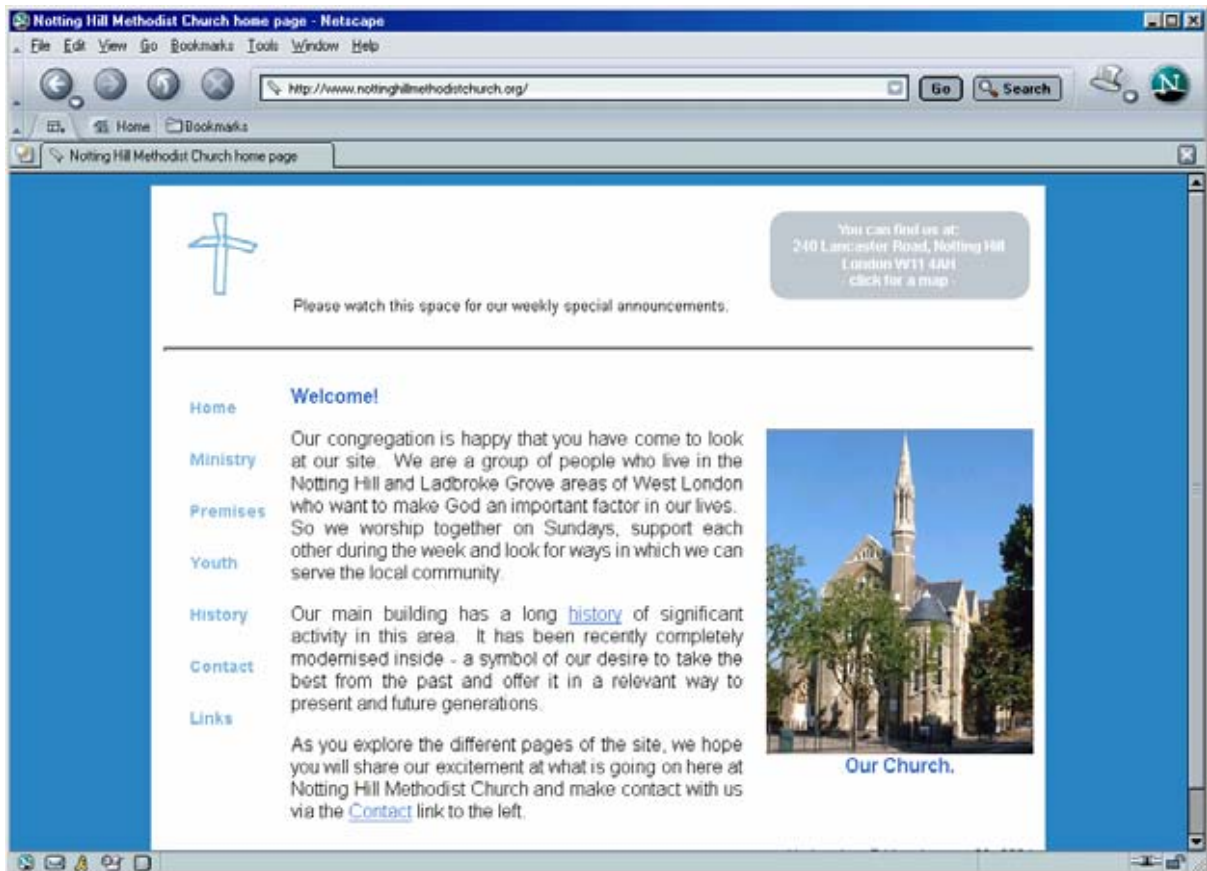
North Harrow Methodist Church – Part 3 of Home Page

Figure A3.12(4)



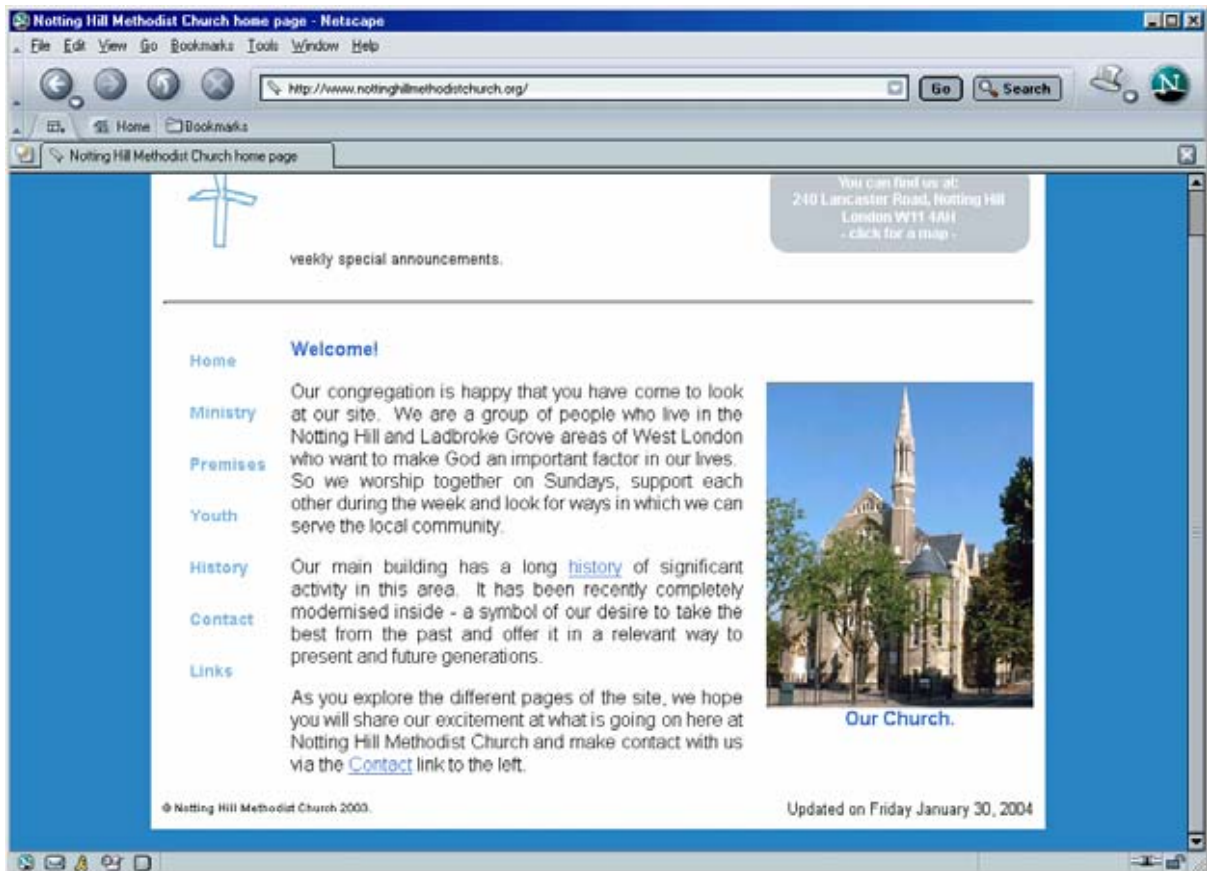
North Harrow Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.13(1)



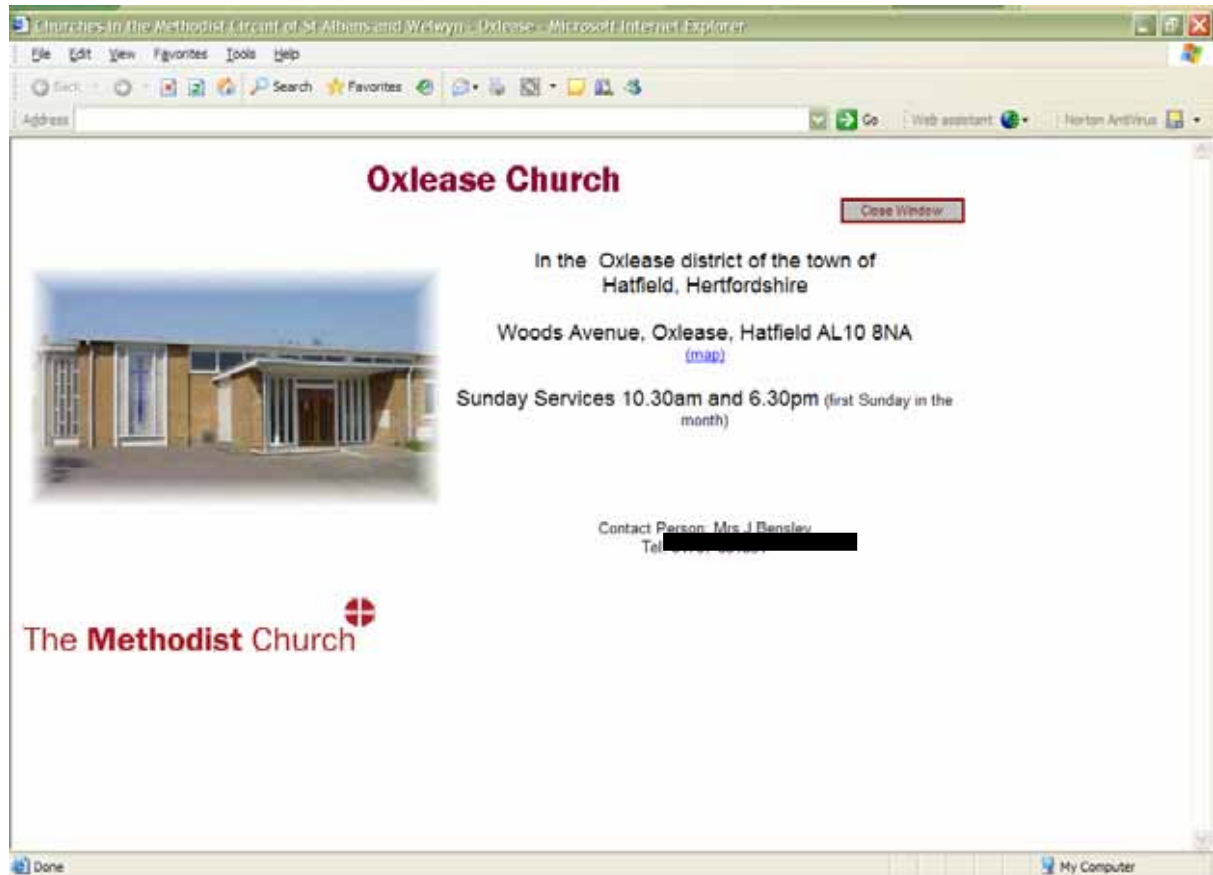
Notting Hill Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.13(2)



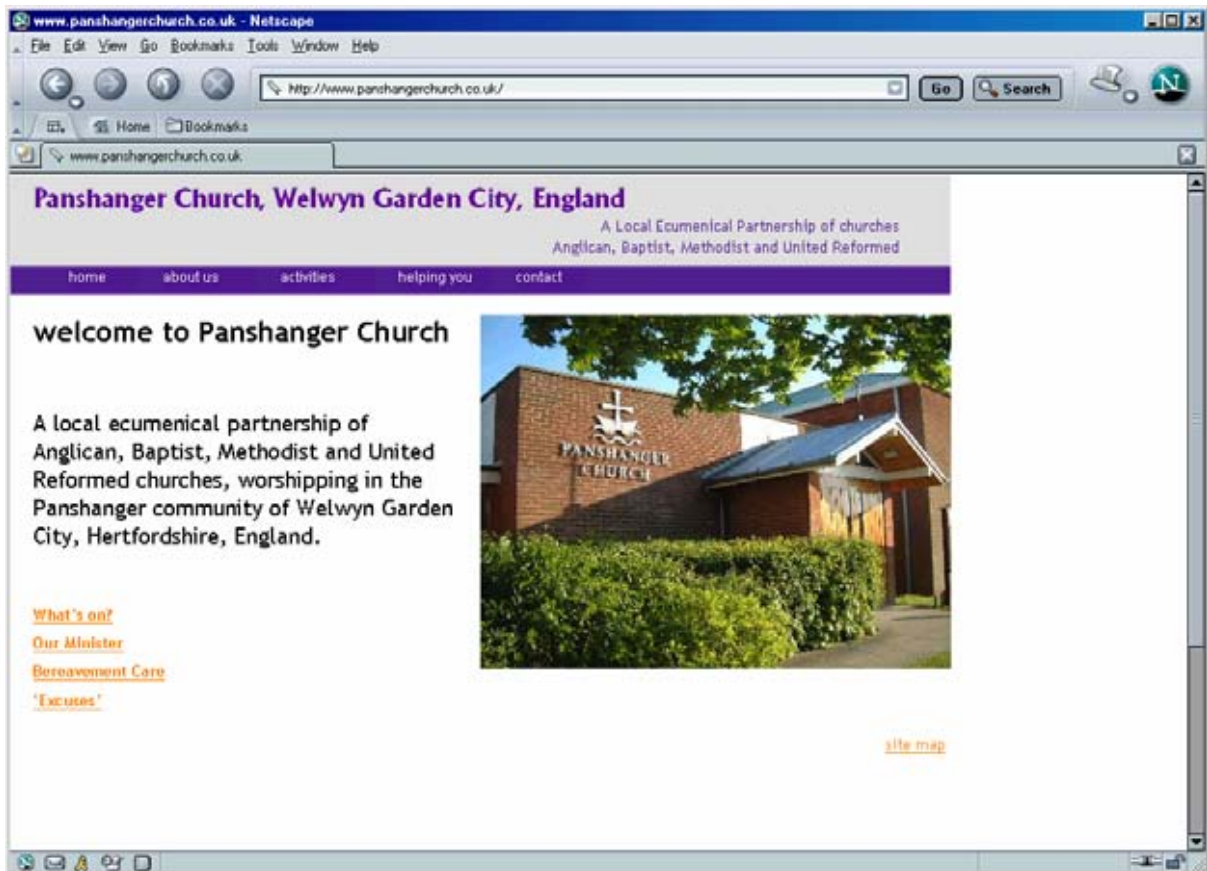
Notting Hill Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.14



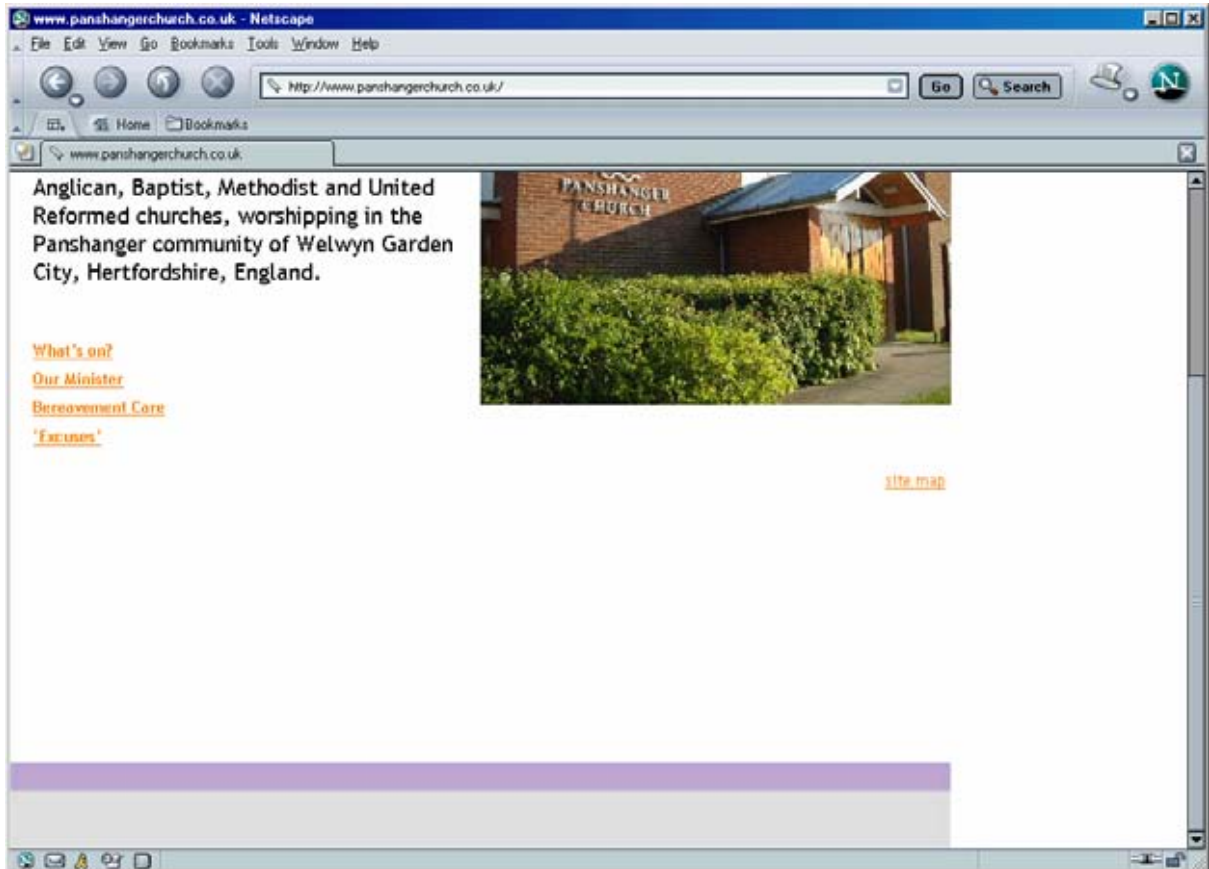
Oxlease Methodist Church – Home Page

Figure A3.15(1)



Panshanger Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.15(2)



Panshanger Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.16



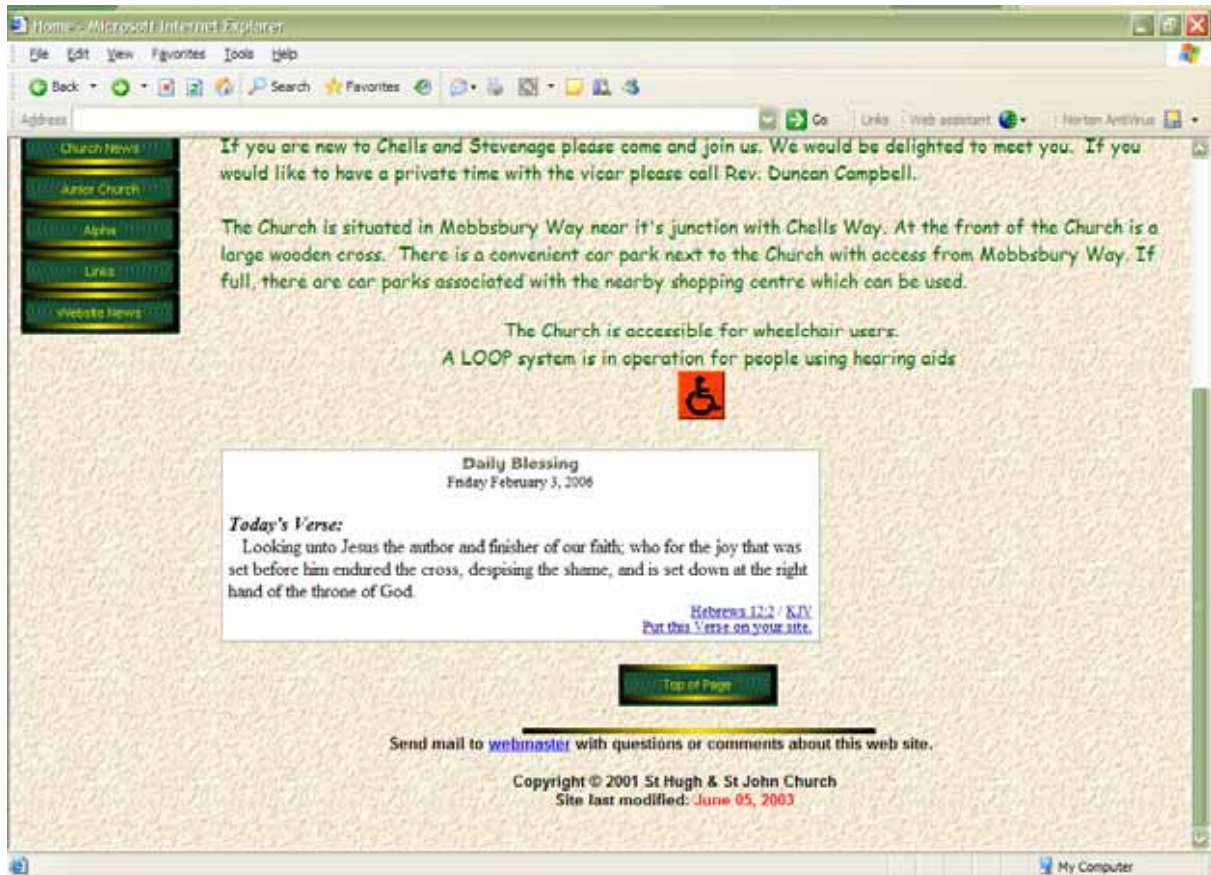
St. Andrews Methodist Church, Bushey Heath – Home Page

Figure A3.17(1)



St. Hugh & St. John's Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.17(2)



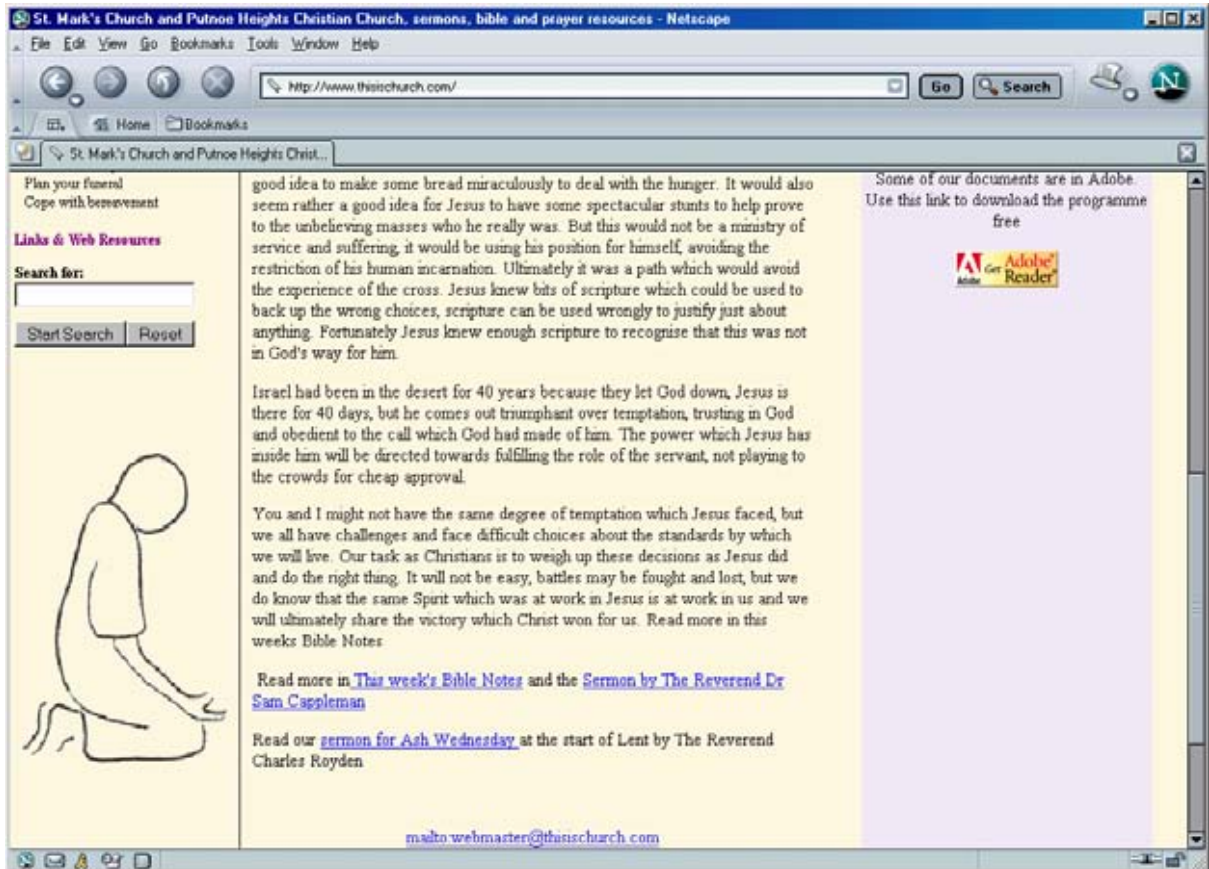
St. Hugh & St. John's Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.18(1)



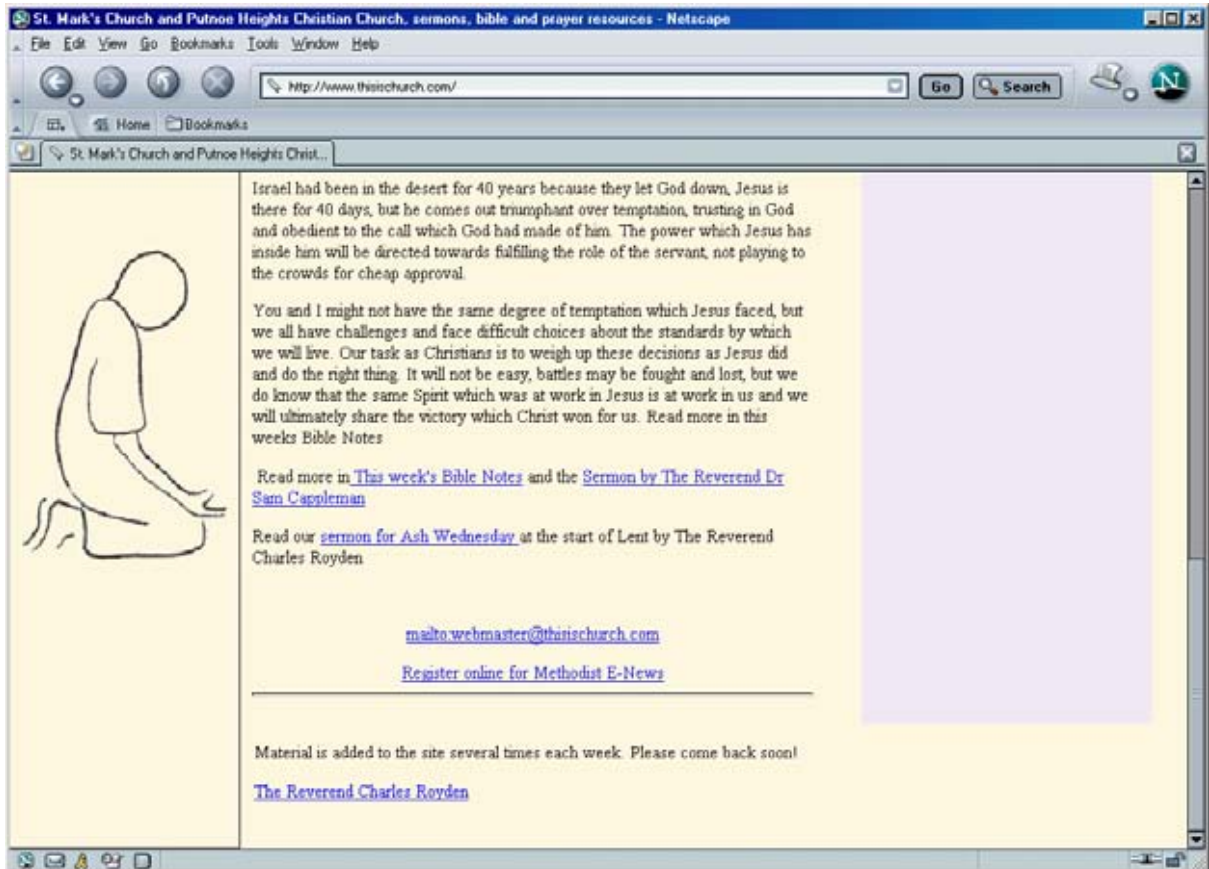
St. Mark's & Putnoe Heights – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.18(2)



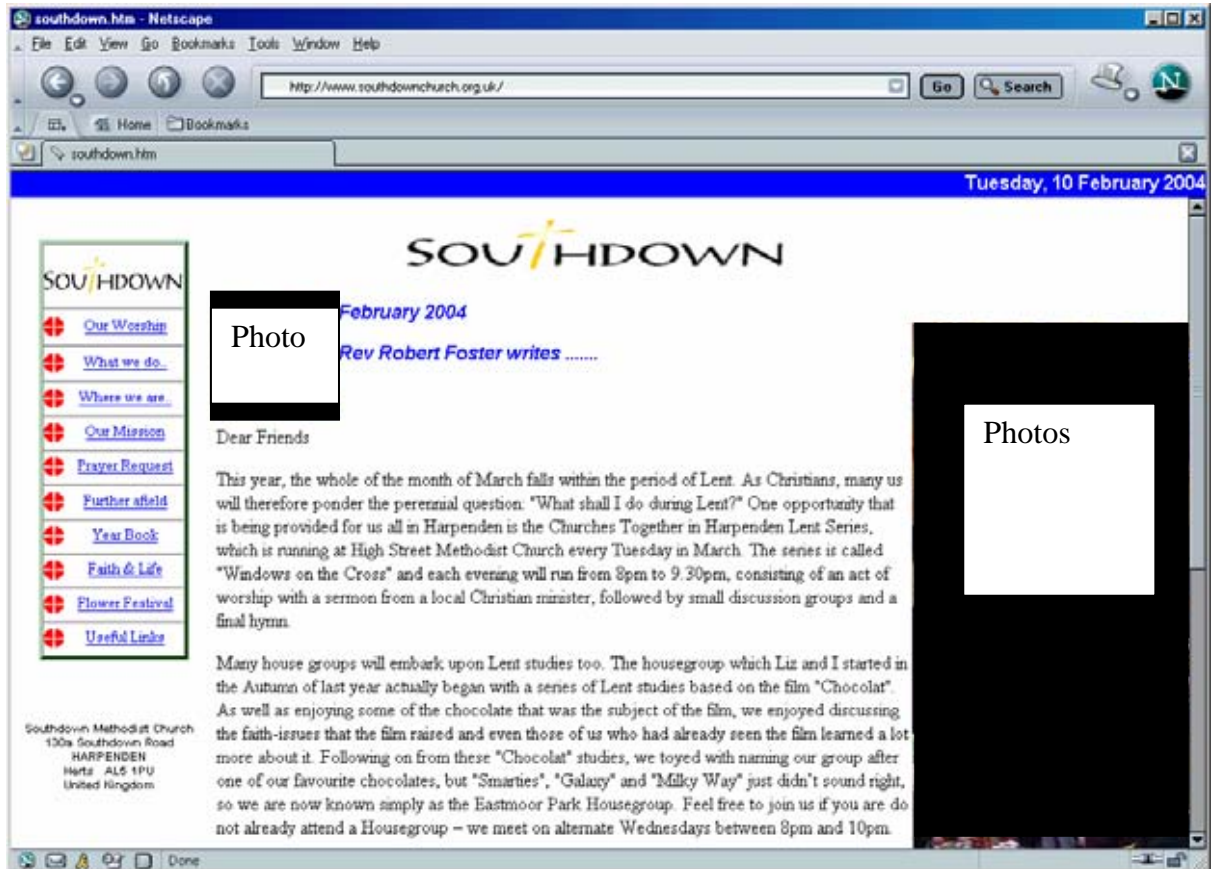
St. Mark's & Putnoe Heights – Middle of Home Page

Figure A3.18(3)



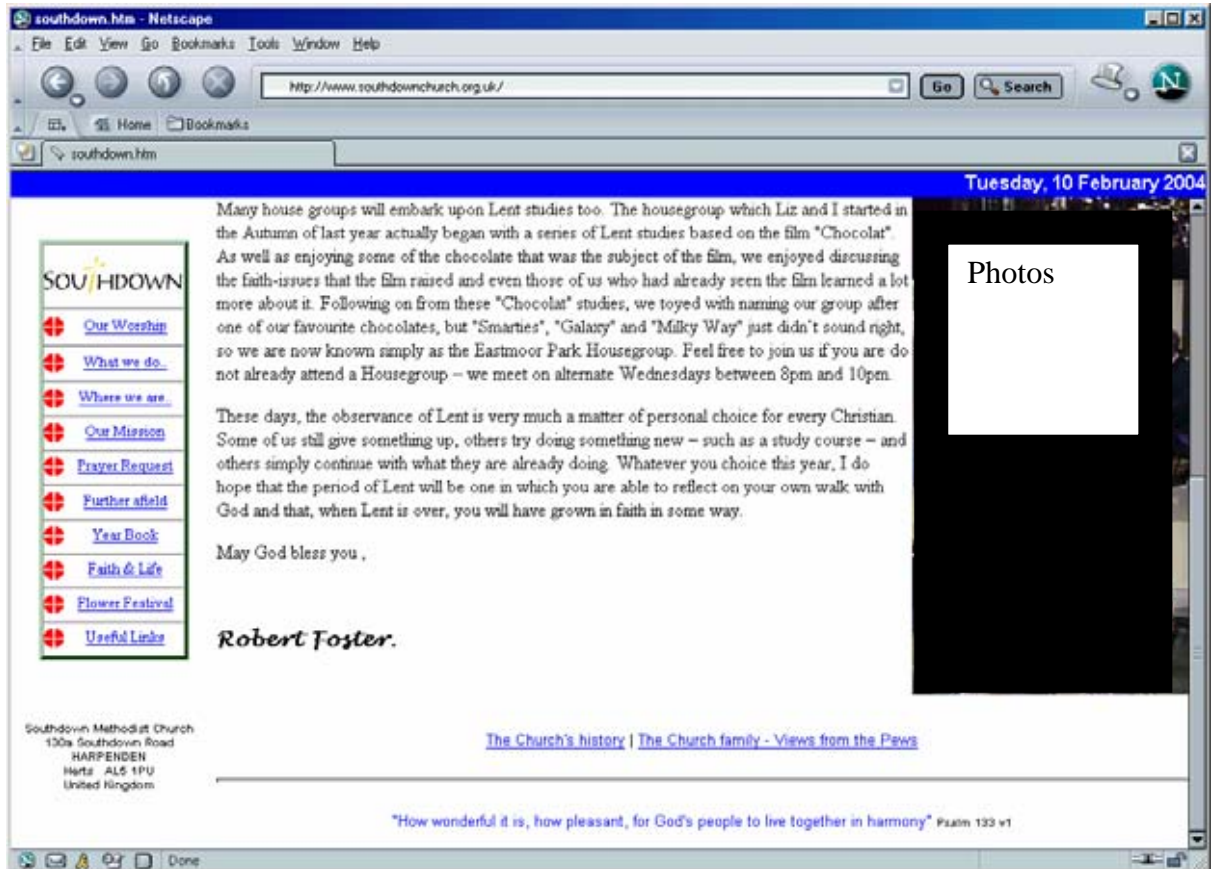
St. Mark's & Putnoe Heights – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.19(1)



Southdown Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.19(2)



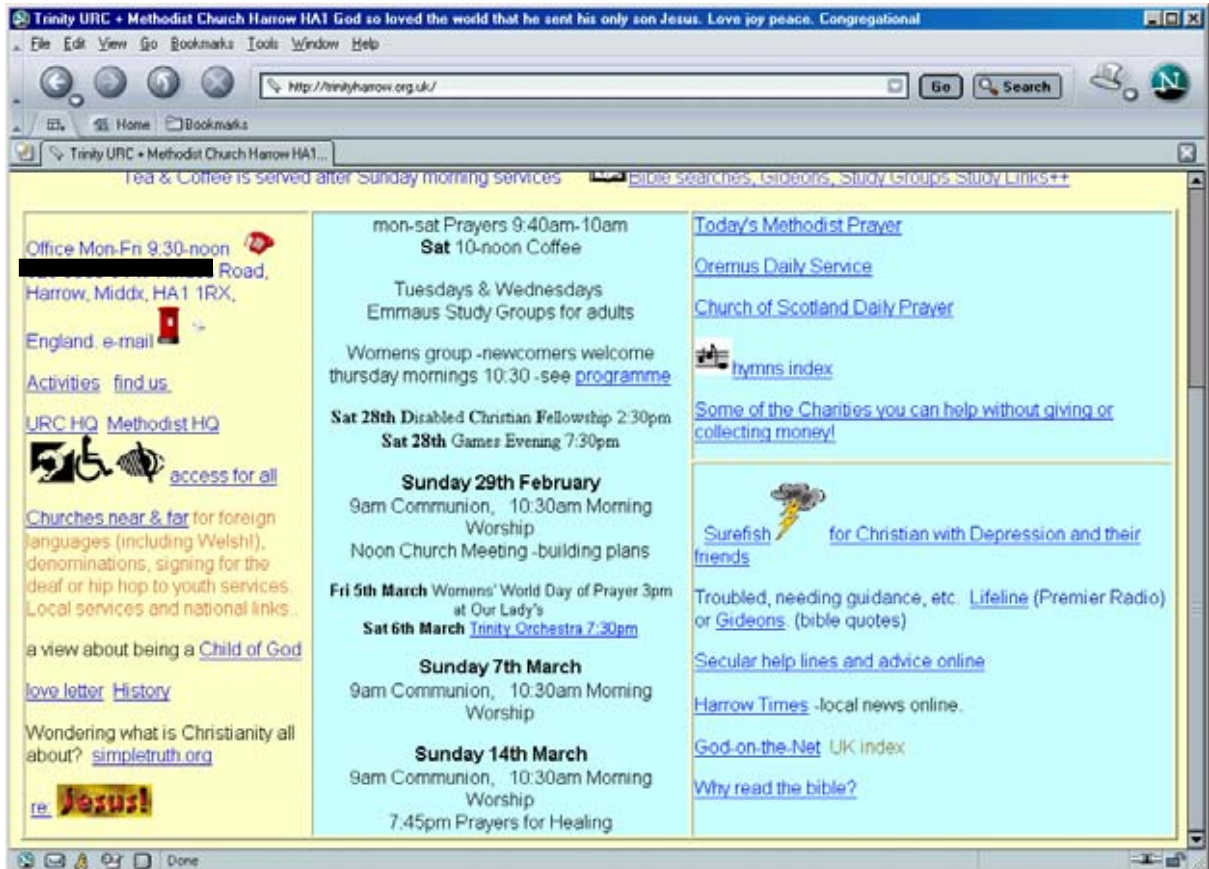
Southdown Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.20(1)



Trinity Church, Harrow – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.20(2)



Trinity Church, Harrow – Bottom of Home Page

Figure A3.21(1)



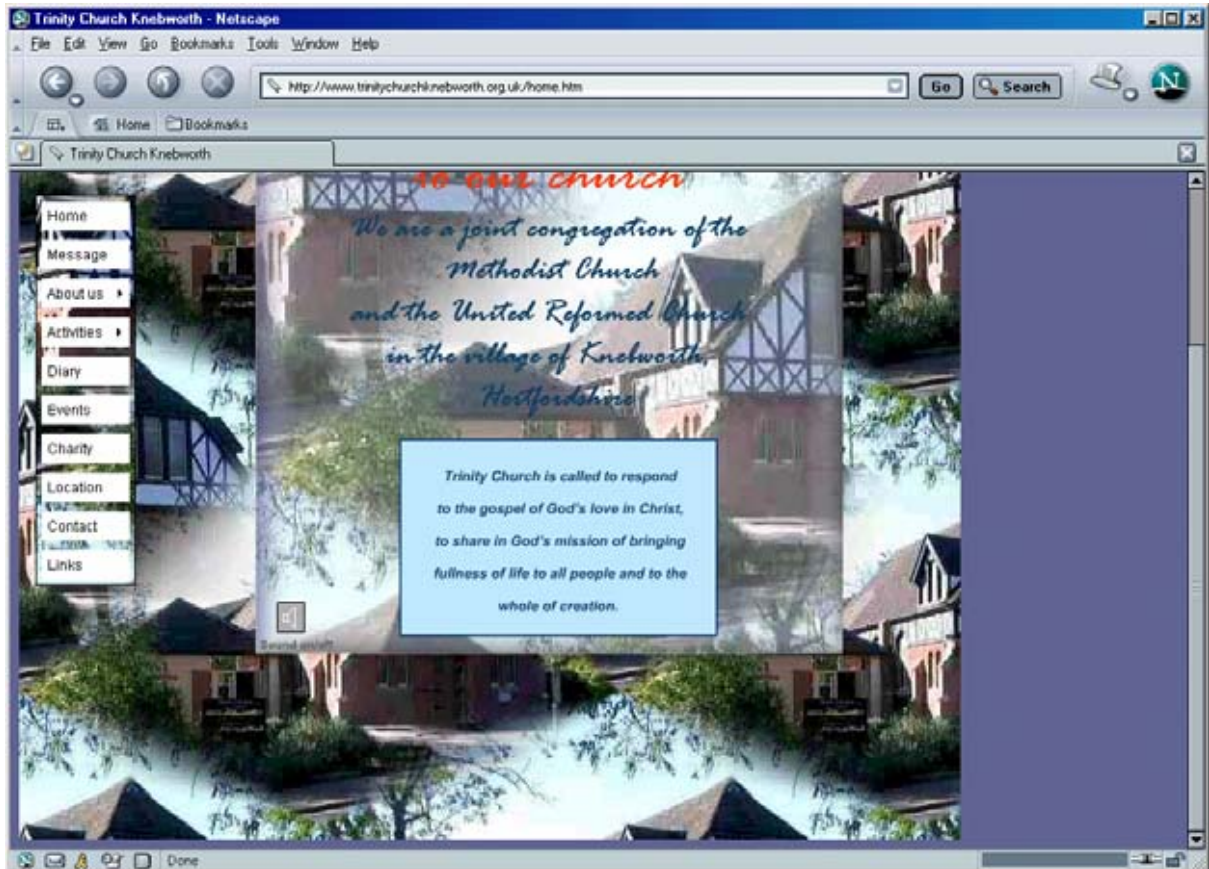
Trinity Church, Knebworth – Home Page

Figure A3.21(2)



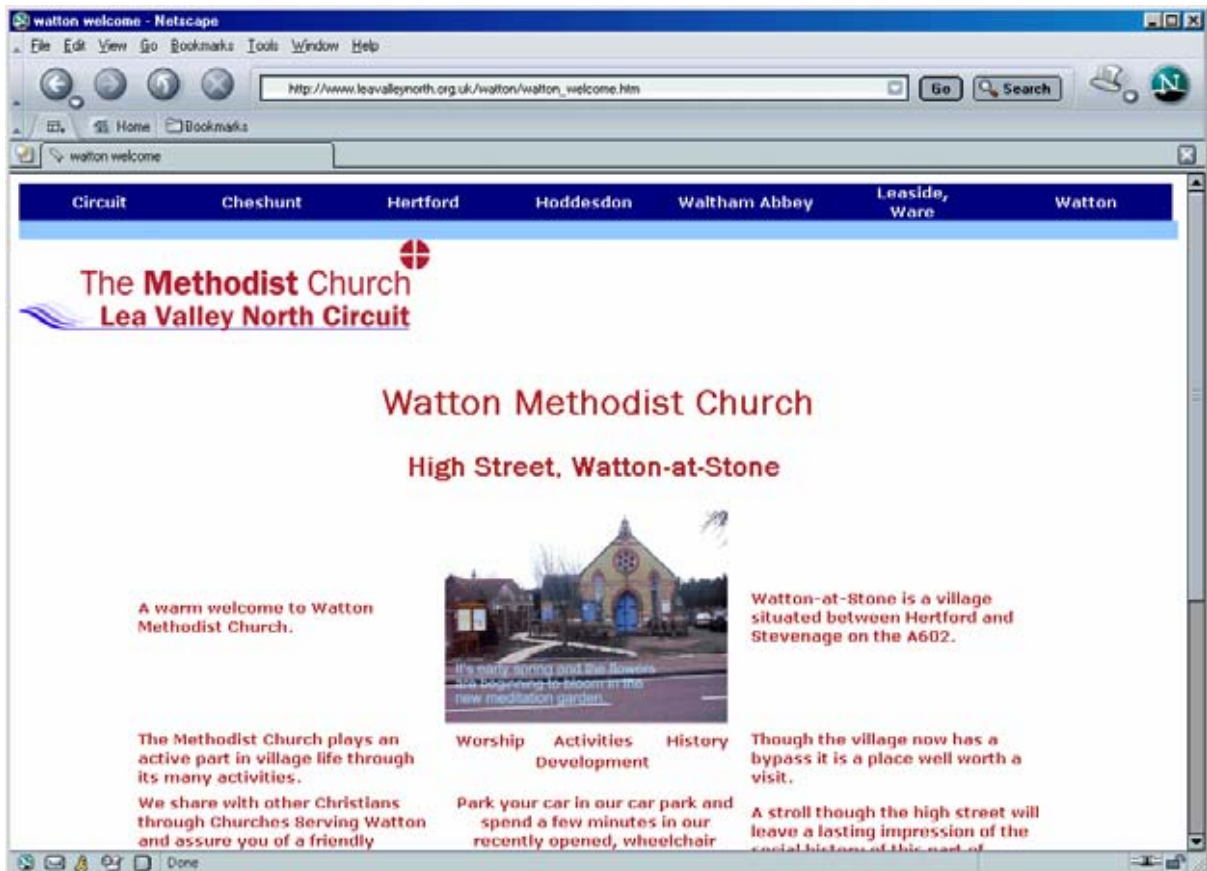
Trinity Church, Knebworth – Top of Psedo-Home Page

Figure A3.21(3)



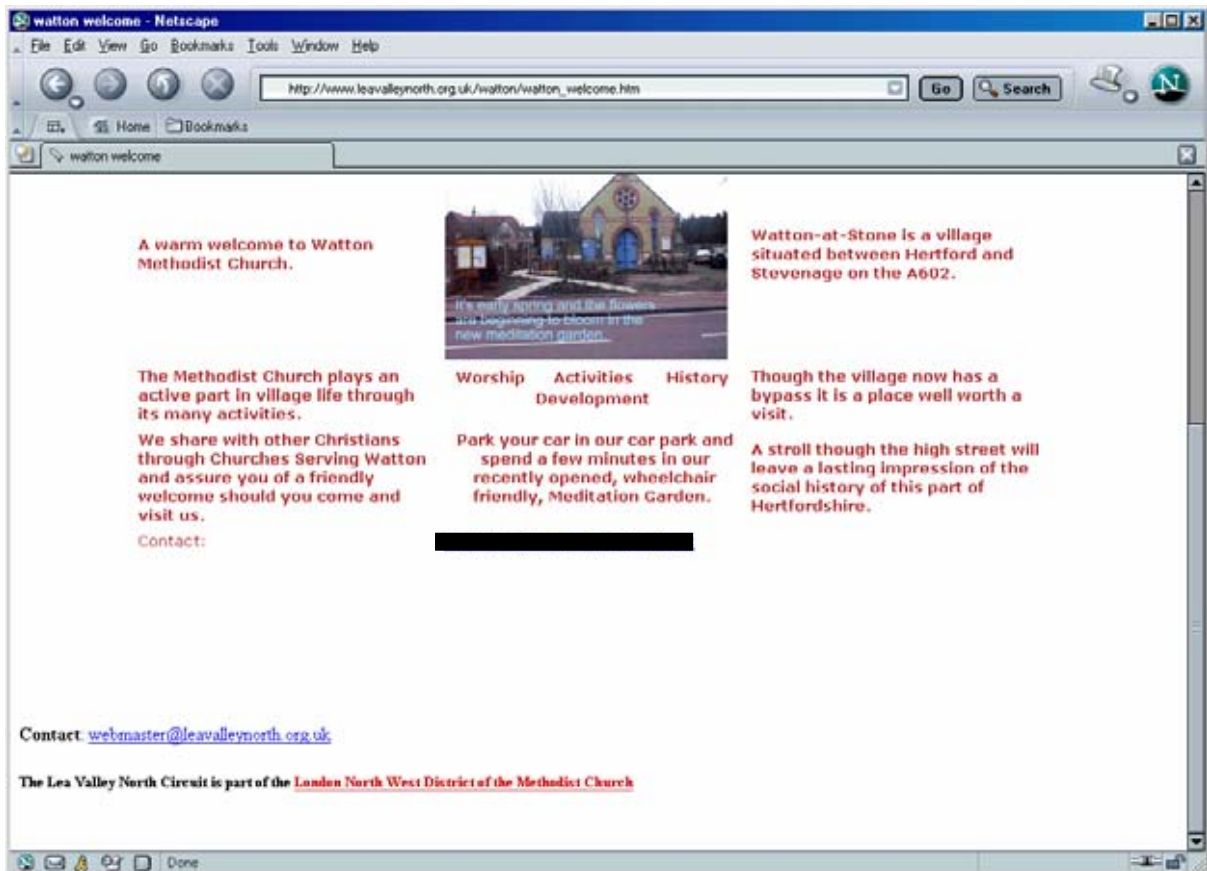
Trinity Church, Knebworth – Bottom of Psedo-Home Page

Figure A3.22(1)



Watton Methodist Church – Top of Home Page

Figure A3.22(2)



Watton Methodist Church – Bottom of Home Page

APPENDIX 4 – OTHER WEBPAGES

This appendix contains pictures of Webpages other than the Home Pages of local Methodist church Websites from the London North West District of the Methodist Church that were studied for this thesis.

This appendix is not available in the web version of this thesis

APPENDIX 5 – WEBSITE DESIGN SOFTWARE

This Appendix gives an overview of the functionality some of the Website Design Software that was available around the time that the research was conducted, along with approximate costs of the software.

Table A5.1

<i>Product</i>	<i>Manufacturer's Description</i>	<i>Price</i>
Creative Suite (Standard Edition)	The Adobe® Creative Suite is a complete design environment that combines new, full-version upgrades of Adobe's leading professional tools – Adobe Photoshop®, Adobe Illustrator®, Adobe InDesign®, Adobe GoLive®, and Adobe Acrobat® Professional software – with innovative Version Cue™ file-management features to let you create and publish content for print and the Web faster, more easily, and more affordably than ever.	£927.08 (full) £480.58 (upgrade)
Photoshop CS	Get superior results faster with the all-new industry-standard Adobe® Photoshop® CS software and its integrated Web production application, Adobe ImageReady® CS software. Create the highest quality images more efficiently than ever before with this powerful upgrade from Photoshop 7.0.	£605.13 (full) £146.88 (upgrade)
Photoshop® Elements 2.0	Powerful yet easy-to-use image editing software for print, e-mail, and the Web. Capture images from digital cameras, scanners, and CDs. Quickly correct photos and use powerful editing tools with ease.	£76.38

Adobe UK (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing

Table A5.2

<i>Product</i>	<i>Manufacturer's Description</i>	<i>Price</i>
<i>Dreamweaver MX 2004</i>	Dreamweaver MX 2004 is the easiest, most powerful way to build and manage any web site. From leading support for CSS-based design to hand-coding features, Dreamweaver provides the tools web professionals need in an integrated, streamlined environment.	£339 (full) £169 (upgrade)
<i>Fireworks MX 2004</i>	Design, optimize and integrate web graphics. Fireworks MX 2004 lets users import files from all major graphics formats and manipulate both vector and bitmap images to quickly create graphics and interactivity. Images can be easily exported to Dreamweaver, Flash and third-party applications.	£249 (full) £129 (upgrade)
<i>Flash® MX 2004</i>	Create rich content and applications across desktops and devices.	£419 (full) £169 (upgrade)
<i>Freehand MX</i>	Create illustration and layout for print and web. Use FreeHand MX for creative design, storyboarding, multipage document production, and editing with an unparalleled set of creative design tools. Easily repurpose your designs for print, the Internet, or Macromedia Flash MX.	£299 (full) £79 (upgrade)
<i>Studio MX 2004</i>	Streamline web development with an integrated tool set. Macromedia Studio MX 2004 provides professional functionality for every aspect of web development and includes the newest versions of Dreamweaver, Flash, Fireworks and FreeHand.	£699 (full) £309 (upgrade)

Macromedia UK (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing

Table A5.3

Product	Manufacturer's Description	Price
Webeditor 5.5	Whether you're an experienced Web professional or just starting with your first home page, Namo WebEditor 5.5 provides the complete set of tools you need to design, build, manage and publish leading edge Web sites in less time and with great results.	£79.99 (full)

Namo (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing

Table A5.4

Product	Manufacturer's Description	Price
DrawPlus 7	DrawPlus 7 really is the ultimate software solution for all of your drawing and graphics requirements. Better, easier and more powerful than ever, there's no limit to the creative possibilities!	\$99.99 (full)
PagePlus 9	Explore a new creative world with PagePlus 9! It's simple for anyone to create stylish documents in an instant. Impressive 3D objects allow more creative freedom with vivid lighting, patterns, textures and perspective controls that will add impact to any shape. Transform your text or other objects with a single click. Stamping your own personality on text and images has never been easier!	\$134.99 (full)
WebPlus 8	Web Page Design Made Easy! Fantastic new WebPlus 8 adds a raft of enhanced features to its multi award winning formula and makes truly outstanding Web design power available to everyone.	\$79.99 (full)

Serif (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing

Table A5.5

Product	Manufacturer's Description	Price
FrontPage® 2003	With FrontPage® you can create and manage your own website. Build exactly the website you want using familiar Office tools.	£169.99 (full) £89.99 (upgrade)
Word 2003	Microsoft Office Word 2003, the latest version of our best-selling word processor, delivers innovations that can help you easily create profession-quality documents, control distribution of sensitive information, and collaborate with others.	£199.99 (full) £89.99 (upgrade) [Microsoft® Word Comes on most PCs as part of Microsoft Windows®]

Microsoft UK (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing

Table A5.6

Product	Manufacturer's Description	Price
Cute FTP® 6.0 Home	Cute FTP® 6.0 Home edition offers the perfect blend of performance, security, power and ease-of-use for the home user. Whether publishing a Web page, downloading the latest digital images, music and software or transferring large files between your home and office, Cute FTP Home will get the job done quickly and easily, even if you are a beginner.	\$39.99 (full)

Cute FTP (2004) – Software Functionality and Pricing

GLOSSARY OF COMPUTING TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

This glossary contains explanations for some of the computing terms and abbreviations that are used in this thesis. A glossary has been provided because it is not expected that all readers of this essentially missiological thesis about local Methodist church Websites will be familiar with all of the computing terms and abbreviations that it has proved necessary to use.

COMPUTING TERMS

<i>Applet</i>	A software component that runs in the context of another program, such as a <i>Browser</i> . An <i>Applet</i> usually performs a very narrow function that has no independent use. Hence, it is an <i>application -let</i> .
<i>Bit</i>	A binary digit of data (i.e. 0 or 1); all data held in computers, including text, numbers, sound and video is stored as a series of <i>Bits</i> .
<i>Blog</i>	A web-based personal diary – short for ‘weblog’.
<i>Browser</i>	A <i>Browser</i> is a software program that allows Websites to be accessed by decoding the instructions in the <i>Source Code</i> of <i>Webpages</i> and converting them into the appropriate <i>Webpage</i> features such as text, graphics and interaction functions. <i>Browsers</i> allow users to access Websites by typing in a <i>Domain Name</i> or by following <i>Hyperlinks</i> . Popular <i>Browsers</i> are Microsoft® Internet Explorer and Netscape®, though there are others available such as Opera.
<i>Byte</i>	A set of <i>Bits</i> (binary digits) considered to be a unit for processing purposes. Traditionally a <i>Byte</i> has been 8 <i>Bits</i> , which is important to remember when translating the data rates (<i>kbps</i> ; <i>Mbps</i>) in terms of the number of <i>Bytes</i> transferred per second.
<i>Cookie</i>	A <i>Cookie</i> is a text file stored by a Website in a small text file on a computer. The information in the <i>Cookie</i> may include a user’s preferences when visiting that Website or a record of the <i>Webpages</i> looked at within the Website the user visited. <i>Cookies</i> can also store personally identifiable information, such as a user’s name, e-mail address, home or work address, or telephone number. Once a <i>Cookie</i> is saved on a computer, only the Website that created the <i>Cookie</i> can read it (in theory).

Cyberspace

According to the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility (1999, 17-18): “cyberspace lets us communicate and share information with each other ... like the real world, we are affected by cyberspace and affect it ... The defining characteristic of the technology (computers, networks, storage devices, and so on) that supports cyberspace is that it is *digital*.”

Domain Name

The ***Domain Name*** of a Website is what needs to be typed into a ***Browser*** in order to access the Website. In order to facilitate global accessibility, a ***Domain Name*** can only belong to one Website in the entire world. A ***Domain Name*** is part of a ***URL*** which, for a Website, will have the format `http://<prefix><site-name><suffix>`. Most ***Browsers*** do not now require “`http://`” to be typed in. The `<prefix>` field is normally “`www.`”, though other forms of `<prefix>` are now used, such as “`www2`” and sometimes the `<prefix>` is omitted altogether. The `<site-name>` is the name which identifies the particular site and might be something like “`anychurch`” or “`southdown.church`”. The `<suffix>` says what type of site is being accessed and is often appended by the country’s abbreviation – this field used to be quite simple, being limited to things like “`.com`”, “`.org`” or “`.gov`”, but new forms of `<suffix>` are being added all the time, such as “`.tv`” and the `<suffix>` may also include the name of the ***ISP***. Examples of ***Domain Name*** that might exist are:

`http://www.argos.co.uk`; `http://www.dfes.gov.uk`;

`http://www.mychurch.freemove.co.uk`; `http://www.ford.com`.

Home Page

The ***Home Page*** is the ***Webpage*** which a visitor to a Website is intended to visit first. It is the address of the ***Home Page*** which is normally publicised (e.g. on headed stationery or in church newsletters) but, as all ***Webpages*** may be accessed independently, specific ***Webpages*** are often advertised as well as the ***Home Page***, especially for larger Websites.

Hyperlink

A ***Hyperlink*** is an item on a ***Webpage*** which, when selected in a ***Browser*** (usually by a mouse click), or perhaps even in another computer program, will result in the ***Browser*** displaying another

Webpage – either from the same Website or from another Website. A **Hyperlink** may be shown as a text field (often underlined, such as <http://www.ford.com>), or it may be concealed behind a photograph or another type of graphical feature so that when a user selects that particular feature the **Hyperlink** is activated.

Internet

The **Internet** is the publicly accessible worldwide system of interconnected computer networks. It is made up of thousands of smaller commercial, academic, domestic and government networks. It carries various information and services, such as electronic mail, online chat, and the interlinked **Webpages** and other documents of the World Wide Web.

IP Address

Internet Protocol address. This is a unique number used by devices, such as personal computers, attached to a network to refer to each other when sending information through a network. An example IP address is 207.142.131.236. Converting a number address to a more human-readable form (e.g. <http://www.methodist.org.uk>) is done via the **Domain Name** system.

Keywords

Keywords are words which the designer of a Website hopes that somebody looking for that Website will enter into the search field of a **Search Engine**. Sometimes, **Keywords** placed in particular places within the **Source Code** of a **Webpage** may be of help in the search process.

Mirror

A copy of all of the files of a Website which is downloaded to another computer in order that the functionality of the original Website can be reproduced on the computer where the **Mirror** is located. (Some functionality, such as input, data-driven functionality and e-commerce may not work correctly on a **Mirror**.)

Operating System

This is the software that allows a computer to work. It allows programs to be run and provides a user interface. Most personal computers run a version of the Microsoft® Windows® **Operating System**, though Apple® Mac® computers run versions of an **Operating System** known as MacOS®. Different **Operating Systems** are not totally compatible and this is particularly relevant when

Browsers are being used as it may mean that users of a particular **Operating System** either cannot access particular Websites, or find reduced or impaired functionality on them.

Plugin

A piece of software which, when downloaded or loaded onto a computer, will enable other software to work. For example, the Flash® **Plugin** is needed on a computer in order to allow Macromedia Flash® animations to run.

Search Engine

A **Search Engine** has become a generic term for a Website that searches the Websites on the World Wide Web. When a query is entered into a **Search Engine** like ‘Google’, the input is checked against its **Keywords** and the best matches are returned as ‘hits’. There used to be more of a distinction between a Search Directory, which listed Websites based on manual submissions that were categorised by real people and a **Search Engine**, which relied on automated software to trawl the World Wide Web and followed links to compile a huge database of keywords. Now, most **Search Engines** are hybrids with both directory entries and the results of trawling the World Wide Web; NETVisibility (2004b) describes ‘Google’ as “a search engine that maintains its own spider-based index ... Google also has a directory that is powered by the Open Directory; however, the sites within the directory are ranked according to Google’s link popularity technology.”

Signpost

A **Signpost** is a way of marking on a **Webpage** that there is more content which cannot be displayed. **Browsers** will display sliding bars to allow users to scroll across or up and down if a **Webpage** is not displayed fully, but **Signposts** on the visible area can help a user to know the type of content that is hidden.

Source Code

In order for a **Browser** to display a **Webpage**, it interprets the **Source Code** which has been written for that **Webpage**. This **Source Code** is written in variations of a language known as ‘html’ (hyper-text markup language) and can be generated automatically by a Website design program.

Thumbnail

A **Thumbnail** is a smaller version of a graphic file which, when

selected, normally results in the display of the full-sized graphic file – often in a separate **Browser** window or on a separate **Webpage**.

Thumbnails are often used in order to speed up the download time of **Webpages** – they allow users to see which graphic files are available without having to wait for all of the larger graphic files to be downloaded.

Webmaster

The person who is responsible for the Website or **Webpage**. This does not have to be the person who actually produced the Website, or who actually maintains the Website, though it often is.

Webpage

Every Website is organised into a number of **Webpages**.

Conceptually, a **Webpage** is like a page in a book except that it can contain text, graphics, sound, photographs, video, interactive features, program instructions, **Hyperlinks** and other features. If the design of a Website allows, then each the **Webpage** on a Website can be accessed individually by name in any order, as well as by **Hyperlinks** which call up specific **Webpages**.

Webspace

An amount of disk space that is allocated by an **ISP** on an **Internet**-accessible computer for a particular user or organisations to store Website(s) on.

ABBREVIATIONS

bps

Bits per second. A data transfer rate of **1bps** equates to the transfer of 1 (i.e. 2^0) **Bits** per second (though, in practice, there are some data transfer overheads in order to ensure that data transfer is synchronised and is accurate). The term **bps** and derivative terms like **kbps** and **Mbps** must always have ‘**bps**’ in lower case in order to ensure that people understand that it refers to **Bits**, rather than **Bytes**.

HTML

HyperText Markup Language. The language used to code **Webpages**. It used to be the case that **Webpages** had to be constructed by coding them manually, but there is a good deal of software available now to produce **HTML** from a design of graphics, text and other Website elements.

ISP

Internet Service Provider. This is a company that provides internet

access or that provides space on its computers to store the software files that make up a Website.

kB The abbreviation for 1 kilobyte. The use of the metric term ‘kilo’ suggests that this is 1,000 ***Bytes*** of data, though its exact size is $2^{10} = 1,024$ ***Bytes***.

kbps Kilo ***bps***. A data transfer rate of ***1kbps*** equates to the transfer of 1024 (i.e. 2^{10}) ***Bits*** per second so that, in theory, the transfer of ***1kB*** of data would take 8 seconds at that rate (though, in practice, there are some data transfer overheads in order to ensure that data transfer is synchronised and is accurate, so it might be assumed that ***1kB*** takes 10 seconds to transfer at a data rate of ***1kbps***).

MB 1 MegaByte (often written Megabyte). The use of the metric term ‘Mega’ suggests that this is 1,000,000 ***Bytes*** of data, though its exact size is ***1kB*** x ***1kB*** = 1,048,576 ***Bytes***.

Mbps Mega ***bps***. A data transfer rate of 1Mbps equates to the transfer of 1024 x 1024 (i.e. 2^{20}) ***Bits*** per second so that, in theory, the transfer of ***1MB*** of data would take 8 seconds at that rate (though, in practice, there are some data transfer overheads in order to ensure that data transfer is synchronised and is accurate, so it might be assumed that ***1MB*** takes 10 seconds to transfer at a data rate of ***1Mbps***).

PC Personal Computer. According to Chambers Reference Online (2006a): “**personal computer** *noun* (abbreviation **PC** or **pc**) a microcomputer designed for use by one person, which may be self-contained or networked to a larger system, used especially for wordprocessing, database or spreadsheet applications.”

URL Uniform Resource Locator. Poulter et al (1999) say that a ***URL*** consists of five elements: protocol://domain:port/path/filename. For a Website, the protocol will normally be ‘http’ (hyper-text transfer protocol), the port is not used and the filename will not need to be quoted (by default, the ***Home Page*** will be displayed, which might be called something like index.htm, but the ‘filename’ does become relevant for other ***Webpages*** in the Website) and the ‘filename’ is important for the files which make up ***Webpages***. So if the domain is

‘www.our-methodist-church.org.uk’, then the *URL* might be ‘http://www.our-methodist-church.org.uk/index.html’. Note that what is called the *Domain Name* in this thesis is equivalent to the part of the *URL* that Poulter et al (1999) would describe as the ‘domain’. Interestingly, Boardman (2005, 103) notes that “increasingly, the ‘www’ part of the address is not required, so that entering just ‘microsoft.com’ will get you to their website.”

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