# Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church: A Comparative Research Project in the North East of England

## 2016 Report

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

The primary purpose of this document is to present the key findings of the Receptive Ecumenism and Local Church Regional Comparative Project to the participating denominations that generously collaborated on this project since 2007 and the various bodies who made the project possible. We want to express our deepest gratitude to those who provided support or contributed to this project. The success realised is due to the collaboration and support of so many groups and individuals desiring to embrace a richer, more open dialogue across faith traditions.

# Background

In January 2006 the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University, in collaboration with Ushaw College, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the Anglican Diocese of Durham, the British Academy, The Jerusalem Trust, and a number of other sponsoring bodies, hosted an international research colloquium on the theme 'Catholic Learning and Receptive Ecumenism'. The colloquium brought together 150 theologians, ecumenists, and ecclesiastics from across many religious traditions for the purpose of exploring a fresh way of conceiving the ecumenical task appropriate for today's contemporary culture; this approach is referred to as 'Receptive Ecumenism'.

The essential principle is that the primary ecumenical responsibility of each faith tradition is not to ask 'What do the other traditions first need to learn from us?' but rather 'What do we need to learn from them in ways which can help us address difficulties in our own tradition?' The hypothesis is, if all religious traditions were asking this same question seriously and acting upon it, then all traditions would both move in ways that would deepen our authentic respective identities and draw each of us into a more intimate relationship.

The January 2006 colloquium tested this strategy in relation to the host tradition – Roman Catholicism. In the process of doing so, a need identified itself for a subsequent, much more practically focused and fully collaborative research project. The aim of this project would be to explore the relevance of this principle – the thinking behind Receptive Ecumenism to life 'on the ground' in the local churches of the northeast. The hope was that this would provide a model of good practice for ecclesiastical communities well beyond the northeast of England, for professional ecumenists, and for researchers working on ecumenism and ecclesiology.

Consequently, in October 2007, a regional comparative research project was launched in the northeast of England under the title 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church'. The project involved six representatives of the major denominational groups of the region working in full partnership with the staff of Durham University's Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University's Business School, and the former North of England Institute for Christian Education.

# **Project Outline**

## Participants and Research Teams

The basic plan for this research project was to undertake a comparative study of the workings of six participating denominational groups in the region:

- United Reformed Church, Northern Synod

- Salvation Army, Northern Division

- Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

- Northern Baptist Association

- Methodist District of Newcastle

- Methodist District of Darlington

- Anglican Diocese of Newcastle

- Anglican Diocese of Durham

The research was carried out by three research teams, each of which was comprised of, 1) key local practitioners and church personnel; 2) specialists in the fields of finance, management, and organisational studies from Durham University's Business School; and 3) theologians and sociologists/anthropologists of religion from Durham University's Department of Theology and Religion, local theological colleges, and the North of England Institute for Christian Education.

## Key Trajectories of Research

This project unfolded along three key trajectories of research, each with its own research team working in a coordinated, yet relatively distinct fashion, the results of which have been integrated into in this document. The trajectories are

1. *Governance and Finance*, which focused on the organisational cultures and systems of authority, accountability, strategic planning, and finance, operative in each tradition.

2. *Leadership and Ministry,* which focused on how practices of leadership are seen and utilised within each of these traditions.

3. *Learning and Formation,* which focused on how the respective cultures and identities of the churches are nurtured, transmitted, and shaped through the habits, practices, processes, and programs operative at various levels.

Together these trajectories explored the following questions:

- What are the organisational patterns reflected in the formation of church?

- How do those structures promote or impede Christian identity or certain styles of ministry?

- What are the positive and negative aspects of the various models in relation to formation?

# Phases of the Regional Project

The overall regional project was initially conceived in six broad phases:

## Phase I: Current Status of Participant Traditions

Phase I involved a detailed mapping of what, at least in theory, is happening in each of the participating traditions relevant to the three aforementioned trajectories (*Governance and Finance, Leadership and Ministry*, and *Learning and Formation*) at the congregational, intermediate, and regional levels of each denominational organisation.

Applying this phase to the three trajectories provides the following:

1. *Governance and Finance* maps out the organisational structures of the respective traditions as well as their finances and governance at the various institutional levels.

2. *Leadership and Ministry* maps out the various types and levels of ministerial and leadership roles, as well as the various routes to ministry as they pertain to different denominations.

3. *Learning and Formation* provides a general survey of extant learning experiences of lay church members that are broadly described as 'Adult Christian Education' and 'Education for Discipleship'.

Together this material provided the groundwork for subsequent phases by highlighting not only the forms involved and practices undertaken but also the issues including possible case-studies relative to denominations, which would allow for a more intensive study.

## Phase II: Testing and Identifying Respective Areas of Good Practice and Difficulties

Phase II moved from the level of theoretical self-description to the lived reality of church life with a view to, 1) testing how the respective theoretical descriptions work in practice, and 2) identifying respective areas of good practice and difficulties/dysfunctions. Each trajectory employed its own methodology:

1. *Governance and Finance* employed qualitative methods, through the use of formal structured interview questions. A detailed round of formal interviews (nearly 70) were undertaken with both ordained and lay members of participating denominations, and

across various levels of ecclesiastical institutions; i.e. congregations, regional structures and where applicable, the intermediate level (deaneries or circuits etc.).

2. *Leadership and Ministry* employed a questionnaire that yielded quantitative data. In turn, *Learning and Formation* (addressed in the following paragraph) employed a qualitative listening audit. Working in the vein of human resources, a questionnaire was devised detailing where and why leadership is or is not working to encourage the respective missions of the various ecclesiastical structures in each tradition.

3. *Learning and Formation* employed a series of over 30 'listening audits', whereby a researcher participated or sat in during a number of adult Christian learning groups (e.g. house, scripture, RCIA, or specially convened participants) of different congregations and traditions where willing members talked about their positive and negative experiences of adult Christian learning.

## Phase III: Ethnographic Case Studies Across Participating Denominations

Phase III pursued more detailed ethnographic case-studies that focused where possible on two congregations from each of the participant denominations. These case-studies were cross-trajectory, serving to bring these three areas into an integrated focus by examining common problems or concerns that both lay and ordained members of the congregations encountered.

## Phase IV: Identification and Analysis of Receptive Learning

Phase IV identified and analysed how fruitful receptive learning might, in practice, take place across the different traditions, whereby one tradition's particular difficulties might be helped by another tradition's strengths or gifts. The end result was the creation of a specific set of proposals for logical or complementary denominational groups to focus upon in the light of the overall hypothesis: 'if all religious traditions ask this same question seriously and act upon it, then all traditions will move in ways that will deepen our authentic respective identities and draw each of us into a more intimate relationship'.

## Phase V: Findings and Publications

Phase V was the dissemination of findings and development of project resources for the local traditions as well as the writing and dissemination of academic publications.

## Projected Ecclesial Outcomes

In addition to leading to significant fresh knowledge and deeper understanding in the fields of ecclesiology, ecumenism, practical theology, sociology and anthropology of religion, and organisational studies, ecclesially, the greater hope is that this project will

1. identify a range of well thought-through and tested practical proposals that will result in real receptive learning within the participant traditions, enabling each with integrity intact to live their respective callings and mission more fruitfully;

2. provide a thoroughly researched framework by which to assess the various traditions

and how they might most effectively work together;

3. lead to a much-needed and highly significant model of good practices by demonstrating a particular creative way of living the contemporary ecumenical challenge that can be offered to the wider church, both nationally and internationally.

## Governance and Finance Research Team

- Captain Ray Begley (Divisional Commander of the Salvation Army, Northern Division), as Analyst;

- Mrs. Jacqui Chapman (independent researcher), as Analyst;

- Rev. Dr. John Claydon (Regional Minister, Pastoral for the Northern Baptist Association, Chair of NECCT), as Analyst/Author;

- Rev. Dr. Neil Cockling (former Ecumenical Officer for the Newcastle District of the Methodist Church), as Analyst/Author;

- Rev. John Durell (former Clerk and Ecumenical Officer to the Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church), as Analyst/Author;

- Dr. Mathew Guest (Reader in the Sociology of Religion, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University), as Core Advisor (Methodology);

- Dr. Charlotte Hardman (former Senior Lecturer in the Anthropology of Religion, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University), as Core Advisor (Methodology);

- Rev. Prof. Peter Johnson (Professor Emeritus of Business Economics, Business School, Durham University), as Team Advisor (Finance);

- Prof. Geoff Moore (Professor of Business Ethics, Business School, Durham University), as Team Leader and Analyst/Author;

- Prof. Paul D. Murray (Professor of Systematic Theology, Department of Theology and Rleigion, Durham University, and Dean and Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies), as Project Director and Analyst/Author;

- Dr. Marcus Pound (Senior Lecturer in Catholic Theology, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, and Assistant Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies), as Co-ordinating Researcher and Analyst/Author;

- Mr. Gerry Rafferty (Chartered Public Finance Accountant, Treasurer of NECCT/CRC) as Analyst;

- Mrs. Kathleen Smith (Financial Secretary to the Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle), as Team Advisor;

- Rev. Paul Richardson (Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle), as Advisor;

- Capt. Russell Tucker (Salvation Army Corps Officer at Sherburn Hill, Durham), as Analyst.

## Leadership and Ministry Research Team

- Major Ray Begley (Divisional Director of Evangelism, Northern Division of the Salvation Army), as Analyst/Advisor;

- Dr. Jocelyn Bryan (Foundation Tutor and Acting Director, Wesley Study Centre, St John's College, Durham), as Analyst/Author;

- Rev. Canon Richard Bryant (Director of the Local Ordained Ministry and Reader Training Schemes for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle), as Analyst/Author;

- Rev. Dr. Stephen Cherry (Former Canon of the Anglican Cathedral, Durham, and Director of Ministry, Council for Ministry, Diocese of Durham), as Team Advisor;

- Dr. Mathew Guest (Reader in the Sociology of Religion, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University), as Core Advisor (Methodology);

- Dr. Charlotte Hardman (former Senior Lecturer in the Anthropology of Religion, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University), as Core Advisor (Methodology);

- Rev. Dr. Judy Hirst (Local Ministry Advisor, Diocese of Durham and Diocese of Newcastle), as Team Advisor;

- Prof. Paul D. Murray (Professor of Systematic Theology, Department of Theology and Rleigion, Durham University, and Dean and Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies), as Project Director and Analyst/Author;

- Dr. Marcus Pound (Senior Lecturer in Catholic Theology, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, and Assistant Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies), as Co-ordinating Researcher and Analyst/Author;

- Prof. Tom Redman (former Professor of Human Resource Management, Business School, Durham University), as Team Leader and Analyst/Author;

- Mr. Paul Southgate (Chief Officer of the Churches' Regional Commission in the North East), as Analyst/Advisor;

- Rev. Dr. Gavin Wakefield (former Programme Director for the MA in Theology and Ministry, Cranmer Hall, St. John's College, Durham), as Team Leader and Analyst/Author.

# Learning and Formation Research Team

- Prof. Rev. Jeff Astley (former Honorary Professor of Practical Theology, Durham University and Director of the North of England Institute for Christian Education), as Team Leader and Analyst/Author;

- Dr. Mathew Guest (Reader in the Sociology of Religion, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University), as Core Advisor (Methodology);

- Dr. Charlotte Hardman (former Senior Lecturer in the Anthropology of Religion, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University), as Core Advisor (Methodology);

- Mrs. Andrea Murray (Human Geographer and Ecumenical Officer for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle), as Analyst/Author/Advisor;

- Prof. Paul D. Murray (Professor of Systematic Theology, Department of Theology and Rleigion, Durham University, and Dean and Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies), as Project Director and Analyst/Author;

- Rev. Dr. David Peel (Education and Training Officer, United Reformed Church Northern Synod), as Analyst/Author;

- Dr. Marcus Pound (Senior Lecturer in Catholic Theology, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, and Assistant Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies), as Co-ordinating Researcher and Analyst/Author;

- Rev. Dr. Peter Robinson (Chair of the Theological Education and Initial Ministerial Training Task Group for the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle), as Team Advisor;

- Captain Russell Tucker (Northern Division of the Salvation Army), as Analyst/Advisor;

- Rev. Dr. Roger Walton (former Director of the Wesley Study Centre, St. John's College, Durham University), as Analyst/Author.

# Summary of Key Findings

The following section presents the key findings of the research in denominational order, along with the recommendations for receptive ecumenical learning.

## United Reformed Church – Northern Synod

### Recommendations

1. The introduction of specific programmes of education to foster outreach among congregations.

2. The establishment of a new class of lay leader(s) to treat specifically the context of Mission Partnerships.

3. Christian learning and formation must be employed in such a way as to better inform the overall strategic decision-making of the church, especially with regard to Elders Meetings.

4. A renewed understanding of Eldership that informs the United Reformed Church's identity and, thus, further contributes to a culture of support for Mission Partnerships.

### Ecumenical Reception

1. The United Reformed Church may want to learn from the team-ministry model used by both Anglicans and Methodists.

2. The United Reformed Church may want to adapt an entry-membership course like Alpha (Anglicans) or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, a.k.a. RCIA (Roman Catholics).

3. For more mature members and to boost lay participation, United Reformed Church may want to adapt a Methodist and Baptist Christian leadership and discipleship course.

4. The United Reformed Church may want to compare its mother and toddler group with Salvation Army's group.

5. The United Reformed Church should compare the synod's four-year plan with the Salvation Army's three-year review of mission in the local church.

6. The United Reformed Church may want to explore the mission and development of social programmes with the Assemblies of God and Methodists.

7. How can the Moderator's role more usefully take on more symbolic-personal significance?

# Salvation Army – Northern Division

## Recommendations

1. The development of translocal ministry across corps in the region and a rethinking of strategy for a collaborative social mission across the local corps.

2. The development of new leadership roles with a view to collaborative corps partnership. This might involve an increase of authority to a tentmaker soldier to relieve pressure on an officer, which thereby adopts the Joint Pastorate model from the United Reformed Church, a clustering model from the Roman Catholics, or a form of circuit ministry from the Methodists. There should be an encouragement of culture of the local officers. Regionally there should be a development of a women's ministry cohort that allows the sharing of ideas in a way that fosters mutual support and interaction (intra-relatedness) amidst the corps.

3. The development of formation in a way that is responsive to the need for changing patterns of corps life and strategic direction. Examples of this include:

   a) Developing formation within an intra-corps context or using a mission plan format that would encourage members to think both strategically and creatively about the types of mission their corps should or could be engaged in, or what alternative forms of worship they might adopt within the context of shared resources.

   b) Helping to consolidate members' efforts whilst offering varied expressions of Army identity in mission and worship. A 'permissive' approach to identity should be encouraged; however, such diverse expressions need to be underpinned by a collective sense of mission and outreach, including the deployment of resources.

   c) Establishing a role in the Corps Council for a 'rotating member' to be operative at a more localised level (working horizontally, for example) to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and resources within the Salvation Army.

   d) Offering regional training programs or opportunities for local officers.

   e) Using the annual regional event/retreat as opportunity for officers to commit to translocal ministry, train deaconates, and develop mission development plan(s).

## Ecumenical Reception

1. As ecclesiastical traditions decline, congregations are led to become more dependent on each other in a more localised sense. For example, the dismantling of the district level within the United Reform Church with a view to partnerships created around mission, provides an excellent case-study in the challenges that may present

themselves in intra-Corps relations. Questions the salvation Army may wish to consider more generally in this regard are

- How is the authority of the minister exercised in church negotiations?

- How might the eventual outcome of the United Reformed Church, with churches forming pastorates, inform models for relations that balance the need of diverse congregational styles within the rationalisation of mission?

2. Similarly, what can the Salvation Army learn from the Catholic experience of clusters, which were created as a direct response to the decline in priests and the need to rationalise worship? This has been felt very strongly at parish level. The sacramental dimension to worship is a challenge to the Salvation Army, yet as worship centres become rationalised within the Salvation Army worship may also become more charged with ritual significance.

3. William Booth had his roots in Methodism. So one must ask: does the structure of circuit ministry now offer something back to the Salvation Army as a model for oversight within the intra-corps relations at this historical juncture for the survival of corps?

4. In linking mission with a worship base, the Assembly of God (initially represented in the study), a Pentecostal grouping, has some highly motivated social mission projects linked to worship centres. For example, the regeneration of an old school in the northeast into a social centre with a mixed economy of practices (Osteopaths, Sure Start), linked through the building to charismatic forms of music and worship. How then might the Salvation Army assess the place of worship, music, and social mission with regard to the Pentecostal experience?

5. In thinking about mission, much of the emphasis on innovative expressions of church life is centred on mission to the young. Such a move rightfully counters an increasingly ageing church population. Yet, arguably, old-age is the growing part of the population. How much of the mission focuses on the old? And if not, what could the Salvation Army learn from programs found in other denominations, specifically in this particular mission field?

6. In thinking about diverse ministries, to what extent do the seven years training of ordination preclude older members becoming Officers? And can this be negotiated through the development of auxiliary offers? In thinking about auxiliary officers, what can be learned from the rise of the deaconate within the ecumenical context?

7. The Church of England has found success with Fresh Expressions. How can innovative Anglican expressions of church inform the continued questioning of a Corps Identity?

# The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

## Recommendations

1. The restoration of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, which builds presbyteral and lay consultation into a single constitutional body.

2. All parishes should have Parish Pastoral Councils.

3. Pastoral Area Councils need to overlap with cluster meetings.

4. The development of governance roles for the laity in the life of their local church and parish church. In particular, as more and more parishes are clustered or amalgamated in the absence of a priest, deaconship becomes an increasingly valued leadership role for communities. Married men should continue to be encouraged into the role, along with women.

5. Explore the possibility of married priesthood and alternative models of priesthood (e.g. local ordained ministry, part-time and non-stipendiary ministry?)

## Ecumenical Reception

1. What does it mean to share as laity in the threefold ministry through baptism? Baptism is something we all share, but do other denomination's interpretations differ and how might that impact upon lay participation? Here the Catholic Diocese has much to learn from the Methodists and United Reformed Church. The question to explore is this: how do the different theological understandings of baptism that Methodists and United Reformed Church carry facilitate/foster lay participation in the church?

   The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that:

   > it is the Church that believes first, and so bears, nourishes, and sustains my faith… It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism. (§168)

   In contrast, while Methodists nonetheless profess the faith of the universal Church, the emphasis is put primarily on the personal decision of the believer in Jesus Christ. The point is <u>not</u> that the Catholic Church repudiates the emphasis on the individual's faith *qua* the church, but rather to note the difference of where Methodists place emphasis and the way that such emphasis is reflected in high levels of engaged membership.

2. What can other denominations teach us from a practical standpoint, about structures to implement lay participation at both the regional and parish level? To take the former, why not address the implementation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council within the existing Council of Laity? Here useful learning could be had from the Methodist Church synod which allows for a routine process of memorials, which invoke concise

discussion and voting that thereby provide raw data for informed consultation. This would make good on what Pope Francis calls 'synodality,'[1] which cannot only apply to episcopal collegiality, but to the whole people at all levels: parish, local church, and Universal church. In other words, in developing both a Diocesan Pastoral Council or the existing Council of Laity, how might a greater sense of 'synodality' be developed within their statutes or practices? To take the latter, the Anglican church has a long tradition of parochial parish councils. One could imagine a cross-fertilisation of practice by inviting Anglicans to such councils, giving an entirely novel twist to shared local ministry and the beginnings of a shared practice for governance.

3. The Anglican experience of Team Ministry (i.e. a formal collaborative ministry established to serve a particular benefice that may include more than one parish) offers an example of the type of ministry which is suited to clusters. Team ministry should extend to the role of the laity and their active contribution in the sharing of worship resources etc. in a bid to win back the sense of spiritual creativity in the life of the worship. It is noted, however, that training provisions are already offered through the Diocese, although the channels continue to function primarily at deanery/diocesan level.

4. One feature of Methodist and Anglican ecclesiology shared by the Catholic Church is the role of the permanent diaconate. The difference pertains to the ordination of women to the role of deaconess. What can the Diocese learn from the experiences of both men and women in these positions with a view to the further development of the permanent diaconate that includes both men and women within the Diocese (not withstanding that permission would need to be sought from Rome)?

---

[1] Address of His Holiness Pope Francsis on the occasion of the Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall, 17 Oct. 2015

# Northern Baptist Association

## Recommendations

1. Baptist churches would benefit from fostering greater interdependency through the cultivation of Translocal Ministry. This could help balance out the dangers of isolationism, which congregational ecclesiology can foster. This recommendation is not simply a matter of expediency in the light of church attendance and provisions—although, the need to finance mission and ministers remains a challenge to isolated congregations. Rather, the aim is to foster the effective collaboration to which many individual Baptists aspire and the Assembly formally recognises, thus affirming the 'interdependence of congregations'.[2] Practically speaking this should include:

   - The development of joint pastorates that would also enable a shared strategic platform for mission and discipleship, whilst remaining sensitive to the inward bonds of trust found in local churches and providing the opportunity to widen the mission understanding.

   - A joint ecumenical day on 'Shared Churches' could be organised with a view to the differing denominational experiences of shared ministry to facilitate the cultural shift and provide tools to develop local programs of discipleship with that in mind.

   - Where the Regional Assembly is perceived to operate according to a consultative model, as identified by our interviewees, a deliberative model would encourage participation in the Assembly with a view to the independent churches. The various practices of the United Reformed Church and Methodist Synod commend themselves in this regard.

2. The regional development of translocal ministry. By way of incentivising translocal ministry, churches in receipt of a Home Mission Grant could be formally asked to consider shared ministry as condition of receipt. The cultural shift from a church and its ministers to shared ministry and church grouping has also been marked in the Catholic tradition through clustering. Reflection on the experience of Roman Catholic clustering from the perspective of the laity could facilitate the cultural shift within the Northern Baptist Association.

3. A number of questions should be posed regarding the role of elders and deacons answering them in tandem with ecumenical partners (formal or otherwise), such as:

---

[2] Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), 'The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain,' 1994, available at
http://www.baptist.org.uk/search.html?searchword=nature&searchphrase=all&start=20.

- How do elders think about 'locality' or 'place' especially within a postmodern context?

- Do elders think of their congregations or wider contexts?

- How does eldership function when congregations move to being one church in different buildings?

- How would elders learn to identify within groups of churches?

- What does a 'culture' of eldership suggest to you?

4. The aim is to increase the importance of deaconship within a translocal economy, rooted in a covenant ecclesiology:

- For example, notwithstanding any legal status afforded to a minister by statute, the church recognises that the minister and the church are in a relationship based on Christian love, trust, and mutual accountability.

- A minister shall be, in the first instance, in a relationship of mutual accountability with deacons, elders (if any), and also with the church meeting.

- If a theology of covenant is to be developed translocally, then one should readdress the provisions for understanding the above.

5. Adequate provision for training must be established in support of the above and more generally, in terms of discipleship. Many churches operate small groups, with Bible study at their heart, approached through a range of other issues such as a discussion about prayer, symbols and sacraments, or about other faiths. In some instances, groups emerge from a desire on the part of the lay people to meet and study – or reflect together. In others, groups are seen as an integral part of the church's life. How then can the culture of discipleship be cultivated through Eldership?

## Ecumenical Reception

1. In the first instance, the interdependency of Methodism lends itself to thinking through Baptist issues to the extent that presbyter and minister undertake roles beyond the confines of their local congregation. The connexional principle is manifest in churches being grouped into circuits with circuit superintendents who, in principle, exercise oversight, foster vision, and encourage collaboration in the light of the Methodist connexion. The General Secretary of the Methodist Conference, Martyn Atkins has argued that 'It is crucial to realise afresh that our commitment to connexionalism is primarily a spiritual commitment before it is a descriptor of our

structures'.[3] In other words, one way to understand the spiritual connexion is through a wider appreciation of precisely what it means to be a covenant church and vice-versa.

2. Initial suggestions regarding translocal ministry as a means to foster interdependency grew out of reflection on the Methodist connexion to the extent that presbyters and ministers undertake roles beyond the confines of their local congregation. While the structure of Methodism and its financial underpinnings do not commend themselves to Baptist structures or ecclesiology, there are possible lessons to be learned from the United Reformed Church, which has dismantled its middle tier, formally called 'the district', in favour of more informal partnerships with a view to resourcing mission through 'mission partnerships'. Subsequently, this evolved into pastorates, or groups of churches, usually two 'joint pastorates'. Pastorates are predicated on a formal statement of intent that governs the way in which independent churches relate to one another, with special reference to the sharing of ordained ministry. In contrast to Methodist circuits, which are standardised across the connexion, pastorates may be drawn up between churches. Thus, churches can retain their own identity along with elders and the local church meeting, although decisions relating to calling a minister are undertaken jointly. In short, pastorates enable a shared strategic platform for mission and discipleship, while remaining sensitive to the inward bonds of trust found in local churches and structures of congregational decision-making.

3. When posed ecumenically, the question can be asked: ecclesiologically, what can the Northern Baptist Association learn from the other traditions in regard to their theology of elders and deacons? For example, what can the Baptist tradition learn from the Presbyterian element of the United Reformed Church, which gives theological consideration to the place of eldership? These questions may best be posed in terms of an ecumenical study day.

---

[3] Martyn Atkins, 'Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission,' *The General Secretary's Report to the Methodist Conference*, 2011, http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/intra-contemporary-methodism-280611.pdf.

# The Methodist Districts of Newcastle and Darlington

## Recommendations

1. Develop programs of formation to allow for the strengths of congregational formation (i.e. close ties of friendship in Christ) while remaining attentive to wider circuit-level concerns, both practical (e.g. resourcing for mission) and theological (e.g. enacting the body of Christ) in ways which drive home the ecclesial significance of Methodism's unique contribution to the ecumenical scene: the connexion.

2. Reassess the role of the circuit superintendent with an emphasis on the theological nature of oversight. This would help impress upon local congregations the theological value of the connexion through his or her representative ministry.

3. Assess how superintendents can work more proactively rather than reactively to the current forces of circuit rationalisation. This might include, for example, developing the theological understanding of oversight to include a prophetic role alongside the priestly and kingly aspects of oversight.

4. Encourage superintendents to identify the charisms in the congregations to promote the connexional principle.

5. Encourage stewards to consider the 'culture' of their officership in both socio-practical and theological terms.

## Ecumenical Reception

1. One way to recover connexionalism is to re-evaluate the role of the superintendent qua representative of connexionalism, i.e. recovering a representative ministry for the superintendent. This is not to suggest a form of ordination akin to bishops, but to suggest that the roles embodied in the episcopal tradition have much to offer in securing the unity of Methodist Church. This is not to suggest a hierarchical understanding of episcopacy – resisted in Methodist ecclesiology – but to ask how the spiritual function of episcopacy, i.e. the 'unity' of the Body of Christ it represents, can be 'repeated' within Methodist ecclesiology.

   For example, strengthening the role of sacramental oversight given the Superintendent (e.g. presiding at local services more often) would strengthen the representative ministry of connexional unity. This might mean strengthening the pneumatological basis of ministry rather than apostolic hierarchy – an entirely different way of the framing the problem to that of the spiritual connexion verses the practical function of the connexion. The practical function requires the former. In this, the Methodist can receive much from the Anglican Church. To put the matter more particularly, given the strategic drive on the part of the Anglican Diocese of Durham to strengthen the role of the Deanery, what might the Methodists learn from the Anglicans in this regard?

2. How might a more robustly sacramental vocation to the ministry be fostered for superintendents? Superintendents preside over the ministries of Word and Sacrament, including worship and doctrine, and exercise a personal episcope following Christ's servant ministry: priest, prophet, and King – the threefold spiritual powers. How might superintendence in the UK Methodist tradition be developed ecumenically in light of Catholic and Anglican understandings of episcopacy?

# The Anglican Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle

## Recommendations

1. The Dioceses should explore the extent to which the four official locations of governance at diocesan level (bishop, diocesan synod, bishop's council, and the diocesan board of finance) enable a clear strategy to be articulated and its implementation enabled with a view to embedding local parishes in a shared strategy.
2. Given the increasing independent expressions of church and the already ecumenical makeup of its learning and formation, a sense of Anglican identity needs to be fostered in ways that speak to the unity of its regional (diocesan church), intermediate (deanery), and local (parish) context. If, as the study suggests, formation is principally about fostering trusting relations within churches, then formation also needs to take on a regional expression *qua* mission and speak to Anglian identity in that respect.
3. The Anglicans have already developed a wealth of ministerial opportunities, lay and ordained alike (e.g. non-stipendiary ministry, reader ministry), yet Freehold, or its legal successors, and the legalities associated with parish reorganisation make rapid redeployment of clergy and pastoral reorganisation more difficult to achieve. There are both personal and structural rigidities – individuals, particularly clergy, but also parishes, which may choose not to participate in the diocesan strategy or who resist change. Anglicans should address the difficulties in encouraging parishes to cooperate and collaborate in the light of their traditional independence.
4. The diocese should explore further the enhancement of the deaneries as a key part of the organisational strategy. The existing shift to making deaneries the key site of financial administration should develop a sense of shared support in the work of individual churches within deaneries. In particular, deaneries need to foster:
   a. a shared ecclesial understanding, to develop patterns for formation alongside its mission which is also to the future of the Church;
   b. the role of the Area Dean and deanery ministries. Area Deans are more than an administrative post; when working well they serve as a sign of the Church's unity at deanery level enabling imaginative and embedded deanery wide roles to share and share *in* the Church's ministry and strategy.

## Ecumenical Reception

1. Central to the governance of the diocese is the synod, but its practice is inscribed in such a way that, as suggested by one interviewee, it can descend into parliamentarianism and fail to express the unity of the Anglican Church. The Anglicans can learn from Catholic practices of synodality where the emphasis is on time-consuming and patient deliberation on key issues, leading to consensus between clergy and laity. This of course relies on structures to facilitate such a space, and the issue is not restricted to the diocesan synod. Deaneries need to develop the existing structures in ways that facilitate catholic synodality, seeking a unified mind within local contexts, as shifting organisational changes are impressed upon communities.

2. Central to the development of the Dioceses is the need for a stronger middle tier of governance (the deanery) and the concomitant role of the Area or Rural Dean. In this regard, Anglicans can learn much from the patterns of Methodist circuit life and the role of the superintendents. Methodist ministers have a long tradition of operating within a circuit whilst nonetheless maintaining pastoral charge with a particular congregation or congregations in ways that anticipate the situation that Anglican governance must take account of (e.g. one priest serving a number of parishes/benefices).

3. Anglicans can learn from all the denominations about parish re-organisation and with an increased eye to the significance of the middle tier of governance (deaneries, circuits, or clusters). In the event that Deaneries become a site of increased focus, both administratively and pastorally in the exercise of mission, how might notions of Catholic subsidiarity inform restructuring?

4. Anglicanism can learn also from the Methodist exercises of oversight or personal episcope, where the emphasis lies not in the formal notion of the office as such, but its broader ministerial significance in personal, collegial, and communal relations. How for example might Methodist oversight inform the understanding of the dean and the role of key laity?

# The United Reformed Church – Northern Synod

*Marcus Pound, John Durrel, Helen Savage (Learning and Formation), Tom Redman (Leadership and Ministry)*

## Phase I: Mapping the Tradition

### Introduction

The United Reformed Church is a relatively new denomination, coming into being in 1972 as the result of a union between the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England – the first church union between churches of different traditions in Britain since the Reformation. However, its roots, Congregational and Presbyterian, belong to the English non-conformist traditions and the influence of the sixteenth-century Reformation, specifically those who held in common a positive evaluation of the work of John Calvin of Geneva. The fundamental ecclesiological experience remains that of the local congregation, where ministers of Word and sacraments share with elders in a ministry of leadership and pastoral nurture, as well as the decision-making processes of the wider councils of the Church.

The Northern Synod covers the regional area of the northeast of England[4] and represents 0.1% of the population, with about 815 regular attendees.[5] Like many of the churches in the study, the United Reformed Church has witnessed a decline in average congregation size. In a five-year period from 2005-2010, a drop of 13% is recorded. This, however, is slightly lower than the national average which records a drop of 17% in the same period. However, it should be noted that in the preceding five-year period, the national decline was only 11%. In other words, given a ten year period (2000-2010), the national rate of decline appears to be increasing.[6]

### Ecclesiology

The United Reformed Church is reformed, but it is also 'united'. Following the initial unification of English and Welsh Presbyterian and Congregationalists, it has continued to create unions with the Church of Christ and the Scottish Congregationalists; both movements with quite a different history having grown out of the 18th century evangelical movement. Moreover, the United Reformed Church belongs to the loosely structured World Communion of Reformed Churches, which claims to be a fellowship of 80 million Reformed Christians across 108 countries.[7]

---

[4] The area also includes a small part of North Yorkshire.
[5] *United Reformed Church Yearbook 2011* (Clearway Logistics Phase 1a, 2011).
[6] Ibid.
[7] 'World Communion of Reformed Churches', 2015, http://wcrc.ch.

Being a united church, the United Reformed Church is an ecumenical church. The United Reformed Church therefore strives for the historical manifestation of the essential unity of the Church. By 'Church' then, the United Reformed Church means 'the universal church of Jesus Christ, regardless of a particular time;' i.e. catholic because 'Christ calls into it, all peoples and because it proclaims the fullness of Christ's Gospel to the whole world'.[8]

Faith and Order in the United Reformed Church are understood according to the 'Basis of Union'. Whilst this is not quite a systematic theology, it nevertheless outlines what the United Reformed Church believes the Church to be.[9] It maintains the belief in the Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has redeemed humankind, reconciled the world to himself, and who calls the church into being, empowering it for continued witness.[10] Because God is continually and actively engaged in the world, the Church is only ever the Church in via.

All of this presents a key challenge to the United Reformed Church: to find a role and identity as a united and ecumenical church, as well as a reformed church. The task, as Robert Pope suggests, is:

> To enable flexibility in its structures and its forms in order to equip its members to live not merely in agreement with certain beliefs and practices but to remain together even in the midst of disagreement over their implications and implementation. Without this commitment to be together under God's providence (known in early Dissent through the notion of Covenant) it becomes impossible for the Church to fulfil its mission.[11]

## *Leadership and Ministry*

According to John Calvin, 'the church exists visibly when the scriptures are purely preached and heard and where the sacraments are administered "according to Christ's institution."'[12] In other words, church order is a gospel ordinance and it is this need which gives rise to the orders of ministry. Order does not simply mean good management but relates to the order of salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ and in his Church. Hence ministry is of the *esse* ('being' or essence) of the Church; thus, one cannot exist without the other.

Nevertheless, the shape of ministry is liable to change, according to context and the well-being (bene *esse*) of the Church. For example, the abandonment of the three-fold order of bishop, presbyter, and deacon by the Reformers during the sixteenth century. This is because, 1) no explicit and eternal form can be discerned in the New Testament, ministry is both a theological and practical matter; and 2) the dynamic relationship between God and God's people means that 'light and truth' are available in each generation; hence, the form of ministry is open to change.

---

[8] United Reformed Church, 'Basis of Union', §A3.

[9] Robert Pope, 'Our Life Together: The United Reformed Church's Basis of Union'. www.urc.org.uk

[10] United Reformed Church, 'Basis of Union', §A12 & §A1

[11] Robert Pope, 'Our Life Together: The United Reformed Church's Basis of Union'.

[12] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559), I:IV:8*, vol. II (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1023. Quoted in Robert Pope, 'Our Life Together: The United Reformed Church's Basis of Union'.

Ministry belongs to all the people who are called into a life of discipleship, witness, and service. However, in order to assist in continuing Christ's ministry, there exist certain ministries which are duly recognized by the United Reformed Church, mainly through ordination but also through commissioning.

Ministers of Word and sacraments are called by God, trained and ordained by the church in order to 'conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world'.[13] However, it is important to note that an ordained minister of Word and sacrament presides at the sacrament, not because ordination endows the minister with special gifts or personality, but precisely because of the need for order within the church.

Ministers serve in a stipendiary or non-stipendiary capacity and may work as one minister of Word and Sacrament alongside the elders or in a team with other stipendiary or non-stipendiary colleagues. A team may also involve church-related community workers, and it may be ecumenical. Moreover, local church ministry is exercised in a single church, with joint or group pastorates.

By the time of the Union in 1972, most Presbyterian churches had deacons who were responsible for matters of stewardship and elders who were responsible for spiritual leadership, while in most Congregational churches, the deacons performed a function similar to Presbyterian elders. Following the union of the two churches, the functions of the two orders were elided into one order, agreeing on the term 'elder', although in practice many churches continue to have a separate group responsible for basic matters of property and finance. Those called to serve in this way were ordained, albeit practised differently from that of the minister of Word and Sacraments. Elders are elected by the church meeting and are able to advise and make recommendations to that meeting. However, the Elder is not simply a consultant, but rather responsible for pastoral, spiritual, and missionary leadership in the local church.

The reduction in the number of ministers of Word and Sacraments has prompted the United Reformed Church to consider the imaginative and flexible deployment of ministers. This has led to the development of special category ministries, which allow ministers the freedom to work, often ecumenically, on the boundaries of traditional church life and in pioneering settings such as chaplaincy in industry, hospitals, universities and colleges, and in special projects (§K7).

Further to this, 'The Basis of the Union' recognises two non-ordained ministries: the ministry of lay preachers and church-related community workers (CRCW). Lay preachers are commissioned, not ordained, and generally identified by local reputation, as well as given authorised training courses and Assembly accreditation. Lay preaching is a way of demonstrating that ministry is the work of the whole people of God. The aim of CRCW is to make connections with secular groups and organisations and, through working in partnership with the community, continue Christ's ministry through service rather than through proclamation. Their focus, according to 'The Basis of Union', is to act as a link between the

---

[13] United Reformed Church, 'Basis of Union', §A21

church and the community, drawing the one into a full and fruitful relationship with the other (§A22). The CRCW has no formal role or responsibility for worship, which is one point that links the other three particular ministries of minister, elder, and lay preacher.

Within the context of ministry, there are three models of non-stipendiary ministry:

- Model I - service in a congregation as part of a team. The pattern is taken from the former eldership of the Churches of Christ and is limited in scope and local in nature.

- Model II - pastoral charge of a small congregation or service as part of a team of ministers caring for a group of churches.

- Model III - ministers in secular employment. Service set apart to be a focus for mission in the place of work or leisure. It is related to a local church or district council.

## *Governance and Structure*

Oversight in the United Reformed Church is conciliar, exercised through the appropriate council, be it the General Assembly, regional assembly/synod, or a church or elder's meeting. In other words, formally speaking, there is no personal episcopacy. The central and regional body of the Northern Synod is the Synod itself, presiding over which is the moderator; a microcosm of what happens at national level. The position of moderator, be it regional or three nations, is that of a chair who formally constitutes the relevant assembly. In this sense, the moderator is understood to be formally equal, yet seen as an authority of special importance by their peers; a point encapsulated in the very function of the term moderator. The moderator is only addressed as such within the function of synod, thus showing deference to the authority of the conciliar council rather than the individual.

In other words, there is no personal episcopacy. Hence for the United Reformed Church Word and Sacrament do not depend on any prior hierarchical authority. Rather ministry gains its authority from Word and Sacrament. So, while there is no apostolic succession, as such, there is a sense in which succession is found in the 'whole fellowship of the church' and only 'secondarily in the ministry'.[14] The moderator is assisted by other officers, including the synod clerk and synod treasurer. Members of synod include active ministers, lay representatives of each congregation, and a small number of co-opted members and members of other denominations who have full voting rights as members of synod. The work of the synod is serviced professionally by an office. Currently, and for most of the period under study, there were three staff members. At the time of writing the only resource person was the ecumenical officer, the other posts having finished with new posts now in the process of being set-up.

---

[14] David Peel, *Reforming Theology: Explorations in the Theological Traditions of the United Reformed Church* (London: United Reformed Church, 2002), p. 261.

The Synod normally meets twice a year. Beyond that, its work is carried out through committees, groups and working parties, which depend on the commitment and skills of ministers in pastorates and lay volunteers. These include:

- Mission Executive had recently been reconstituted to service the synod between meetings for the oversight of mission, and to act on behalf of the Synod where required. Chaired by the moderator, its membership is deliberately kept small and consists mainly of elected individuals.

- Finance and Property is one of the larger synod committees – now subsumed into the Trust, with representation sought from each mission partnership (MP) to ensure balance, and drawing on other individuals with financial and other expertise. The convenor and the synod treasurer are volunteers appointed by synod for fixed periods. Increasingly the committee recognises the need to work closely with the Pastoral Representatives' Committee: e.g. when a church looks for grants and loans for development of its premises, the committee wants to know whether a strategy for mission and growth is in place before taking a decision. The moderator and clerk are each members of both committees and aim to ensure such communication takes place. The committee sets up working parties and sub-groups as required; e.g. Synod office reviews and oversees the annual process of negotiating local church assessments.

- The Trust (The United Reformed Church Northern Province Trust) effectively shadows the Finance and Property Committee. It is chaired by the moderator and comprised of about ten directors. The trust officer is an employee of Synod that concentrates on Trust and legal matters. In practical terms, the Trust carries out the wishes of Synod, often expressed through its Finance and Property Committee. It has the power in principle to overturn a Synod decision. This anomaly, to what is otherwise a conciliar arraignment, arises from shifts in charity law and the legal status of trustees. The directors also appoint from their number a small Investments Sub-Committee.

- The Pastoral Representatives' Committee is the other large synod committee, chaired by the moderator, and currently seeking one lay and one ordained representative from each mission partnership. It is responsible for matters relating to the call and deployment of ministers and moderation for the oversight of local churches, undertaken through a programme of visitations. However, this is now moving towards a new pattern of church-life appraisal that is undertaken alongside ministers' accompanied self-appraisals. Following the suspension of district councils, the committee was occupied with drawing up new procedures. Now that this particular piece of work has been completed, much of its agenda consists of rubber-stamping decisions already made by its Designated Group (the pastoral group); the question of its membership and style of meeting remains to be seen.

- The Pastoral Group is the current name of the Designated Group, which is a subgroup of Pastoral Representatives' Committee and was set up to help the

moderator in matters of pastoral urgency or sensitivity. It developed into a small group, elected by Synod, to carry out the day-by-day business formerly undertaken by district pastoral committees. The nature of this business, relating to deployment of ministry and the life of local churches, means that there is a strong strategic element to the agenda, ideally with a focus on mission.

- The Ministries and Training Committee is responsible for overseeing the candidate process for those who discern and undertake the ministries of Word and Sacrament or church related community worker, as well as supporting those candidates during their training, as well as finding appropriate placements within the Synod. The committee also supports the education and training officer with his or her work with ministers (education for ministry 2 & 3 programmes) and lay people, and is the body that immediately relates to the regional training partnership. The committee includes the lay preaching commissioner, who is responsible for support and encouragement of lay preachers and worship leaders throughout the synod.

- The Ecumenical Group is responsible for developing and implementing ecumenical strategy within the synod area. The committee supports the ecumenical officer, a half-time lay post, in servicing Local Education Partnerships and playing a full part in the North East Christian Churches Together (NECCT)[15] team of ecumenical officers. In 2007, 16 of our 86 churches were part of single congregation LEPs – but many more are in other forms of partnerships (e.g. local covenants, sharing agreements, shared ministry arrangements) and are developing new ecumenical relationships.

- The World Church Group is responsible for particular Synod links with overseas churches, including our partnership relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique, as well as encouraging any such local church links.

- The Children and Youth Group is responsible for developing and supporting work with children throughout the Synod, and developing and supporting work with young people more generally throughout the Synod. The group traditionally supports the post of Children and Youth Officer.

- The Youth Action Group is responsible for developing and supporting work with young people throughout the Synod.

- The Church and Society Group is responsible for a broad agenda of social issues, which it may bring to the attention of churches and Synod in any appropriate way. Its remit includes Commitment for Life (the United Reformed Church programme that supports Christian Aid and thinking and action on wider development issues), and its membership includes the Interfaith Relations Advisor and the two Synod Rural Consultants.

---

[15] North East Christian Churches Together, now replaced by NECAT, North East Churches Acting Together.

- The Listed Buildings Advisory Committee carries out its legal obligations when changes are sought to any of its listed buildings (twenty of the churches are listed Grade II and two are listed at Grade II*).

## *The Congregation*

The basic unit of the Northern Synod is the congregation. These are brought together in small groups under mission partnerships, exercised through a leadership team. The churches meet regionally through the regional Synod. In 2010, there were about 79; although over the last decade, the Synod has seen about two churches a year close.[16]

Governance of the congregational church is exercised through the two councils of church meeting and elders' meeting, both of which are normally chaired by the minister. The church meeting consists of all the members of the local church, gathered together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Reception into membership or confirmation involves the individual in making a confession of faith, which leads to a declaration of their membership of the Church of Jesus Christ and of the local congregation: there is no concept of confirmation without committed membership to the local church. Church members make up the voting constituency of the church meeting.

The church meeting should be held at least four times a year – but some churches may hold meetings on a nearly monthly basis – and is responsible for major decisions in the local congregation, even if frequently, the elders' meeting will have carried out preliminary work and made clear recommendations. Church meeting is the body that issues a call to minister (a call that requires synod concurrence) and that elects elders to office.

Elders are chosen by church meeting, and are ordained within the local congregation while still remaining 'lay people'. The elders meeting and the minister together exercise spiritual leadership within the congregation; and, in effect, the elders act as managing trustees. In most of the synod's congregations, elders are elected to serve for a fixed-term but after or between periods of service, they remain non-serving elders. Other groups may be set up, often including but not exclusively consisting of elders, with particular responsibility: e.g. finance and property (often called managers), pastoral visitors, etc. These will be seen to have authority derived from the elders or churchmeeting, who may formally charge them to act on their behalf.

That the relationship between the church meeting and the elder's meeting is unclear and is one of the worst kept secrets of the United Reformed Church. The centrality of the church meeting and the ministry of elders were reckoned to be among the most significant gifts brought by Congregationalists and Presbyterians to the union in 1972, and it would have been impossible to give precedence to the one over the other. For this reason, there is still a variety of practice in the churches. In some, elders effectively prepare an agenda for a church meeting, which makes final decisions; while in others, elders will function as an executive and seek confirmation from the church meeting of decisions already taken.

---

[16] 'The Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church,' accessed May 4, 2014, http://www.urc-northernsynod.org/synod/dtl_intro.htm.

Further to this are local ecumenical partnerships. As already noted, some 16 of the local congregations (2007) consist of single congregation local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs). It is required of LEPs that a separate roll be kept of members of each participating denomination, together with a roll of joint members. In some cases, joint members are only those who have been confirmed jointly, but where Methodist/United Reformed Church LEPs have so chosen, it is possible for members of one tradition to become full members of the other – hence all might be joint members. Most LEPs require some kind of church meeting open to the whole membership to operate, though usually the smaller Ecumenical Church council (or similar) will be seen to be the more significant body. The United Reformed Church also asks that within LEPs, a ministry comparable with that of elders be exercised within the congregation.

## *Finance*

Overall The Northern Synod employs some 40 ministers (including 8 Methodist/Anglican minsters; 4 P/T; 1 retired; 3 P/T)[17] and exercises a pastoral ministry within the churches of the Synod, alongside 664 elders. In addition, there are 3 ministers in synod posts, 4 chaplains, and 2 lay community workers.[18] In total, there are 30 ministers (whole/part-time) who are stipendiary. There are two stipendiary posts in synod, F/T, and a stipendiary hospital chaplain.

Finance of the Synods has undergone a major restructuring over the course of the research. Finances were previously held by the districts. This was a formal intermediary layer of governance between Synod and the congregational church: Synod was made up of a collection of districts, which ministered, both financially and pastorally to the local churches within its geographical grouping. Now, finances are held centrally and governed by the Trust. So whereas in 2006 the total income represented only 55% of the total expenditure. In 2010 the synod managed a surplus (equivalent to roughly a quarter of their total income).[19]

The problem arises, however, because 60% of their total income in 2010 was derived from the sale of property, which is not an action likely to be repeated regularly. Investment gains and voluntary contributions follow a more generalised pattern of economic downturn. However, the Trust has sizable assets and ready reserves, if finite. In the short-term, things are looking healthy, but a continued downturn coupled with finite resources and pension concerns would build up problems for the future.

Because the Trust's chief income expenditure is on charitable activities, the question is, how these are committed in advance of receipt of funds, and how far the Trust would adjust their charitable activities to meet their income?

---

[17] There are a number of Methodist ministers who are members of the Synod because they minister in the SE Northumberland Ecumenical Area (SENEA). However, most of these do not minister in the churches or LEPs and so do not really count as ministers in pastoral charge.
[18] Figure representative of 2007.
[19] The United Reformed Church – Northern Province, 'Annual Reports and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st December 2006'; 'The United Reformed Church – Northern Province, Annual Reports and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st December 2010'.

## Learning and Formation

The United Reformed Church has a strong heritage of educational provision that was rooted in the local community, led by lay people and often pitched at a high level. Yet, like many Christian traditions, the United Reformed Church has experienced difficulties over recent years in attracting people to adult education programmes unless they are related to specific tasks and ministries. There are, however, exceptions to this general rule. For example, the very good response that was experienced when reading groups were set up, centred on a particular text that is accessible. As elsewhere, people were looking for something that was not too academic, or too directly and explicitly about Christian communication. David Peel refers to this as a form of 'education by stealth'. Reference was made in discussion to a particular text that needed a 'study guide' before it was successfully taken up.

Some within the United Reformed Church are wary of 'formation' language, fearing that it may be interpreted as an excuse for socialisation into familiar practices and ways of thinking. It is argued that a more critically reflective form of adult Christian education is needed for the apologetic and dialogical tasks facing the church today. In many ways, those who work with today's children may be better equipped to cope with a questioning secular world.

Training courses for those engaged in children's work have shown the advantage, both of a practical and immediate application of their adult learning, and also of widening the scope of Christian learning beyond the spoken or written word, to embrace auditory, visual, and tactile experiences, artistic expression, and theological play.

While the sermon used to be the main medium of adult Christian education in the United Reformed Church, as elsewhere, since the 1960s, it has tended to be reduced in length and less well prepared. In assessing their priorities, ministers today tend to rank preaching and teaching below their pastoral and managerial tasks, despite the fact that ministers are still invited to preach before a congregation before it decides whether to issue a call. This is called 'Preaching with a View' – to becoming the Minister.

## Training for Learning and Serving

Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) is an United Reformed Church adult education programme that includes national input through written material and tutors on weekend courses, but is taken by local groups of students working with a tutor and aided by a local 'support network'.

The two-year (ten units) foundation course called 'Enriching Faith' is open access and covers topics such as 'exploring spirituality', 'prophetic church', and 'where is wisdom' through biblical and thematic study. Other courses build on this Foundation Course with more service-oriented courses such as 'Gateways into Worship', 'Gateways into Care' and 'Developing Community Experience'. It teaches students who are seeking accreditation as lay preachers, or for other ministries, alongside those who are seeking only to enrich their Christian understanding and service.

David Peel speaks highly of the motivation of students on the programme, and reports their high level of satisfaction with the courses. Is this another possible case-study example, perhaps in concert with a study of the Anglican 'Living Theology Today' course?

Although it is possible to follow the programme without submitting assessed work, it is also possible to use it to gain accreditation to certificate or diploma level, as the programme is validated (currently by the University of Bangor). The full programme can lead to United Reformed Church Assembly lay preacher accreditation. In addition to this, the foundation course serves as one possible route to non-stipendiary or stipendiary ministry. David Peel comments about the TLS that he has 'never come across a more highly motivated and satisfied group of students'.

## *Strategy*

In the years leading up to this study, and encouraged by 'Catch the Vision', a national strategy document to put mission at the centre of local church, the Northern Synod undertook a major strategic overhaul of its governance structures. While prioritising mission, the synod also addressed an out-dated and top-heavy structure that was failing to meet the needs of a church that had halved its size since its inception some forty years ago.

The Northern Synod's response was to restructure and it initiated this by suspending the intermediary layer of governance between synod and the local churches: the 'districts' (2007) were replaced with 'mission partnerships'. Where the former districts were a formal level of governance with their own set of finances and locus for ministers, mission partnerships were to be loose clusters of churches that would meet regularly for mutual support and encouragement, sharing human as well as capital resources, including the deployment of ministers, and, in particular, for considering and implementing local strategy for mission.

Formally the structure of mission partnerships should include, a) a leadership team, b) mission partnership gatherings, and c) a mission partnership-appointed contact person. As for finance, the synod agreed to offer limited financial assistance towards any administrative costs.[20]

As both a driving force and consequence of these structural changes were changes also to the financial workings. Where previously money was held in the districts leading to an inequity of resources, the funds were united and, since 2009, have been held in a limited trust.

Meanwhile, a new committee was set up, 'Mission Executive', in order to develop the mission strategy for the region as well as to oversee the function of a mission enabler to be employed by the local churches.

Having embarked on structural and financial changes, the Synod looked to a further national strategy document: Vision4Life,[21] a three year program with a view to renewal of the spirit within the church. Each year takes a specific theme as a focus in Christian formation: Bible,

---

[20] 'Making Mission Partnerships Work,' *United Reformed Church, Northern Synod*, n.d., http://www.urc-northernsynod.org/members_downloads/mission_partnerships.pdf.
[21] 'Vision for Life,' accessed May 4, 2014, http://vision4life.org.uk.

Prayer, and Evangelism. This was accompanied by entering into a consultation period (Vision 20/20)[22] with a view to looking beyond Vision4Life and identifying ten localised mission priorities around ten national themes, the first of which is 'identity'.

The provision and oversight of Vision 20/20 belongs to Mission Executive, which has promoted the document under the region specific title 'Dying to Live'.[23]

It is worth spending some time reflecting on this vision. The context of the document is the 'apparent death through significant decline' of the church in the West, more generally, and particularly the Northern Synod, with two churches closing a year over the last ten years, and an age profile of congregations weighted heavily to the senior:

> Dying to live' speaks to that context and asks what needs to be let go of for new life to come. In acknowledging this we are called to step out in faith and take the risk of planting many seeds whether they fall on paths, stones, amongst weeds or on good soil. For example, seeds of accessible worship for the un-churched and young, seeds of opening our churches to the community more, seeds of deepening our spiritual life in prayer and engaging with story. Then God will give growth so that a harvest of God's kingdom can be reaped. 'Dying to live – Vision 2020 in Northern Synod' gives a framework, whereby we can all work together, to see what a many seeded church will look like. One thing we can be sure of it will be different to what we now know.[24]

Put into practice on the basis of Vision 2020, each local church, pastorate, Mission Partnership or ecumenical setting is encouraged to identify their own mission priorities, and the relevant people, spiritual, material, and financial resources required. This, in turn, is to be supported through the Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) and a 4-yearly cycle of review of a churches' life and mission.

The key to interpreting the document lies in mission by which is meant the mission to promote the Kingdom, which more specifically translates in terms of the need to stimulate growth in the United Reformed Church; herein lies the most striking aspect of the document. It was the Rev. Arthur MacArthur, a Northumbrian minister, who helped to form the United Reformed Church and who, upon having the detailed legal process of unification explained, said 'The two existing churches have to die in order to be born again'. Dying, in this context, is a fundamentally ecumenical gesture. Yet, the current vision speaks much more directly to the death of the church through decline, and hence the emphasis on mission, sowing the seeds so to speak, a metaphor underlined by the Synod's decision to send each local church an actual packet of seeds by way of introducing the strategy. One member neatly summed-up the climate when he said, 'Ecumenism just obscures falling membership, growth in the United Reformed Church is the key'.

This brings us back to the first mission priority adopted by the Synod, 'identity'. A recent circular in response to the 350th anniversary of the 'Great Ejectment' put the issue well:

---

[22] 'Dying to Live,' *United Reformed Church, Northern Synod*, accessed May 4, 2014, http://urc-northernsynod.org/synod/dying_to_live.htm.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

> Once we know where we have come from, we will have a better idea of who we are, what we are doing, why we do it, and where we are going. […] Mission starts with closer interaction between church and the people in its own locality.[25]

Little wonder an emphasis on identity and locality is being fermented when it is the very identity of the United Reformed Church as an ecumenical church that is being questioned.

## *Questions Arising*

From the above description, one can easily identify two key strengths: first, a pro-active organisational-level strategy responding to the challenging context of the Northern-Synod, inspirational in its courage; second, a degree of flexibility ecclesiologically rooted, which allows for the adoption of these changes in the first place.

However, the strategic shift also raised a number of key questions for all those involved: how successful would Mission Partnerships be? How well would ministers share resources? Is there a clear strategy for implementing the partnerships? What would happen when a minister refused to engage in the organisational strategy? What support for the development of strategy and mission at local level would there be? While a concerted development of governance was being implemented, what becomes of the strategy as it pertains to the local church? Would centralisation of funds ease and assist the financial burden both locally and regionally?

Arguably, from the perspective of Synod, and the overhaul of the governance system aside, the various strategic frameworks offered by Synod are precisely that, a framework within which the local churches may adapt a given theme in a way which reflects the concerns of the local church. Moreover, the employment of national strategic documents such as Vision2020 or Vision4Life may say more about the region's relation to the national body, rather than the local. However, the crucial point remains the ideological thrust – from an ecumenical to a mission-shaped church. The issue is not as to which of these orientations the church should pursue as such, but, a) whether a mission-shaped church is a realisable entity as such and b) if so, how.

A simple case in point is Stockton United Reformed Church. While not short on missionary spirit – renovating church property with a view to the community it served, it now finds itself with diminishing resources and without a community to which to witness.

With restructuring complete and a shift into a reflective phase of establishing mission and strategy, one can describe the United Reformed Church - Northern Synod as at a hinge point, from which two scenarios are possible. On the one hand, further sale of closing churches might facilitate a levelling out of the finances and increased adoption of and engagement with, the potential of Mission Partnerships leading to an invigorated albeit streamlined and straitened church into the future. On the other hand, the continued decline of membership, increased financial burdens passed on from the General Assembly, and the autonomy of local

---

[25] '1662 - 2012 - a Time for Celebration,' leaflet prepared by the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee of Northern Synod to encourage churches to rediscover their United Reformed identity and to see their buildings and furnishings as an asset to Mission.

churches blocking the way, may well lead the regional Synod into further decline from which the only route will be incorporation into other denominations. The hope is there, but the signs are not good. The United Reformed Church came into existence with the express aim of further unification, i.e., with a view to its shedding its then present form. Its gift, therefore, to the ecumenical churches might be in the witness of dying; i.e. ceasing to exist as a discrete denominational unit.

On the basis of the given description, the following points can be identified as strengths which the United Reformed Church-Northern Synod can offer to other traditions:

1. An organisational-level strategy which has been proactively responding to the challenging context of the Northern-Synod; and

2. Flexibility of synod and local church governance.

## *Open Questions*

The following can be identified as open questions which the Northern-Synod might seek to address, and where learning from other traditions may be of assistance:

1. Is there a clear strategy for implementing Mission Partnerships?

2. To what extent can the minister resist or refuse to engage in the organisational strategy?

3. How can the organisation support the development of strategy and mission at local level?

4. How clearly articulated is the strategy at both regional and local level?

5. How sustainable is the financial position?

6. To what extent is the policy to invest in people being maintained?

7. Is the Mission Partnership as new and as radical as it was believed to be?


## Phase II: The Empirical Investigation

### *Introduction*

In what follows, we take Mission Partnerships as the focus for a more general consideration of church governance. In this way, we build up a case cumulatively, using the results in one field of research (*e.g.* the questionnaire) to corroborate and develop what emerges in other fields. Mission Partnerships put the issue of governance at the fore and serve as the basis for strategic reform. A nuanced examination of the interviewees coupled with the statistical data clarifies in the first instance where the real issues of power and decision-making are situated. The Leadership and Ministry survey gets behind what people say to target the ways they self-

report their church behaviour and relationship to leadership. By drawing out the behavioural assumptions on the part of the congregations, we can then compare them with the regional strategy.

As earlier suggested, there is what amounts to a cognitive dissonance between the strategy being advanced and the patterns of church life, which points to the need for greater institutional support in the implementation stated strategy. This, I suggest, can be developed along two lines: the role of Eldership and the culture of Christian adult learning.

## *Case-Studies*

Two local churches served as the focus of our case-studies: Stockton United Reformed Church and Barnard Castle. Taken together, along with the data from Learning and Formation trajectory, they offer us an initial window of what issues and challenges are faced in the local life of the Synod.

Stockton United Reformed Church was established 1987, when three United Reformed Church congregations in central Stockton came together. This act of unity not only recalls the formation of the United Reformed Church itself, but the even prior union in Stockton of two large Presbyterian churches, one predominantly Scottish, the other English in 1934. Its main worship centre is St. Andrew and St. George, a handsome building that was a huge drain on the resources of Stockton United Reformed Church. It sat just south-west of the town centre, which, until a few years ago, was surrounded by streets of old terraced houses and flats. The congregation regarded this neighbourhood as a natural constituency and undertook to renovate the church kitchen in the hope of setting up a lunch club for elderly residents. Plans by the local council to redevelop the area provided a further impetus to persuading Stockton United Reformed Church to maintain its commitment to this site.

However, the redevelopment scheme was cancelled; a casualty of the financial crisis that began in 2008, but only after the streets around the church had been flattened. All that remains is a nearby clinic providing support for drug-abuse. When the congregation, to its credit, wished to know if it could assist in the care of those who use the clinic, the competent authorities advised strongly against it pointing to the need for specialist care in these situations.

The resultant area around the church is now an eyesore and at risk of theft or vandalism which requires employment of a security guard to provide protection for parked vehicles.

The Church retains another building, also close to the centre although rather isolated. Built in the 1970s, it is in good repair with a hall and suite of rooms that provide an income to the church that just about balances the cost of the upkeep of the building. The regular worship space has just resumed in the form of monthly Café Church in a room that is specially equipped with the help of a grant from the Northern Synod.

In 2011, Stockton's membership was at 82, which is about a quarter of the membership from forty years ago. Few members are under retirement age and a significant number are aged over eighty and even over ninety; some of whom are residents in care homes. There are only two children who worship regularly. There is also a steady trickle of asylum seekers who

have found a home at Stockton United Reformed Church: men from Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran. All of whom are welcomed and accepted.

Stockton United Reformed Church, however, is a picture of financial concern. The congregation includes a high percentage of older people who have a fixed income and the church's historic financial reserves will be exhausted by the end of 2012. Expenditure exceeds income by about £5,000 per year and is set to widen further. Income is falling. According to the church treasurer, the prospect for the church finances is 'a downwards spiral'. At present, 63% of annual income goes to the United Reformed Church centrally as a contribution to the 'Maintenance of Ministry Fund'. This leaves little to meet the considerable costs of maintaining their plant.

Some dedicated funds had been reserved towards the cost of improving the heating in St. Andrew's and St. George's, but concerns were raised in the elders meeting that unless finance was addressed soon, attendance at worship would fall further in the winter months.

The elders face a difficult challenge in trying to increase revenue and close the funding gap. It is understandable that some should wish to revise the membership list in the hope of removing any lapsed members so that the burden of payments to the Maintenance of the Ministry Fund might be eased a little. They are also keen to continue to receive any income generated by the rental of the Stockton Manse, for without that, their plight would be grave.

Our second church was Barnard Castle, 'The Church in Hall Street'. This is a church that has learned to live with uncertainty and anxieties about its future for as long as any of its members can remember. One parishioner told of a lady who took the improbable opportunity of an address to open the church's annual bazaar one year in the 1920s to share her doubts about its future viability. A decade later, its minister feared that its days were numbered.

Over the years, membership has grown and then fallen again. In 1993, there were 57 members; in 2000, there were 72. By 2010 there were just 38 and a few months later, after the death of several members, a total of 34. However, in 1974 the membership was just 42 and in the supposed halcyon days of Victorian church attendance in 1892, it was still only a modest 76. This long view of fluctuation helps, just a little, to set the present anxiety about decline in a wider context.

The sturdy stone church was built in 1836 to offer the Independent Congregation, later the Congregational Church, a home in which it might have more space and feel secure. In its simple, dignified exterior, it appears calm and solid, but its position in a quiet backstreet suggests that it has retired from the bustle of life to be found in the Horse Market and around Morrison's car-park, both less than a minute away. Only in the last year has a signpost been erected for visitors, for none was previously allowed by the local authority, and the traditional, tasteful notice board on the church wall was easily missed.

It was built on the edge of town, but as Barnard Castle grew it found itself unlike the Stockton congregation much nearer to the centre. It still, however, remains off the beaten track with difficult access.

The building (grade 2 listed), despite the burden of its upkeep and its location, is nevertheless an asset. The worship space, much reduced in size, is comfortable, warm and light. The adjacent hall with its kitchen is sound, airy and clean and various groups use the hall during the week, including a second congregation – Barnard Castle Christian Fellowship.

## *Governance*

As part of our interviews we asked about the governance structures and Mission Partnerships in particular. Were they a good thing? How successful were they proving? A contrasting range of experiences informed the responses. On the one hand, they were clearly productive and vibrant examples for which the minister lauded the lack of formal governance: 'It isn't a case of another burden, another committee meeting with minutes and agendas and stuff like that,' as one minister put it, 'the events that we organise as MP – prayer days, retreats – are there for people, who want them, and not for those who don't, so it's not a burdening of another layer of governance'.[26] Indeed, as another minister explained, Mission Partnerships exercise a

> very casual governance […] and one other word, informal […] they are not the official meetings […] and largely it's about sharing information, sharing how things are going in the individual churches, and thus supporting one another […] it's very much as I say, a support governance that is actually about supporting one another and encouraging one another, encouraging the ministers and encouraging the elders […] I don't think it is necessarily even conciliar, […] the phrase that's come down from synod that we are now calling MP events is that they are gatherings.[27]

The suggestion from the above is that Mission Partnerships operate as a kind of 'folk' governance. However, the general picture emerging also found expression in a subtle yet traditional narrative of opposition between the powers: the suspension of the District and its replacement with Mission Partnerships means that governmentally the individual churches now relate directly to the Synod. This encouraged the view of one minister that 'by taking on the powers of Districts they [Synod] effectively became a much bigger organisation that can't possibly be involved in a local way'. For example, the power to shape a pastorate was traditionally made by the judgment of the District; now it falls upon the local church and its degree of involvement within a given partnership. Hence the view by one ordained local minister that the introduction of Mission Partnerships was as an 'unwanted imposition'.

Rather than enter into the argument as such, I want to explore the narrative in terms of power. As other studies have shown, often such narratives mask the more subtle exercises of power.[28] In the case of this study, when asked about possible tensions within the organisation, while the relationship between Synod and the local church was cited, the examples given were representative of intra-regional or intra-local concerns – not regional/local tensions.

For example, while the consolidation of funds was cited as a tension between Synod and the local church, the tangible example offered concerned an intra-regional decision: following a

---

[26] Phase II Interviews.
[27] Phase II Governance and Finance interviews: United Reformed Church.
[28] H. Cameron et al., *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 209–233.

conciliar decision of the mission executive to support a number of paid posts (Children's Officer, Education and Training Officer), a budget was drawn up by the Treasurer and the decision taken to the Trust who voted against it. In effect, as one minister put it, 'a decision of Synod was effectively overturned by the Trust'. Here, the issue is intra-regional.

In another example, a minister reported how another minister within his proposed Partnership wanted nothing to do with Mission Partnerships

> when the idea of Mission Partnerships was put forward and the Mission Partnerships were formed, a certain minister […] said, "So what are we supposed to do?" and the Synod Moderator said "You do what you like, it's up to you to decide what you want to do in your Mission Partnerships. That is the whole point, Mission Partnerships do what is right for them". So this person said, "Oh, in that case we'll do nothing then'. […] We're now reaping the legacy of that."

The issue here is clearly intra-local – the refusal by a minister to co-operate locally.

In a final example, a minister raised the issue over whether Mission Partnerships would be capable of sharing resources 'with churches feeling that Synod is taking more from them in both financial and personnel terms, whilst giving less help when it is needed'. Notice how the Synod is charged in terms of having created the situation, while the issue is intra-local. Hence we might ask, if Mission Partnerships will be capable of sharing resources.

Where Mission Partnerships function well is in their effectiveness as a 'mission tool,' which is seen as dependent upon them being constituted as pastorates with some structure. In general, however, as one minister puts it 'Mission Partnerships are so unstructured they are ineffective for mission'.

To sum up, it might be said that the problem with Mission Partnerships is less their imposition as the loss of a formal governance structure. One way to address this issue is in terms of power. Governance directs the research to the decision-making structures, which makes for accountability. Governance confers legitimate authority on a given process in decision-making, which in the case of the United Reformed Church is conciliar.

When asked at local level where decision-making power really lies, all five interviewees agreed that the Church Meeting is the decision-making body, although their responses were shaded by variations over the precise relationship between the two councils, reflecting the tension, as one interviewee suggested, that arises between the two styles of leadership which formerly constituted the United Reformed Church: Presbyterian and congregational. Mission Partnerships, by contrast, are seen to have no authority as such and were described by one minister as a 'think tank'.

However, as was highlighted, there are anomalous loci-of power: i.e., the ability to enforce a wish, be it regionally through the Directorate (corporate power) or individually through a local minister (individual power). We might draw attention to these civic-loci, practised as it were on the edge of conciliar governance, to highlight more precisely the issue of power as it relates to Mission Partnerships. Briefly put, if the church were truly conciliar, on what grounds can a minister simply 'opt out' of regional initiatives as fundamental as Mission

Partnerships? Is such a decision rooted in the will of the individual or an expression of the general will of the congregation?

One can tease out the implications of this point by asking what role would Eldership play within such a decision? This of course raises the question as to the true role of the Eldership more generally. Eldership is merely one expression of designated ministerial offices, along with Ministers of the Word and Community Related Workers; yet as indicated, it is one of the peculiar ecumenical gifts that the United Reformed Church has to share. Eldership expresses precisely the shared nature of ministry. Moreover, as David Peel has argued, 'the potentiality of this office has not been taken up in every United Reformed Church congregation'.[29]

It might be suggested then that Eldership serve as the distinctive metaphor for Mission Partnerships and Mission Partnerships as an index of the churches' collective identity.

## *Faith and Institution*

Another way to look at this issue is in terms of the relation of institution to faith; i.e. the relationship between the core practices (e.g. to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize and nurture new believers)[30] and the way they are supported through institutional means including assumptions about the legitimate means of achieving them.

We asked interviewees about the degree to which they felt the United Reformed Church was 'institutionalised' and the degree to which it supported their practice of faith. A simple scoring system allowed us to plot all the respondents' results on a graph. Taken as individuals the overall results across the denominations are inconclusive, one finds only a random scatter of opinions. However, when individual scores are grouped by denomination, a different picture emerges which offers at face value a validity in the degree of institutionalisation by denomination – they intuitively feel about right. For example, those denominations who scored themselves as less-institutionalised (e.g. Assemblies of God, Northern Baptist Association, United Reformed Church; i.e. those with a Congregational basis) are less supportive of the practices of faith. They see themselves foremost as Christian, and would happily remain so regardless of their existing denomination. While the obverse is true of more-institutionalised denominations (e.g. Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Anglican). The Methodists sit somewhere around the mean.

The suggestion from these findings is that there is an optimum level of institutionalisation for a given change of governance in the furtherance of practice, and that more institutional support is required, albeit in a manner which avoids it feeling restrictive (e.g. financial support).

However, before asking the obvious question, what kind of institutional support, one should add another layer to the mix, thinking not only in terms of institution and practice, but also

---

[29] David Peel, *Reforming Theology: Explorations in the Theological Traditions of the United Reformed Church*, 249.
[30] 'Annual Reports and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 December 2010' (The United Reformed Church, Northern Province, n.d.).

their relative relations to goods.[31] Where the former (institution) is concerned with external goods (i.e. those goods necessary to survive such as investments, ministry funds etc.), the latter is concerned with 'internal' goods, such as social practices that realise the core values of the institution. This difference poses an essential association and tension between, first, the practices and institutions: they form a single causal order. Practices cannot survive without being institutionalised and yet practices are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness and competitiveness of the institution. Second, similarly the essential association and tension between internal and external goods. This gives the texture of organisational life a central dilemma. Of course the question remains: what type of institutional support is required?

Applied to our current situation, we might say that Mission Partnership is practice in the place of institution, offsetting the very possibility of a balance between internal and external goods by representing one directly as the other.

Hence, an important part of this framework is to focus on the level of institutionalisation in order to assess which features of the institution will better enable it to promote excellence in the core practice it houses. I have suggested that the support of Eldership plays an under-developed role in this regard.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

How do congregations behave? To what extent does the new mode of governance introduced by the United Reformed Church relate to the behavioural expression of a given church? As part of our study we undertook a questionnaire aimed at church behaviour and the effects of leadership upon it.

Our survey included 184 responses; members (i.e. church-goers) had collectively belonged to the United Reformed Church for an average of 36 years, and been a participant in their specific church for an average of 30 years. Members had been working with their specific minister for an average of 6.38 years. In 35% of cases, the church member was male; in 65% female; in 66.5% of cases the church leader was male; in 33.5% female. That is to say that roughly two thirds of the leadership are male, governing a congregation which is two-thirds female. The average age of respondents was 66.

The questionnaire employed a scale from cultic forms of leadership to servant leadership; i.e. someone who leads primarily as a result of a prior commitment to serve, as opposed to someone who wants first to lead. We also employed various other scales to measure psychological mediators such as 'trust', which transmit or hinder the effect of leadership between the local church and its minister. For example, a congregation that trusts its leader will, in turn, do more for that minister. In this way we can determine the different effects and different types of leadership have on a given church with a view to lay participation.

---

[31] G. Moore, 'Churches as Organisations: Towards a Virtue Ecclesiology for Today,' *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 1 (2011): 45–65.

The United Reformed Church survey highlighted strong levels of servant leadership. For example, in regard of 'spiritual wellbeing'[32], the United Reformed Church respondents score highly in with 91% agreeing that their relationship with God contributes to their sense of wellbeing.[33] Spiritual well-being is predicted by servant leadership but not cultic leadership. Similarly, 90% of respondents agree that they are satisfied with their role in the church and 90% with their life as a whole. Analyses finds that spiritual wellbeing predicts life satisfaction; and further analyses on predictors of life satisfaction and United Reformed Church members shows that satisfaction with their church role is strongly predictive of overall life satisfaction: if you are satisfied in your church role and life, you will be generally satisfied.

The findings also suggest that the levels of church effort are good with 76% of respondents reporting that everyone gives their best efforts in the church. Again, analysis finds that productivity is predicted positively by servant leadership but not cultic leadership.

Indeed, servant leadership is only negatively associated with outcomes such as intent to quit the church or switch to another. In our study, 7% of respondents were often thinking of quitting the church and only 3% thinking about switching to a new church in the following year.

To get at how the minister transmits leadership requires mediation analysis, in other words, an analysis of how psychological states such as trust or identification affect the degree to which a member engages in the churches core activities.

To take 'trust' as an example; i.e. 'the psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another'. Findings suggest that trust in the local minister as opposed to say peers or the institution as a whole is relatively high in United Reformed Church with only 7% of respondents reporting that they did not fully trust their minister. A minister who has built up trust ministers more effectively.

High levels of leader loyalty were also discerned, with only a small minority of respondents reporting low levels; for example, 8% of respondents disagree they have a sense of loyalty to their minister.

Moreover, there appears to be a sense of empowerment amongst the respondents (i.e. organizational members are imbued with a sense of meaning and challenge in their church work) – factors which, organisationally speaking, improve motivation and performance. Respondents felt that their roles are very meaningful and that they themselves feel that they have the necessary skills and abilities to perform them. For example, 95% of respondents agreed that their church role was personally meaningful for them.

---

[32] The scale was developed for use with religious populations and employed a widely ecumenical definition of spirituality; the majority of studies which use it to measure perceived spiritual well-being have found evangelical, Protestant populations scoring the highest on the scale.

[33] The analysis finds that for United Reformed Church members spiritual wellbeing is predicted by servant leadership (ß = 0.37; $p < 0.001$) but not cultic leadership.

All of this suggests good levels of group potency and cohesion. Group potency is a measure of a church group's belief that it can be effective in its tasks and duties. For example, 64% of members agreed that the church group has confidence in itself to a considerable/great extent.

A group is said to be in a state of cohesion when its members possess bonds linking them to one another and to the group as a whole. Groups that possess strong unifying forces typically stick together over time. There is strong evidence of a high level of group cohesion in the United Reformed Church, with 96 % agreeing that working in the church was like working with friends.

We also found strong levels of self-esteem in the organization, formed around organizational experiences, which plays a significant role in determining their motivation and effecting related attitudes and behaviours. For example, 90% reported that they felt helpful in the church. Related to this is the level of organizational identification; i.e. the degree to which a member defines him/herself by the same attributes as those that he or she believes define the organization. This relates to when an individual's beliefs about an organization become self-defining. When people identify with their church, being one of its members is an important part of their identity. People think of themselves in terms of their membership in the church. They see themselves bound up with its successes and failures. The results report some fairly high levels of organizational identification among our respondents. 90% agreed that they usually say 'we' rather than 'they' when talking about their local church, and 62 % agreeing that when someone criticizes their organization (the United Reformed Church) it feels like a personal insult.

However, crucially, in terms of self-determination and impact, the United Reformed Church responses are largely less favourable with 46% disagreeing that they had any control over what happens in their church.

Two other important responses stand out. First, what is called leader-member exchange: leaders often develop differentiated relationships with each member of the group that they lead, and leader–member exchange theory explains how those relationships can increase organizational success by creating positive relations between the leader and group members. In particular, leaders usually have special relationships with an 'in-group' who often get high levels of responsibility and access to resources, but their position can come with a price: members will usually have to work harder, be more committed and loyal to the leader, and share the leader's administrative duties. Conversely, members in the 'out-group' are given low levels of choice or influence and put constraints on the leader. There is evidence in the United Reformed Church data for both in-group, e.g. 19% of respondents say their minister understands their problems, needs, and out-group, with 19% of respondents also reporting that their minister recognizes their potential not at all/a little. When we compare this to the Methodist response (49% of respondents say their minister understands their problems and needs either quite a bit/a great deal), denomination then becomes the single biggest variable in the data.

The second concerns overall church-group behaviour. In our analysis of member behaviour, we identify several key dimensions whereby members exhibit helpful behaviour which goes 'above and beyond the call of duty' for everyday church members. The evidence suggests

that the most common church citizenship behaviours are targeted at helping other individuals in the church and the least common ones are the community-based activities.

One of the immediate questions this data throws up is the disjunction between a picture of a church in decline and the relative 'well-being' of its members and adherents. In other words, how do we interpret the data? In the first instance, one should look to the average age of the respondents: sixty-six. Moreover, given the average time they have been a participant within their church – thirty years – and the age of the denomination – 40 years in 2012 – a picture emerges of well-founded and established communities that have grown-up together. This would account for the meaningfulness of their church life, as well as strong group cohesion and potency. However, it would also account for a congregation that was motivated primarily towards its own rather than community-based activities. In this way, the disjunction between strategy – church growth – and the mode of being church opens up a kind of cognitive dissonance in which the frame of mission jars with the type of church its members make.

## *Learning and Formation*

To the quantitative data thus far we can add the qualitative data drawn from Learning and Formation. We visited nine 'learning and formation' groups from the Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church and a further group from a Methodist/United Reformed Church LEP. Each case-study either took the form of an 'appreciative inquiry,' an exercise in listening that normally lasted about an hour, or observation of a learning session after which questions were put to the group for discussion.

The range of what groups do is diverse, ranging from informal bible study to leadership training (TLS in the United Reformed Church); groups that use films or novels as a 'starter', to quite informal discussions at 'Café Church', and those who ask for learning do so for many reasons. Many groups take a collaborative approach to decision-making between lay people and clergy in developing the learning programs or events. However, the key finding, given the emphasis on church growth and notwithstanding an experiment with Alpha Groups at North Shields, Christian Initiation did not feature in the United Reformed Church learning groups we observed.

Indeed, evidence from the listening audits is that the purpose and outcomes of Christian learning and formation in the participant denominations appears geared towards developing personal discipleship and to enable church communities to develop deeper personal relationships among themselves like family ties. For example, when pushed on 'what people learn', people often talked about gaining acceptance and self-esteem:

> It was good to find out that I was not the only one to have doubts.

> The content of the course enabled the sharing of stories that helped to deepen relationships.

> We've all grown in confidence. We were able to bring our troubles – and support came from that.

> As I get older, I'm more willing to question and to say I don't understand this God, but oddly, my faith seems deeper too.

> I thought, 'I can't do that!' but then self-esteem grows. It's amazing really!

It has been great to verbalise what I feel.

All this suggests that the culture of learning and formation is reflective of the picture of church behaviour that emerged from the Learning and Formation questionnaire. The styles of adult learning reinforce the existing relations rather than push a community into a critical and educative place of change. The questionnaire identified the most common church 'citizenship' behaviours as those targeted at helping other individuals in the church and the least common ones as those which were community based.

In a similar fashion the learning and formation fostered at local level is directed towards developing personal and familiar ties within the groups, rather than a formation directed toward reaching others outside of church. A notable exception was recorded, the 'Café-Church' where Christian discussion is available. Nonetheless, this raises the question as to whether the strategic shift to a mission is supported more generally by a culture of learning.

Evidence from the listening audit, particularly around ecumenism, also raises the issue of identity. In treating the question of ecumenism, one should begin by transposing the differences between denominations into the given denomination. For example, many of the Learning and Formation groups were de facto ecumenical. The Low Row Bible study, for example, although organised by the United Reformed Church ministered and attended by people, all of whom also attend a United Reformed Church in Swaledale, consists of those who described themselves as (variously) Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist – as well as United Reformed Church. Informal, dual 'membership' is common and many people have roots in one tradition but are content to worship and study in another, as for example at Barnard Castle United Reformed Church.

Second, while denominational differences were rarely indicative of the learning style (for example, one could find Catholics engaged in charismatic worship) a few markers of distinct denominational character did emerge from time to time, chiefly and ironically, members of the United Reformed Church often expressed a pride in their ecumenical credentials, believing themselves to be more essentially ecumenical than anyone else. For example, a participant from Low Row said, 'There's an ecumenical feel to URC worship, the United Reformed Church feels itself to be very ecumenical. You don't ever hear "United Reformed Church" in the service' and members of the URC often articulated a wish to be even more visibly ecumenical. For example, a Morpeth member asked 'Could we not collaborate more with other churches? It would be a good experience to learn together – individual churches could have bolt-on bits'.

In summary, the experience of adult Christian learning in the URC is generally directed towards psychological and spiritual empowerment within the groups, deepening existing church ties, but also evidences not only ecumenism as an index of the URC, but something to be actively developed.

## *Summary*

In drawing together these threads, it is helpful to draw upon literature from the field of congregational studies, in particular, the claim that, organisationally speaking, while denominationally diverse, local congregations nonetheless are underpinned by 'models' of

church (e.g. a family model, a community orientated model, a house of worship, a Leader model) which can cut across the denominations. By dissimulating the question of denomination for a moment, and looking more directly at the behaviours of those congregations, we can discern more subtly these organizational types, which while shaped by wider institutional factors related to denominational ecclesiology, highlight nonetheless how the exercise of congregations over matters of polity, authority, and decision-making may yet be structured differently.[34]

By way of example, one could easily imagine two discrete denominations in which the decision-making processes were largely dependent upon and dominated by a core of long-standing individuals. In terms of governance, then, models help to the extent that they try to get behind a given issue, to explore the ways an organizational culture structures the very presentation and possibility of the issues arising in the first place.

Because models prompt us to ask about organisational processes (e.g. how are goals set, decisions made, programs developed, and what are the problems encountered on the way?) they provide a particularly good lens in treating practically the issues that arise around identity and mission. The broader institutional form of a denomination will determine the features of public life, its core values, which are disclosed through mission, evangelism, or ritual etc., providing, as it were, the rules for public discourse (thought as social practice) and shaping the kind of issues congregations must fight about.[35] Models mediate the relation of the institutional whole to the local church; a model can explain a church's capacity to receive and respond to a regional initiative on the part of Synod. In this way one can explain dynamics of the relation between the institutional culture at regional level, and the agency of local churches, i.e. the relation between 'social forms and social action'.[36]

Finally, models make for a comparative analysis precisely because they cut across denominational patters of governance.

The URC data suggests what Penny Becker calls a 'family-model'.[37] Congregations tend to revolve around three core tasks:

1. developing the church's sense of its own community;

2. reproducing themselves through worship and or educative programs; and

3. witnessing to others be it through outreach or simply by being a presence in the community – regardless of how engaged they are in that community.[38]

These three categories overlap. For example, worship is a means of fostering community relations within the church. However, Becker's concern is for the general pattern a

---

[34] Penny Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5–6.
[35] Ibid., 182.
[36] Ibid., 18.
[37] Ibid., 15.
[38] I have changed the initial order that Becker put this list in. See specifically page 15.

congregation takes and how that shapes the direction given the core tasks a church undertakes. In the case of a family-model, the community aimed at is precisely that: providing for close family-like attachments for most members. Religious witness, according to this model, tends to be centred on being a presence in the community – their witness is simply the way a church lives its life within a given wider community.

We might briefly contrast this with what Becker calls, the 'community-model,' which, while incorporating elements of the family model (e.g. providing close, family-ties), differs to the extent that a greater emphasis falls on being a community of values. So in terms of witness, it is marked by the desire to live its values as a witness, taking values out into the community through local enactments of mission orientation, and building towards new members and church growth. A community church is more likely to be a leader in the community rather than a witness to it by virtue of its presence.

Evidence from the trajectories suggests the general model of URC congregations is the family-model. This is evidenced by the questionnaire, where only 8% said that they 'do not feel part of the family in the church' and further evidenced in terms of religious reproduction. So, while the congregations undertake adult Christian learning, that learning is, as we saw, principally directed toward developing personal discipleship and sharing stories that helped 'deepen relationships'.

Arguably, then, part of the initial conflicts reported between Synod/Local church relations are more the result of the type of conflict which arises through the transition of model, e.g. from a family-model to a community-model, giving rise to a kind of cognitive dissonance: what they are asked to become does not belong to the frame under which they have operated.

Take Barnard Castle as an example: the traditional, gentle, rather formal style of worship seems well suited to the needs of the present congregation. It is a church for older people, served by older people. As younger people, in the words of one great grandma from the congregation, 'don't think that it's cool to go to church', it would presumably require rather more than a change in the style of worship to attract them. Indeed, there is no provision for learning and formation for the young people at Barnard Castle URC. The only regular contact with the young now comes through the Mother and Toddler group.

However, everything hangs upon 'mission' in the context of church growth. In a small pamphlet for sale at the back of Barnard Castle United Reformed Church, Alan Wilkinson tells of a lady who took the improbable opportunity of an address to open the then church's annual bazaar one year in the 1920s to share her doubts about its future viability.[39] A decade later, its Minister feared that its days were numbered. It is hardly surprising that with an overwhelmingly retired, elderly congregation the idea of growing the church seems anachronistic and members express new concerns about the church's viability; but it is just as clear that if only two or three energetic couples were to retire to the town and join Barnard Castle United Reformed Church, it might grow again.

---

[39] Alan Wilkinson, 'The Church in Hall Street,' *Pamphlet for Sale in Barnard Castle United Reformed Church*, 2000.

In sum our study shows that the primary threat that the URC faces today is one of sustaining a coherent identity amid a changing context. On the face of it, the URC is organized congregationally with limited structural oversight by a representative synod and financial trust. This organizational structure stems from a Calvinist theology of ministry, which locates organizational 'authority' not in an episcopal hierarchy but rather in the proclamation of the Word and distribution of the sacraments. In practice, the URC negotiates its own organization at a local level through a minister, group of elders, and congregation. From an institutional perspective, the URC is rapidly losing members and financial resources, which has resulted in some radical austerity measures. From the perspective of the local church, the URC struggles to equip and mobilize its local leaders (whether they are stipendiary or not) to enact any framework or strategy handed down from the institutional level. In fact, some local leaders view institutional recommendations as burdens or being at cross-purposes with the core URC identity.

This leads us to ask the obvious question: what does it mean to the URC to be united, reformed, and a church? From our perspective, the URC struggles to hold these key identity markers together in a coherent fashion from the local level, all the way up to the institutional level. Effectively, the district/regional body was the vital organizational link between the URC institutional level and the local congregation. The URC must reinvest in local church or it will become a charitable trust like The British Heart Association. Our research shows that there is an overall threat to the URC's claim to 'unity' and 'church' insofar as it sacrifices the needs of the local church and leaves it to reconstruct its own regional authority. Moreover, the URC's claim to be 'reformed' is also under threat insofar as it continues to neglect the formation of its ministers and elders.

The URC's identity crisis leads researchers to ask another obvious question: what is the regional mission of the URC? From our research, it appears that the regional mission of the URC is to provide a mutually beneficial framework for local church ministry in an ecumenical context. Indeed, the structural flexibility of the URC is a strength that can help it adapt in this new context. The functional, task-oriented approach to ordination and commissioning leaders in the local church is a good platform for building a volunteer base in the absence of stipendiary ministers and necessary financial resources. Hence, just as Calvin was able to shift from three-fold ministry, so the URC must shift to a new phase of supporting and recruiting non-stipendiary ministers.

In light of our research, the URC must invest in and develop the role of elders, lay preachers, university and hospital chaplains, and community workers. The URC's 'Ministry and Training Committee' needs to develop training courses for all of these roles to mobilize these volunteers for the mission of the local URC. Among local eldership, one representative should be designated to serve on the 'Ecumenical Group' to reinforce the importance of LEPs for stabilizing the flow of synod-regional-local communication and support. Moreover, the URC (perhaps in conjunction with the 'Pastoral Group') should host an area ministers' meeting that gathers non-stipendiary and stipendiary ministers from all denominations once a month for prayer, reading Scripture, meal, and to raise local concerns that can be reported through proper channels. The Trust needs to re-evaluate its external charitable activities and focus funds on building local support. Otherwise, the URC will need to become a charitable para-church trust that funds appropriate projects in the U.K.

Another question that the URC must answer is: what becomes of unity without authority? How will the United Reformed Church negotiate virtual unity/authority? Theologically, the URC teaches that the church is united non-temporally and non-spatially, i.e. through the invisible church. However, if we think about the vanishing organisational structures of the URC Church (motivated by financial decisions) and the pressure that is put on the local level to reconstruct these regional structures on their own, then every local congregation must fend for itself. Why are stipendiary ministers burnt out? The URC must reinvest in ministers' formation.

In light of the need for minister formation, the URC must ask: what becomes of reform without pedagogical and financial resources? How will the URC negotiate the meaning of membership? Theologically, to be a member of the universal church, the URC says that we are elected by Christ (perhaps there are good, ecumenical reasons for endorsing this); but to belong to the local church, to make it visible as a community of Christians, what resources are needed to facilitate local concerns and institutional? If the URC emphasises the invisible church too much, then the risk is that it will vanish. So what does it mean to become a member of the URC? Are they accepting new members? Why are local URC events poorly attended? Perhaps the notion of 'dual membership' is problematic, and these participants are participating elsewhere that seemingly has more to offer. To what extent is the URC a visible church? It seems that the URC is visible insofar as it is ecumenical—that is, the URC synod functions as an institutional umbrella for several UK-based congregational churches, and the local URC congregation/event appears to have participants from ecclesially-mixed backgrounds.

In sum, our study began by mapping and contextualising the strategic, governmental, and financial shifts undertaken by the URC. In particular, we paid attention to the ideological emphasis upon a shift from an ecumenical to a mission-shaped church. The introduction of Mission Partnerships (MPs) provided a lens to explore the issues more concretely. The evidence suggests that greater institutional support is required if MPs are to be successful. Drawing on the overall analysis, one can approach this in a number of ways:

1. specific programmes of education to foster outreach among congregations need to be introduced;

2. the role and understanding of eldership should be developed – or indeed a new class of lay leader to treat specifically the context of Mission Partnerships.

3. Christian learning and formation must be employed in such a way as to better inform the overall strategic decision-making of the church, especially in regard of Elders Meetings.

4. There needs to be a renewed understanding of eldership that informs the URC's identity and thus further contributes to a culture of support for Mission Partnerships.

Part of the drive of the Northern Synod is toward church growth. Given the lack of initiation courses, these recommendations might be introduced. However, the question remains: should they be targeted at the young or, given the aging profile of the church coupled with the

relative levels of well-being recorded by the questionnaire, is not the future of the URC with the senior members of our society? The development of institutional support, especially in regard of external goods may also be aided ecumenically. Stockton's 'messy-church' is held in tandem with the Salvation Army in the local corps. Similarly, the evidence of Barnard Castle's ecumenical support is immediate and considerable from the space awarded then on the notice boards, from the sharing of plants with Barnard Castle Christian fellowship to the strong commitment of Barnard Castle URC to Churches Together in Barnard Castle and Startforth. As well as formal ties, informal links are strong as evidenced by the way in which members of the different churches in the town readily support each other's events. In other words, while the key to the United Reformed Churches future may well lay in a mission-orientated and community church – as opposed to its initial ecumenical mandate ('born to die'), ecumenism may nonetheless be the key to community-mission.

# The Salvation Army – Northern Division

*Marcus Pound, Russell Tucker, Helen Savage (Learning and Formation), Tom Redman (Leadership and Ministry)*

## Phase I: Mapping the Tradition

### Introduction

> We are not and will not be made a Church. There are plenty for anyone who wishes to join them, to vote and to rest.[40]

It was never William Booth's intention to establish a new Christian denomination; an early convert to Methodism and a travelling Methodist Minister himself, he began to realise that the poor were not made to feel welcome in the churches and chapels of Victorian England. Resolved to do more he resigned his post (1861) and returned to London's East End where he had previously worked with a view to doing more for the poor, the homeless, hungry, and destitute. His preaching quickly impressed a group who encouraged him to lead a series of meetings in a large tent, which subsequently led him to establish a movement: 'The East London Christian Mission', 1 of 500 charitable and religious groups helping in the East End during the period.

After a democratic approach failed to provide solid direction to a rapidly expanding movement, the Mission opted for an episcopal form of government expressed in the language of the military.[41] Missionary churches had often worked closely with the army as international work took them to new territories and exposed them to real threat. Since Booth saw his movement as engaged in spiritual battle, it was logical that he should adopt a military metaphor. Consequently, in 1878, the mission was reorganized along military lines with Booth as their General, and Catherine by his side. Preachers were now referred to as 'officers' and the church members their 'soldiers'. This was the point at which the mission became known as the Salvation Army.

In the early Salvationist movement, soldiers were organised into 'brigades' for specific missionary tasks. These groups became important vehicles for evangelism precisely because of their adaptability: meeting needs in settings outside the institutional churches, organising themselves around specific tasks, determining their own format, organising for spiritual battle, and ensuring discipline. In short, the small group was ideally suited for this disciplined pursuit of objectives and the adaptation of structure and method to the needs of the spiritual battlefield.

Today's Army maintains evangelistic and social enterprises (emergency disaster response; health programs; education programs; residential programs; day-care, addiction dependency programs; service to the Armed Forces; and general community services such as prisoners

---

[40] Orders and Regulations 1878.

[41] Writing to a correspondent in 1877, William Booth says: 'I am determined that Evangelists in this Mission must hold my views and work on my lines'. See Harold Begbie, *The Gospel Truth Life of William Booth*, vol. 2, 1920, http://www.gospeltruth.net/booth/boothbiovol2/boothbiovol2ch11.htm.

support, charity shops, and feeding programs). Indeed, in the United Kingdom the activities of its Social Work Trust make The Salvation Army one of the largest and most diverse providers of social welfare in the U.K. after the British Government. These are undertaken through the authority of the General, who is aided by full-time officers and employees, as well as soldiers who give service in their free-time. The Salvation Army currently serves in 126 countries and other territories employing about 17,000 active officers, and has around 1.1m senior soldiers (2008).

The Salvation Army has been active in the North of England since the early 1800s. The area covered by the Northern Division has been described as the belt, which goes round the belly of the British Isles. It covers an area stretching from Carlisle and embracing part of the Lake District (Penrith and Whitehaven) on the west coast, to Newcastle on the east coast. It extends north of Newcastle to Alnwick and South to Guisborough and Whitby. In practice, a majority of its corps are situated in the historic region of Northumbria, such that it ministers to a population in excess of 3.1 million.

The Division is home to 3,462 members. Corps statistics, recorded between the months of March and April 2007 the total attendance at the various corps events (e.g. home groups; outdoor evangelism events; prayer meetings; parent and toddler groups etc.) at 86,027.[42] This includes both adults and young, but excludes the various other social outreach programs such as hostels. Average attendance at worship in the same March to April period amounted to 1455 (giving an average congregation size of 29). Membership (i.e. covenanted soldiers or youth) is in a slow decline, dropping on average by 1.14% a year over a seven-year period.[43]

## *Ecclesiology*

Like the Methodism from which it sprang, Salvation Army ecclesiology is a mixture which combines belief about the church's mission with a pragmatic sensibility toward the church itself: the church exists for the sake of its mission in the world and hence is ordered toward this aim.[44] Because its purpose is to further the mission of the church, it must be judged not only by its faithfulness to the gospel but by its effectiveness in advancing mission. Robert Paul calls this attitude 'evangelical pragmatism', by which the church must be free to meet the spiritual needs of every age.[45] This implies to an extent that ecclesiastical institutions are secondary to the missionary imperative: structure serves mission. Institutional structures may be employed from time to time, but ultimately should be setup to meet the needs of the moment and should be modified or discarded in that regard. In short, Salvationist ecclesiology holds that everything connected with the ordering of the church's life and work must serve its missionary calling. Hence, what is important is less the form of the Army and more the process by which it achieves its goals.

---

[42] Corps Statistics 2007, Statistical department THQ.
[43] Statistics Office, THQ.
[44] Phil Needham, *Community in Mission: A Salvationist Ecclesiology*, The Salvation Army, 1987, http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki.nsf/0/12896B1F80141A6B80256F960052C35B/$file/Library-CommunityinMission.pdf  (accessed May 4, 2014)
[45] Robert S. Paul, *The Church in Search of Its Self*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 123.

The missionary purpose of the church makes for a unity and herein lies further relevance of the military metaphor for the church: an army tends to be united in a common purpose. Yet Booth also manifested his desire for unity more theologically, distilling the Army's doctrinal statements to that which its early leaders considered as the missionary essentials, eliminating divisive points of doctrine which may have served to polarise denominational difference. That is not to say that divisive points of doctrine were not important but the emphasis lay on overcoming division.

To take as an example 'Communion' or Eucharistic service: while the Army does not hold them neither does it maintain that they are wrong. Rather, the fundamental theological premise is that no particular outward observance is necessary for inward grace: God's grace is freely and readily accessible to all people at all times and in all places.[46] Speaking pragmatically against the background of the temperance movements, concern and responsibility was exercised toward alcoholics lest the wine of Communion should tempt them back. Finally, because the practice of Communion could become divisive of gender differences in some denominations, the lack of Communion also removed a principle site of contestation.

As they themselves were only too aware, such an approach says just as much about the period of history in which the Booths were situated. In his 1883, an apologia for the Army's stance, written in response to a Northern Clergyman and following his split from Methodism, Booth said the following:

> Now if the sacraments are not conditions of salvation, and if the introduction of them would create division of opinion and heart burning, and if we are not professing to be a church, not aiming at being one, but simply a force for aggressive salvation purposes, is it not wise for us to postpone any settlement of the question, to leave it over for some future day, when we shall have more light?[47]

Hence, working on the assumptions given above, a recent international report on Eucharistic Communion was able to state:

> Recognizing the freedom to celebrate Christ's real presence at all meals and in all meetings, the Commission's statement on Holy Communion encourages Salvationists to use the opportunity to explore together the significance of the simple meals shared by Jesus and his friends, and by the first Christians. It also encourages the development of resources for such events, which would vary according to culture, without ritualizing particular words or actions.[48]

And in a similar vein, consider the following statement from the Salvation Army's web page regarding 'The Orders and Regulations of The Salvation Army', providing 'the manual of operations for furthering the mission on which Salvationists are engaged':

---

[46] International Spiritual Life: Commission Report (1997), http://www.sfotusa.org/library/pdfs/intlSpiritualLifeCommissionReport.pdf (accessed May 4, 2014).

[47] Salvation Army, 'Sacraments' http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/our-beliefs/sacraments.html (accessed May 4, 2014)

[48] International Spiritual Life: Commission Report, (1997).

As conditions, challenges and opportunities change, orders and regulations are reviewed and amended. A recent notable trend has been towards giving territories greater discretion in applying or adapting regulations to fit their particular circumstances, allowing the mission of the Army to be localised and focused on the pressing needs and issues at hand.[49]

## Leadership and Ministry

The adoption of a military government led to the commissioning of soldiers and officers. A soldier is a person who has signed the Soldier's Covenant (Articles of War); officers are ministers who have undergone vocational training for the ministry, usually through two years residential training at the William Booth College in Camberwell, South London,[50] which makes them an accredited minister of religion of study at an officers training college. After this, they are commissioned or ordained as a Salvation Army officer, usually with the rank of Lieutenant.

However, the adoption of the term 'ordination' for the commissioning of ministers was only formally introduced in 1978, before which officership was a more functional term. Its introduction aimed at underscoring the solemnity of the commissioning of Salvation Army officers, as well as presenting officership in analogous terms such that a Salvation Army officer should be regarded as equal to any priest or minister of other denominations.[51]

As a military-style organization, all positions, with the exception of that of General, are held by appointment and a strict hierarchy is maintained. Pragmatically this allows for daily decisive decisions to be made in a field of rapid engagement. Ecclesiologically, the principles behind commissioning officers and soldiers is attuned to a reading of the New Testament call to ministry: the priesthood of all believers. All God's people are called to specific ministries and the church is charged to give spiritual direction in discerning and developing individual gifts for ministry. So again, like an army, each person is commissioned with a clearly defined task which works towards the imperative. Thus, while the Army adopts a hierarchical distinction between ordained and lay, they are more properly 'one people' whose distinctions pertain to their individual functions.

Typically, the call to officership is understood as a lifetime commitment involving sacrifices (e.g. no tobacco or alcohol). Salvation Army officers receive an allowance, somewhere in the region of £8,000, with provision for housing and various expenses including council tax,

---

[49] Salvationist.org
https://www.salvationist.org/extranet_main.nsf/vw_sublinks/FA9C803EA3D8448880256BBB0035DCD6?openDocument (last accessed January 28, 2013)
[50] The structure of personnel runs, in ascending order, as follows: Cadet, Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lt. Colonel, Colonel, Commissioner, Chief of Staff, General. Cadet is the title given to those in training to be Salvation Army Officers. Lieutenant, Captain, and Major are the regular ranks for Salvation Army officers. A Cadet is commissioned to the rank of Lieutenant, and after 5 years promoted to Captain, then after fifteen years receives the rank of Major in recognition of service. Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, Commissioner and General are all special appointment ranks in that they are only given to officers in senior leadership positions. Terms may vary.
[51] Harold Hill, *Officership in the Salvation army: A Case Study in Clericalisation*, Unpublished thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2004, pp. 246.

travel, a pension, and funeral costs (such that employees of the Salvation Army often earn more than officers). Such an allowance relieves the Officer of the need for separate employment, but is not perceived in the same terms as one might a fixed-salary. The undertaking signed by the officer commits him/her to a number of conditions which ensure full availability, including the appointment of posts, and the renunciation of any legal claim to the benefits of employer status. While this safeguards the army against legal action, it also precludes access on the part of officers to employment tribunals.

Officership has impacted on marriage and women's ministry. Traditionally officers took wives from the ranks of the Salvationists and vice-versa, although Officers may now marry non-serving members. Thus while ministry has been a distinctive feature of Salvation Army work female officers were traditionally awarded smaller allowances, with payment being made to the husband. Single women were required to resign their commission when they married and both parties had to resign officership in the case of the breakdown of the marriage, regardless of fault. It was not until 1995 that all married women officers were granted rank in their own right and, more recently, catered for with the introduction of single-spouse service, separate retirement ages and recognition of individual gifts when deciding married couples' appointments.

In sum, one could say that governance in the Salvation Army involves the exercise of organizational authority in which those in authority delegate within a hierarchal structure. This model highlights the need for calling.[52] The question is where the balance lies between pragmatism and Gospel.

## *Governance and Structure*

Army operations are divided geographically into Territories, which are then further sub-divided into divisions and corps. Territories usually correspond to the particular countries in which the Salvation Army is represented. The regional unit within territories is called a Division and is administered by Divisional Commanders who are responsible to the Territorial Commander. A Division occupies the same structure place as a Diocese of the Church of England or what Catholics would also call the Local Catholic Church (as opposed to the parish). Each Division consists of a number of corps and social centres which are mostly run by officers of varying rank.

The Salvation Army equivalent for a parish or local congregation/community is a Salvation Army corps. Each corps is led by a Corps Officer, (the Army equivalent of a minister who is responsible to the Divisional Commander). Congregations are composed of soldiers (those who live by the Salvationist tenants) and Adherents (those who attend although do not share the level of commitment). In turn, Adherents incorporate Recruits (a person who has professed conversion and is undergoing instruction to prepare for enrolment as a soldier), junior soldiers (a young person, from age 7 upwards to approximately 15/16 who signs a pledge, and affirms a promise regarding life-style), new seekers (those who wish to become

---

[52] Vern Jewett, 'An Examination of Ecclesiastical Authority in The Salvation Army in The United States of America,' *MA Thesis*, Unpublished, Candler School of Theology, Emory University In Atlanta, Georgia, 1987. http://salvationarmyusa.org/usn/Publications/WD_1999_Nov_5_Ecclesiastical_Authority.pdf (accessed 2012).

members with no previous Salvation Army background) and YP seekers (teenagers wishing to become members with no previous Salvation Army background).[53]

## Northern Division: Governance

The Northern Division operates under two central trusts of the national body:

- the Salvation Army Trust (Central Funds), the charitable objects of which, as defined by its Trust Deed of 1891 are for 'The advancement of the Christian religion' and the 'advancement of education, the relief of poverty and other charitable objects beneficial to society'. Hence, evangelism plays a key role.[54]

- the Salvation Army Social Work Trust (Social Work Funds), the specific objectives of which are the relief of poverty, sickness, suffering, distress, incapacity or old age; the advancement of education and the provision of training in Christian and moral principles and the assistance of those in need.

The Salvation Army Northern Division services the communities through 45 corps, with an average congregation size for worship of 29. There are five Social Service Centres, two Community Centres, and a host of other forms of social outreach programs.

The seat of the Northern Division is the Divisional Headquarters, currently serviced by seven full-time Salvation Army Officers and ten full-time administrative staff. The Army also employs a number of part-time and full-time staff through its various missionary activities such as educational projects and mobile emergency units. The Divisional Commander has overall responsibility for the Division,[55] whose principle, in undertaking efficient management of the Division, should be to fulfil through delegation rather than administration. The Divisional Commander is Chairman of the Divisional Strategy Council, the Business Board, the Appointments Board and the Candidates' Board, and a member also of all advisory boards.

---

[53] H. Hill, *Leadership in the Salvation Army: A Case Study in Clericalism,* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 332-333.
[54] The Salvation Army, *Financial Report,* 2006, Charity Registration No. 241779.
[55] Ibid, 2.

The Division relies on six Boards:[56]

1. The Divisional Business Board (weekly): sub-board of the Salvation Army Trust Company. Four members form a quorum, the board deals with all expenditure. Their operations are governed by international regulation and by the guidelines determined by the board of the Trustee Company. The secretary is the Divisional Administrative Officer. Members include, the Divisional Commander, Director of Women's Organisations, Director for Personnel, Director for Evangelism, Director for Social Program, Director for Finance and Administration.

2. The Divisional Strategy Council: forum for coordinating the work in support of the Army mission (weekly, must meet monthly), church growth, new developments in social services, young people and youth-work, adult and family, community work, fundraising, localised projects, divisional events. Ex-officio members include: Divisional Commander, Director of Women's Organisations, Director for Personnel, Director for Evangelism, Family Officer, Youth Officer, Director for Social Program, Director for Finance and Administration.

3. The Divisional Appointments Board: advisory body for formulating proposals regarding he appointment of Salvation Army Officers in leadership in Corps throughout the Division. Membership includes: Divisional Commander, Director of Women's Organisations, Director for Personnel, Director for Evangelism.

4. Divisional Candidates Board: to monitor candidate recruitment. Membership includes: Divisional Commander, Director of Women's Organisations, Director for Personnel, Director for Evangelism, Director for Social Program.

5. Divisional Advisory Council: an advisory council made up of diverse members and functions to advise the Divisional Commander of Mission Strategy.

6. Further to this, there is a Divisional Youth Advisory Council.

## Finance

The finances of the Division run a large deficit so, given the overall budget, approximately half of that money comes from the corps; i.e. tithes and donations, with the rest made up with support from Territorial Headquarters (THQ). Overall some 65% of the corps are funded from the national pot. Crucial in this regard are the national financial resources of the

---

[56] Update from Major of Northern Division: on the various boards and councils there is no Divisional Director of Social Service now it is renamed, Divisional Director for Community Services. There is no Divisional Advisory or Youth Advisory, there is a Youth Forum. In addition, there is in place the following: Divisional Training and Development Council, which looks at all aspects of training for Officers, employees and volunteers. Divisional Safe Mission Council, which in other terms is known as Health and Safety. This covers risk assessments, fire drills, first aid, food hygiene, accident reports, safety at buildings covering all aspects and compliance issues. Divisional Safeguarding Board, covering CRB checks now known as DBS, safeguard issues for all age groups, children's advocate and child protection coordinator, codes of conduct, complaints, risk assessment and management plans for blemished disclosures, safe and sound training for all age groups, policy and procedures.

Salvation Army as a whole through which struggling Divisions are funded. The Divisions run a tithing system, with 10% of corps' takings being passed to DHQ which in turn tithes 10% to THQ. Corps are run as single units and encouraged to be financially independent. Nonetheless, governing from missional perspective within the northeast, the understanding is that corps operate with a view to supporting the poorest, rather than encourage the poorest to support it, so while the Army runs the highest deficit budget of the region's denominations, it does not appear as a crisis on their horizon.

The Army's stance on gambling means that national government funding through lottery schemes is not available, thereby diminishing possible areas of financial support. Similarly, the possibility of local/national grants for social services is also increasingly being put under question by regulations required in national law (e.g. providing provisions for same-sex couples in the Army's social-service centres). This suggests that funding opportunities are becoming more restricted.

Nonetheless, from the regional perspective, this means that the link between finance and strategy is carefully considered and hugely important: strategy and budgeting go hand in hand. Whilst from the perspective of the local corps, emphasis is on developing a mission/vision or strategy prior to financial considerations which can be sorted out in conjunction with the Division's Director of Finance.

## Corps: Governance

The corps is the local Salvation Army unit, equivalent to a parish or local congregation. The corps is run by a Corps Council, an advisory group of senior local officers (i.e. non-commissioned volunteers) and other members of the corps, including adherents and members. The Council advises the corps' Corp Officer on local policy and programme. A Corps Council is established in every local centre in accordance with the Orders and Regulations Governing Corps Councils and is encouraged to take ownership for the Corps Mission Programme. Typically, a corps program will include: weekday public meetings, bible study, house groups, age-related meetings, parent and toddlers, band/choir rehearsal etc.

Corps budgeting is undertaken by, a) the Corps Officer, b) the Local Finance Officer, c) a Divisional Headquarters representative annually. The process begins with, 1) a draft budgeting document is created which defines the financial status of a corps; 2) where a surplus or neutral budget is recorded, it is submitted to DHQ for recommendation; 3) where there is a shortfall the budget is submitted to Divisional headquarters where the Divisional Director of Business and Administration considers further support funding. The Divisional Director for Business and Administration can consider the allocation of Mission Support Resources from a budget allocated by Territorial Headquarters (£500,000).

Corps accounting is undertaken weekly by the Corps Officer and Corps Finance Local Officer. Transactions/Banking is reported monthly to Divisional Headquarters. Budget monitoring is undertaken monthly by the Corps Officer and Corps Finance Local Officer as well as the Director of the Business Board and Administration and involves monthly reports and bank reconciliation. An Income and Expenditure report is issued to the Corps, highlighting variations to the budget which must be managed either locally or divisionally.

Bank accounts are reconciled and a monthly report is issued from DHQ to THQ. The Salvation Army has its own Bank, *The Reliance Bank*.

It is the responsibility of the Director of Evangelism to ensure that all corps operate a Mission Development Plan. His aim is not to provide one but facilitate corps in devising their own to reflect the local situation. The Mission Development Plan sets out the individual strategy for particular corps. Mission Plans are put in place bi-annually, although the document is fluid in regard to progress. The Mission Development Plan is formulated by, 1) Corps Officers, 2) Corps Council, 3) Director for Evangelism, and may engage areas such as, community services, youth and children's work, finance and resources. The Corps Officer, Corps Council, and Divisional Director for Evangelism meet quarterly to discuss the Plan.

## Learning and Formation

While regional level departments include dealing with youth and children's work, it does not deal with adult education, yet alongside social outreach, one of the prime responsibilities of the officers in their local churches is the work of adult Christian formation. A typical local congregation ('corps' or 'church') in the Salvation Army would consist of approximately 90% soldiers, the remainder being 'adherent members'. Those seeking to be soldiers undertake a ten week course exploring doctrinal ('what we believe and why') and practical ('discipline') issues. Courses are entered into without a formal commitment on either side.

The current manual used in the course is Chick Yuill's *Battle Orders: Salvation Army Soldiership* (London: The Salvation Army, third edition, 1997). The weekly sessions include worship and prayer, together with a range of more explicitly educational activities: sharing 'homework,' direct teaching, Bible reading, and discussion.

Salvationist worship in the northeast follows a traditional pattern, with some three-quarters of church members still attending services twice on a Sunday. Preaching is regarded as the primary forum for presenting ideas and challenges. This is usually (but not universally) the responsibility of a Salvation Army officer. Group work is little developed in many churches but worship is always regarded as a central Christian learning experience and taken very seriously. Sermons, worship, soldier training, and other learning events express the core values of Salvationism, which include a passion for working with the poor and outcast of society.

## Strategy

The Salvation Army is currently experiencing a drastic drop in the number of Salvationists in the North East. The chart below offers a window into average weekly attendances at collated activities in the Northern Division (i.e. worship, prayer groups, mission activity, but excluding social outreach programs such as Hostels), which is further broken down into Adults, and Adults and Children.[57] Statistics record all attendees, not just Salvationists.

---

[57] Corps Statistics 2012, Statistical department THQ.
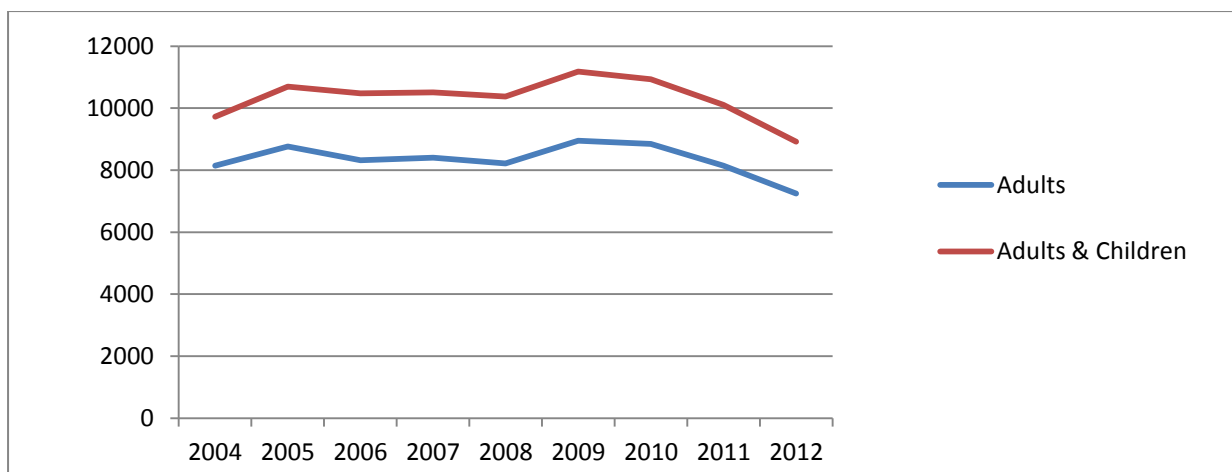
The chart records an 11% drop for adult attendance in activities over a seven-year period (1.57% a year); an 8% drop for adults and children over the same period (1.14% a year). However, as indicated in the chart, the drop from 2010-2012 amounts to a drop in the total (adults and children) of 18% (6% a year over the three-year period) suggesting that any previously high was artificial, or that the trend in decline is increasing. Arguably. the Army has experienced radical drops in attendance before, in particular between 1888 and 1894 the number of British Corps declined from 1412 to 1211, a drop of 15% in 6 years. However, the scale of the current drops dwarfs previous falls.

The response follows their strong emphasis on mission priorities, with understanding the needs of a community placed above the need of a worship centre, a train of thought that comes after a process of rationalisation and centralisation of the Division's worship centres. The process of rationalisation continues to be a strategic priority. Further to that, the Division encourages corps initiatives which give fresh expression to the Army (i.e. parent and toddler groups; breakfast mornings etc.). The impact of the territorial wide strategy ALOVE (what amounts to an internal reformation, challenging the Army's identity around issues of uniforms and band formation with a view to attracting fresh members) appears to have little impact in the region, although a number of officers would clearly like the question addressed more widely.

Strategy at local level appears reasonably well developed (with some corps more focused than others), and structured through the application of Mission Development plans which all corps are encouraged to develop in tandem with the Director of Evangelism and the Treasurer. Strategies cited reflected the needs of the local communities.

Scoring of strategy at local level was comparable with development of strategy, albeit marginally higher than effectiveness. At regional level the development of strategy was deemed better than effectiveness with an overall very high score (i.e. much better than average – 1.86) a feature indicative of the way that strategy takes root at the local level.

It appears that regional strategy is local strategy; i.e. strategy comes through the divisional strategy meetings (every month or six weeks) and entails reviewing the centres in the division, especially those presenting obviously strategic plans for the future, with a view to

feeding down to them strategy that we'd like to help them with; mission development […] to resource and empower the local churches to achieve their strategic goals.

In more specific terms, as the Regional Commander put it strategy can be summed up in the following terms

So obviously we deal with the decline of our numbers and obviously we are promoting through program to try and rectify that and address it with how you're going to do this, and then they're reviewed annually again by ourselves.

Obviously finance is a very important part, whether a church is self-supporting or whether we give a grant for mission aid, because they're not making it on their own. We are trying to bring about the reduction of that every year; they have got to find some way to lift their finances locally. Because we can't keep giving them financial aid. So that's addressed annually because it is a concern.

And obviously personal leadership, whether there are local people, if you don't recruit people you don't have local leaders to help, then if you don't have local leaders you've not also go people in power to raise, fundraise and develop programs to help financially, people's giving as well, personnel tithing, giving to the church as well. So those are the three major ones that we address corporately together.

## *Questions Arising*

### Strengths

The following can be identified as strengths which the Salvation Army – Northern Division can offer to other traditions:

1. Clarity in the decision making processes and governance arrangements.

2. DHQ is perceived in wholly supportive terms by the local corps.

3. Good system in place on the part of the DHQ for the development and implementation of local strategy.

4. Able to combine hierarchical model with a sense of devolved power and flexibility in the possible formations and expressions for mission.

### Open Questions

The following can be identified as open questions which the Northern Division might seek to address, and where learning from other traditions may be of assistance:

1. To what extent has the observance of Army tradition occluded the required pragmas for Gospel mission in the current situation? Or, where does the balance lies between pragmatism and Gospel?

2. To what extent does the hierarchical structure of ministry facilitate the congregation in participation?

3. While relations between the local corps and DHQ remain strong, how well developed are bonds between corps? What networks exist to help corps share resources?

4. How will the Salvation Army address internal questions about identity and corps representation? 'Fresh expressions' of corps are springing up. How can the vision of corps in this regard be developed further?

5. To what extent will the rationalisation of worship centres in favour of social programs of care undermine the basis for social care?

6. To what extent would the community practices be further consolidated through sacramental understanding?

## Phase II: Empirical Investigation

### *Governance*

Our initial interviews probed the nature of governance. How well developed is it, and how effective? The results reflected the way the Army embodies a series of paradoxes: e.g. a strong hierarchy which is nonetheless employed to allow for the greatest level of flexibility and autonomy to the local corps. And likewise, at the local level this same paradox was noted.

For example: Local Corps Council was said to provide a 'of kind of ownership and risk-taking over responsibilities' and 'an opportunity for the whole congregation to be represented'. The Council provides a forum for a 'consensus building approach,' variously drawing on, where applicable, representative Salvationists and the Corps Finance Team. Yet it is also clear that this model is underpinned in other ways by 'an autocratic style,' said to be 'engrained' in the culture. So for example, as one interviewee put it: 'In certain circumstances, yes, my wife and I work closely together so we would often discuss and come to a decision ourselves because we are the leaders of the Corp'. Likewise, another officer, while not considering the system 'hierarchical' added:

> [B]ut at the same time it can be, because if we sit down and the chief decision is: this is where we'd like to go, they can sit there and say, 'I really don't feel that's the best way we should go'; bottom line is that the corps officer can make the decision, and sometimes you have to make the decision […] at which point they have to just say: OK, because they know actually they're just an advisory board.

In short, while the forum is democratic, the position of the officer allows a strong hand to be given, depending on the interest of the officer. Hence, while the style of leadership was described by an officer in terms of bringing the congregation/council 'into as many discussions as we possibly can so we can make a decision that carries them all,' it was also noted by the officer that 'sometimes you need to just say: 'this is the way we are going''.

Similarly, while Divisional HQ is hierarchically privileged, when asked 'in a word or phrase, how would you describe the governance system' at regional level from the perspective of the corps, lay and ordained', the overwhelming perception was one of 'support'. For example, as

one office put it, 'I think that the shift over the last decade or so has been a shift towards the role of DHQ to be supportive one, rather than one of…,' the Officer continued, 'of course there is a management dimension to that, but they have a responsibility to manage and support me'. And another:

> My perception of DHQ would be that underneath it all, is that same spirit of collegiality, but in practice it needs to be far more structured and bolted down […] I'm not sure they can be as free as us, […] they are a management structure. When asked 'Does it work well?' this same Officer replied 'For us it does, in terms of their support for our ministry it does. […] I can phone and there is somebody on the other end who will be able to talk me through how we navigate some particular problem. They are very responsive if we ask for something we get an answer.

DHQ, then, effectively acts as a centre of expertise and a facilitator through the financial board and the DDE. Where one Corps is shown to lack a history of self-development, DHQ will 'get more involved; if they have a strong leadership team, who have got a handle on what they are going to do in the future, then we'll have all that to manage form a distance'. However, as one regional interviewee put it:

> the driving force of the Salvation Army is the work or the mission and people in the corps, their desire to develop mission where they are.

This paradox was reflected in the scoring we asked officers and members to undertake in regard of the 'development' and 'effectiveness' of both governance and strategy at the various levels. Local levels scored marginally better in effectiveness than development. That is, the consensual approach led to a more effective means of governance if not as tightly developed as the Divisional Headquarters. In contrast, the Divisional headquarters scored marginally better on development than effectiveness. While Divisional Headquarters was deemed less effective than developed, this of itself can be attributed to a highly bureaucratised system which while it could be streamlined in theory, did not seem to impede greatly its overall effectiveness.

Hence, no real evidence of institutional tension was found: from the perspective of one corps officer:

> we're given freedom to develop and work it out here, and I think that's been something that I think in the last decades certainly the leadership of the Salvation Army, nationally and divisionally, has tried to give authority and power and responsibility to the local corps.

As another officer put it:

> I would say that DHQ lets us take the bulk of our local decisions and will support where they can.

Complementing this from a regional perspective, while the regional opinion of one officer accepted that tensions could arise, these were largely seen to be reflective of the relation between a local corps and THQ, especially where a local corps needs a project to be signed-off by a trustee down in London. Nonetheless, it was recognised that sometimes delays serve as 'a safety net' ensuring 'that we're good stewards of the money that we're raising', and on the whole 'those that are in post want it to achieve the mission at grass roots, and whatever

decisions are made is to facilitate the mission of the church'. Yet, these were also qualified by two interviewees, local and regional, ordained and lay, as 'frustrations' rather than tensions.

Hence, when asked 'Where does decision-making power actually lie and how well-distributed is it?' one local officer answered, 'situated at the desk of the Corp officers'. But as another pointed out: 'we could make life very difficult for ourselves if we didn't ensure that we had the support of the people, so in some respects the people have power'.

Regionally, interviews indicated the local level as the basis of power-making decision: 'It sounds contradictory, but at church level they make decisions, they try different things, they're given permission to do whatever they want to do'.

All of this is not to forget the underlying faith drive. When asked about authority and its relative managerial/spiritual dimension, both appeared well correlated. All regional leaders are Salvation Army officers. So 'basically', as one interviewee put it:

> their first task is as a spiritual leader and then depending on their role or responsibility other factors come into play. Indeed, the ordained local responses clearly indicated that they see their role in terms of spiritual leadership. Lay responses highlighted how different situations required different approaches, but underlined the sense of 'good' spiritual and managerial leadership at the top of DHQ.

In sum, the Salvation Army initially provides a model form of governance. Little wonder the prestigious American based consultancy, Booz Allen Hamilton, in 2005, voted the Salvation Army one of the ten most enduring institutions, one of two non-profit organisations to be so identified.[58] The report cites its unusual governance structure (most non-profit organisations aim to achieve a 'flat chart'), the use of a uniform as a simple but efficient means of strengthening the internal organisational culture within a global context, its ability to generate high levels of donations facilitated through a strong sense of public trust, and its ability to motivate its workers through the 'faith dimension'.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

We asked corps members about their attitudes to their current immediate leader (i.e. their Corp's Officer); 163 corps members who had been members (e.g. adherent or Salvationist) of the Salvation Army for an average of 49.5 years; member of their specific corps for an average of 30 years, and known their Officer for an average of 3.17 years. In 62% the officer was male, in 38% female. In 33% the respondent was male, in 67% female.

Amongst other things, the questionnaire probed whether ministerial leadership matters and how it works, and the processes through which it transmits its effects.

In particular, we employed a measure of 'servant leadership' based on Liden's (2007) conceptualisation of servant leadership as comprising seven core dimensions:

- Emotional healing: the act of showing sensitivity to others' personal concerns.

---

[58] Booz Allen Hamilton, 'The World' s Most Enduring Institutions,' (2005), http://www.boozallen.com/media/file/143411.pdf (accessed 2013).

- Creating value for the community: a conscious, genuine concern for helping the community.

- Conceptual skills: possessing the knowledge of the organization and tasks at hand so as to be in a position to effectively support and assist others, especially immediate followers.

- Empowering: encouraging and facilitating others, especially immediate followers, in identifying and solving problems, as well as determining when and how to complete work tasks.

- Helping subordinates grow and succeed: demonstrating genuine concern for others' career growth and development by providing support and mentoring.

- Putting subordinate's first: using Mission Plan

- Relationships and servanthood: words to make it clear to others (especially immediate followers) that satisfying their work needs is a priority.

- Behaving ethically: interacting openly, fairly, and honestly with others.[59]

There is strong evidence from the data that ministerial leadership matters for the attitudes and behaviours of corps members and that servant leadership is typically positively associated with important variables such as spiritual well-being, life and role satisfaction and willingness to engage in extra effort on the church's behalf. Mediation analysis (i.e. how ministerial leadership transmits its effect) finds some important mediators, for example, psychological empowerment. To this extent, the corps are making good on the recommendations following consultation by International Commission on Officership (2000), of which the first was that:

> Territories continue to move away from authoritarian models of command and develop consultative models of leadership. Such models will be characterized by consistency with gospel values; servant leadership; cultural relevance; flexibility; increased and wider participation and mutual accountability.[60]

We also probed the level of responsibility on the part of corps members to tease out aspects of social commitment and engagement. We can measure this by drawing out levels of understanding between members and their leader and thus differentiate 'in' and 'out' groups. That is, leaders often develop differentiated relationships with individual members of the corps they lead, fostering special relationships with an 'inner circle of group members' who give more of their time and service and who, in return, are given higher levels of responsibility within the corps: the 'in-group'. Conversely, there is usually an 'out-group;'

---

[59] In the analysis, we aggregate these dimensions to produce a single servant leadership measure. In addition, we include a measure of a more authoritarian leadership style in churches - 'cultic leadership'. We examine two dimensions of cultic leadership: Spiritual Aloofness and Traditional values aggregated to form a single construct.

[60] The Salvation Army International Commission on Officership. 2000. Final report and the General's consultation with officers. London: The Salvation Army. Recommendation 1.

i.e. those members who are given low levels of choice or influence. There is evidence in the Salvation Army data for both an in-group, with 56% of respondents saying their minister understands their problems and needs either quite a bit/a great deal, and an out-group, with 15% respondents reporting that their minister recognizes their potential not at all/a little.

Corps also appear productive. By productivity, it is meant the collective efforts of a corps members are tapped via a subjective measure. For example, the levels of corps effort are good with 77% respondents reporting that everyone gives their best efforts in the corps.

We found strong evidence of high level of group cohesion with 97% agreeing that working in the corps was like working with friends; and a high level of identification between the values member's hold personally and the values of the institution. For example, 88% agreeing that the corps has the same values as them in concern for others. The level of shared values with the minister is also high, with 96% agreeing that their officer represents values that are important to them.

More generally, high levels of organizational identification were noted among our respondents. 82% agree that they usually say 'we' rather than 'they' when talking about their corps and 81% agreeing that when someone criticizes their corps it feels like a personal insult.

However, personal identification with the leader is rather weaker in comparison; with 20% disagreeing that when someone criticizes their officer it feels like a personal insult. Further, while Group potency, a measure of a corps group's belief that it can be effective in its tasks and duties – is reasonable, with 53% of members agreeing that the corps group has confidence in itself to a considerable/great extent. 42% 'disagreed that they had any control over what happens in their corps'. In other words, a little under half have a low sense of self-determination and impact within their local organisation.

However, 85% of respondents agree that they are satisfied with their role in the corps and their life as a whole. Hence, generally the level of intent to quit or switch corps life is low although on a scale of impact it is difficult to assess this figure. For example, only 10% are thinking of quitting their corps. In the case-study, by way of a further example, one family in one of the corps combines formal adherence to the Salvation Army with membership of the Methodist Church in the neighbouring village.

What then of the commitment exercised toward a corps? Commitment can have three bases, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Firstly, members may have 'affective' commitment in the sense that they personally identify with the corps and choose to be associated with it. For example, 70% of our respondents say they feel the corps' problems are their own, while 10% say that they do not feel part of the family in the corps. Overall, it appears from these responses that the level of affective commitment to the corps is strong. The second form of commitment is referred to as 'normative' commitment, which involves the individual feeling a sense of duty or obligation to the corps. The basis of commitment here is rather different, involving a feeling that one ought to remain in the corps. Here levels of commitment appear to be good but 22% said that they would not feel guilty if they left the corps. Finally, there may be a sense of commitment simply because individuals feel that the costs of leaving the corps would be too great, the so-called 'continuance commitment'. The

results here suggest that continuance commitment levels are relatively high with 59% of respondents saying it would be very hard for them to leave the corps on their own accord.

So, the picture that emerges is of corps with little sense of self-ownership and with fewer natural leaders emerging, fewer people capable and able of taking responsibility and that this may prove a considerable challenge for the corps, especially given the course of rationalising worship at the expense of mission in line with the provisions of local authority.

## *Learning and Formation*

The findings of our Learning and Formation observation-participation are taken from four Salvation Army Corps. Broadly speaking a range of activities were undertaken;. Alongside morning service and lunch there is a Former Home League group (weekly), now 'adult and family ministries' where a variety of theological issues are addressed including prayer, hymn and Bible reading, as well general interest sessions on age; what October means to us; stained glass windows; objects that mean something to us; fashion night (from second hand clothes); refugees, and autistic adults. Bible study was undertaken but not universally, as well as Alpha groups and Band practice.

In response to the question 'What works well?' people spoke about shared activities: 'When we've shared a meal it has enabled conversation', and ' a feeling in the group that you can say what you feel (share a lot of confidences) informally too'.

One lady suggested: 'Just being together – being friendly: we're like a big family' and another 'small groups are friendly – you do get to know one another'. These comments should serve to highlight the subjectivist ends valued by the participants; i.e. that the outcomes of Christian learning are the sense of community and trust as opposed to the intrinsic value of the learning. Hence, the perceived impediments to Christian learning were centred less on the lack of experience as the anxiety of the situation: 'It's hard to walk into a strange place'. And 'if here were more people, you would be frightened to speak up'. In one case people were worried that they may have to say something.

In this sense there is little to distinguish the learning cross denominationally, although the specific nature of band practice was cited as a cause which precluded at times other formative learning experiences, not least biblical. The 'outcomes' of Christian learning and formation in the salvation army groups is given below:

- I can't pretend everything's rosy, but what I've got (here) is special. They think I'm crackers, but we're all crackers.

- Message: God made us individuals and loves us for it: God loves us for who we are. We all have our part to play. As we come close to God, he gives us gifts and talents to build up his kingdom and build each other up.

- The Church is very good at knocking people down. We should be building them up.

- We were very apprehensive at the start of the ten weeks, but it has been a great encouragement to us – we've had some great discussions.

- We've been able to share more deeply.

- Get to know each other better. Get to know officers and what their faith is – it's encouraging.

## *Case Study*

Our case study at an individual level conforms in many respects to the above outlined model. Horden is a former mining community on the Durham coast.[61] Nearby Peterlee offers some employment opportunities but Horden itself seems to be struggling. In increasingly stark contrast to its magnificent natural setting, the town is rather 'down at heel'. Shops are shutting, the housing stock is poor, there is little sign of investment and the population is increasingly elderly. Nonetheless, it is a place with a strong sense of identity: a pit village still struggling to come to terms with the closure of its mine, left with a struggling economy and an uncertain future. Inadequate public transport reinforces its sense of abandonment and it feels overshadowed by Peterlee to the West.

Leadership of the Corps is shared by Sheila and Michael who have leadership both of the Horden Corps and the Easington Corps. Their style of leadership is one of warmth, encouragement and a deep level of personal engagement with their people. They share their lives with them in a deep, affecting and impressive way. They believe that it is important to be seen to share the platform at meeting, but divide other tasks according to their individual character and competences: Sheila manages the finances, Michael does the other paperwork. Sheila works closely with the local community; Michael undertakes outside speaking engagements and values his role as Ecumenical Officer. However, they admit that ministry in the Salvation Army is 'hands on,' even in attending to the minutiae of building maintenance, demands that one must be 'a jack of all trades'.

Like many Corps, Horden has soldiers, adherents and others for whom the Salvation Army is no less their home. Between all three, the membership is not large, but has gown recently. There are fifteen soldiers and three adherents as well as others who regard the Salvation Army as their church but who have not adopted formal membership.

Leadership of the Horden Corps is shared in particular with Mary, the Home League[62] Secretary, who also leads 'Kool-Kids' with great good humour and considerable insight and wisdom. The 'Drop-In' is managed by Alison, an adherent, who also tends the grounds. The 'Lunch Club' is run by Sheila herself and the 'Parent and Toddler Group' by a group of the mothers themselves, who otherwise have no link with the Salvation Army.

---

[61] I visited Horden on eight occasions. I began with a visit to the Home League in November, 2010 and then made several other visits early in 2011. I came to the Lunch Club on Monday, 28 February, attended Morning Worship (a Dedication) on Sunday, March 5 and Evening Worship on Sunday, March 13. I came to the Drop-In on Thursday, March 11, the Parent and Toddler Group on Wednesday, March 16 and then Kool Kids (singing) followed by the start of band practice on March 18. Finally, I met with Sheila and Michael on the afternoon of May 5

[62] Home League is a fellowship group designed to influence women in the creation and development of Christian standards in personal home life. The fourfold aims of worship, fellowship, education, and service have been immensely empowering to women worldwide.

However, as officers, they are clear that they make the decisions at Horden. They have considerable freedom to manage the life of the Corps and its mission in the community, bound only by limited financial resources. They feel that ministry is a privilege and they are strongly supported in what they do by divisional and territorial command.

There are two meetings for worship each Sunday, in the morning at 10 am and then in the evening at 6 pm. On the morning I attended, a family brought their child to be dedicated. The family had links with the Corps but not especially strong; one grandma was a Salvationist. They talked among themselves of the event as a 'Christening,' despite Sheila's clear explanation of the distinct Salvationist understanding of Dedication. It was not an admittance of a new member to the Salvation Army and was not recognised by the Salvationists themselves as a distinct 'sacrament' but as an act of Christian service to a family wishing to do the best for their child in the eyes of God.

During the evening worship there were fourteen people present, four or five of whom were in uniform. There were songs then prayer, notices and offertory, a reading and address, then a final prayer and song. The songs were traditional favourites, accompanied by an electric organ and with a little gentle congregational clapping in the choruses. Michael led the worship and Sheila preached. During her address the congregation were happy to engage in good-humoured banter with her, which she was happy to encourage. There was a friendly, relaxed ease to the worship. At the end, folk stayed and chatted, continuing the conversations that had been underway before the service began.

Service to the community is integral to the identity and ethos of the Salvation Army. Several regular events express this corporate social responsibility at Horden. A Lunch Club takes place every Monday, a Parent and Toddler every Tuesday and Wednesday morning and a Drop-In every Thursday morning. The Lunch Club offers a simple cooked meal and, more importantly, the opportunity to meet and talk is hugely popular with a loyal clientele. Sheila herself cooks the meal.

The Drop-In attracts seven or eight regular members and, like the lunch-club, offers friendship, a place to talk and a listening ear, supported by a steady stream of coffee, home-made cakes and bacon butties. The Corps Shop operates at the same time – a kind of rolling jumble sale. One man with learning difficulties is made welcome and given a role, helping in the kitchen. The extended Corps is a family for him, he says. The Parent and Toddler Group is a self-run, low-cost support group, advertised mainly through word of mouth. Membership fluctuates. On the morning I went, there were about ten children.

In addition to these events, there is 'Kool-Kids,' the Corps choir. It meets on a Friday evening in the hall and is led by Mary. There are seven or eight under-tens, and a handful of teenagers and eight to ten adults, plus Sheila. Apart from the Sunday addresses during worship, the main initiative in adult learning is the Home League. This is led by Mary, a soldier of long-standing in the Horden Corps. Though primarily an adult group, it does not exclude youngsters. The focus of the group is as much about building community as it is learning and provides a safe place for people to talk. It is also an important bridge in the Corps for folk on the edge. More recently, Mary has encouraged the group to attempt to do some Bible study.

Money is tight in Horden and it is impossible for the Corps to meet all its costs itself. Very few of its members are in paid employment. Sheila doubles as treasurer, a significant element in an administrative work-load which the Easington Corps also demands up to two full days each week. The Horden Corps is supported by Mission Funding, but contributes itself through regular giving and fund-raising. This includes a second-hand shop, which draws in around £1,200 per year; a regular income of £20 to £26 per week from the Thursday-Drop In and occasional hire fees, including as a 'polling station' which brings in a welcome £200.

## Ministry

Ministry, in practice, is shared. There is no sacramental role associated with ministry in the Salvation Army, just a strictly hierarchical process of decision making. At Horden this means that the Majors will find themselves cooking, cleaning, and doing odd jobs to maintain the building, as well as leading worship and representing the Salvation Army in the wider community. Soldiers lead groups, an Adherent runs the Band and Drop-in and the Parent and Toddler Group has its own leadership unrelated to the Army.

## Adult learning and formation

'We don't push the Bible down people's throats', says Michael. Adult learning, such as it is at Horden, is thus neither systematic, nor explicit, nor immediately obvious, but is related both to the worshiping life of the Corps and also, perhaps especially, to its ministry of welcome, acceptance and service. The meetings of the Home League provide an example of this, in that friendship and acceptance come first. Informal learning, through the many opportunities to talk, reflect and serve together afforded to the Corps every week, is considerable. Through these, members discover the meaning of their Christian commitment and, in an atmosphere of acceptance and safety, are enabled to explore their hopes and fears. Thus in practice, the function of the Drop-In or Home League varies very little from many groups that gather with the more explicit purpose of Christian formation.

The kind of learning is informal and implicit. Organic learning evident in the Horden Corps plays a significant role in building a community with its own traditions, character, norms and customs. It is, in the best sense, a process of enculturation. As Michael and Sheila say, 'people learn more by how we live than what we say'. It is directed towards the building of a listening, caring community in which everyone is valued, and yet which respects and does not seek to question or to challenge traditional Salvationist patterns of leadership. Certain learning events, especially those around music, for example Kool Kids, are significant in that they are directed towards to maintaining a highly distinctively Salvationist culture in which a range of broadly popular styles of music are married to explicitly evangelical lyrics, and all done to the highest possible standard. I suspect that the practice of singing these kinds of songs in this kind of way gets under the skin of what it means to be a Salvationist far more effectively than, for example, membership of a choir that seeks to maintain a distinctively Anglican choral tradition might form an Anglican identity.

## Leadership and Learning

At Horden, learning is organic and real and fits with the everyday life a relatively small community, whose members are tightly bound to one another. One might argue that it

involves little critical reflection. It does not seek to address changing patterns of ministry explicitly. Ministry and leadership in the Salvation Army are still largely dependent on a traditional hierarchical structure and organisation, although there is the possibility of allowing local Corps to respond to the needs of their communities in imaginatively different ways. Yet, as Sheila and Michael recognise, the survival and growth of the Horden Corps necessitates more members, soldiers and others learning to take more responsibility. They hope that out of the process of building up of a community at Horden new, local leaders will emerge naturally.

Formal ecumenical relationships are strongly supported by Michael in his role as Ecumenical officer, and as Chair of Churches Together in Horden and Easington. The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity is still seen by folk in Horden as important and is marked by a full week of events. Informal ecumenical links are also significant – through shared participation in local events, not least the various weekly activities of the Corps. There is a sense that ecumenical relationships have achieved a natural balance – or maybe a plateau. They tick over with occasional events and much informal contact and do not change significantly. The number of different Churches Together organisations (separately in Horden, Peterlee, and Easington) may also complicate the pattern of formal relationships.

The greatest changes seen to have taken place in the church over the last ten and fifty years is the decline in membership, which has only recently been arrested. It is difficult to assess or quantify the relative significance of a general decline in Salvation Army membership and the marked decline of Horden itself as a community. The latter has certainly had an adverse effect on the viability, maintenance and growth of the Horden Corps.

According to Sheila and Michael, in terms of the way the corps must change: 'the biggest worry is where the next generation of leaders is going to come from. People won't volunteer' Still, despite this uncertainty they remain optimistic. 'New people are flowing in', they say and believe this is God's answer to their prayer. They recognise that the Horden Corps may need to find new ways of being church. They are about to experiment with 'Messy Church', for example, and feel that the Corps needs to be become still more open. Their assertion that 'Horden is like an emerging church' rings true.

## *Summary*

### Outreach and/or Worship?

The strategic response to the decline in attendance and those coming forward for officership at regional level has been, for some time now, to

> dispose of and centralise and rationalise our worship centres, whilst at the same time
> trying to make sure, that a weekly service is delivered on a satellite basis, away from
> the worship centres.

In other words, the emphasis is less on establishing a centre for worship than on understanding what the needs of a given area are and finding mechanisms for delivering them (in particular in ways which tie into the needs expressed by the local authorities), such that there is an ability to deliver without having the encumbrances of buildings, bricks and mortars, which are much harder to maintain.

Arguably then, the statistics mask a more complex issue around membership and growth. Growth may be manifest in ways which do not necessarily impact on membership, e.g. a congregation's decision to resource an outreach centre of sorts which encourages people to develop their skills for wider community use. In doing so what is increased is both the provision to the poor and other social groups which may now relate to the congregation through their dealings, but not through membership. One might calls this as Mead and Percy do, 'organic growth' where the emphasis is on developing processes and networks of social bodies. Congregations shape their activities so as primarily to promote the community.[63] However, while the figures may mask 'organic growth' they nonetheless tell us that membership as a covenanted relationship is on the decline.

Martyn Percy's observation can be of help, that our assumptions about decline are often situated within wider cultural narratives. For example, in prevailing post-industrial working class areas, a culture may of-itself share in a 'tragic' as opposed to say 'charismatic' outlook. The problem then arises because this cultural narrative then validates the struggle of the church such that what initially appears as a complaint quickly becomes a kind of boast and subsequently growth of itself becomes a betrayal of the Gospel. In short, how one describes one's church only emerges from a complex web of oral history in which expectations have been already posited within the presuppositions. Putting the issue in terms of the Army, Roland Robertson has argued that

> many Salvationists […] were drawn from socially disadvantaged lower-middleclass, working class and destitute strata, and this in itself presented a strong incentive to achieve status qua status within the Army itself.

Indeed, in one interview the following comment was offered by an officer:

> The Salvation Army has traditionally worked with the underclass, for want of a better word, that's where the Salvation Army's community is […] if you're working with the poor, they are not going to generate, well even when they come into membership or service or being a receiver of community provision, they never turn into a financial fruitful resource for the church.

In the above example it is the presupposition of an 'underclass' that shapes the expectations about mission growth. It recognises *a priori* in the North East that it is there to support the poorest, rather than helping the poorest support it. Hence numerical growth in membership might act as a sign betrayal to their mission.

All of this is to raise a crucial question concerning the relationship between outreach and worship. How does the process of rationalising corps sit with the international statement:

> local corps cannot properly be understood unless seen primarily as local church congregations meeting regularly by grace and in Christ's name for worship, fellowship and service?[64]

This sentiment was reflected locally in the response of one officer on church-state relations:

---

[63] Martin Percy and Emma Percy, 'A View from the Pew: Ministry and Organic Church Growth,' in *Why Liberal Churches are Growing*, eds. M. Percy and I. Markham, (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 167-175.
[64] *The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ*, Ecclesiological Statement, IHQ, 2008.

> The Salvation Army is happy to employ anyone in the social service centres and I guess that is in keeping with the law. Some in the Salvation Army, myself to some extent, would argue that we could be a bit more selective in our advertising for place, in stipulating that people need to have to have a life, a Christian faith, because to some extent would the Salvation Army's social service ministry be Christian ministry if those who are practically putting hands on are not practicing faith, so in some senses the Salvation Army doesn't create a tension because it complies with the law, so there should be tension.

The issue may thus be summarized:

> to what extent does the strategic rationalisation of the Army bring its mission identity into conflict with the desire to create a Christian community?

In short, the issue may be put this way. Does the decline in membership and the emphasis on social service risk severing the essential ecclesial identity of the local corps, and hence the ecclesiological link between worship and mission?

## Identity, Leadership and Structure

The Army currently operates a two-tiered structure: Division and corps. However, the reduction in corps membership, coupled with a rationalisation of worship centres raises questions about the future of traditional corps life. There are three related issues here. First, should corps reassess their identity as a means to address the marginalisation of corps life? Second, how does the nature of leadership affect the possibility for innovative expressions of both leadership and corps life. Third, are the current configurations of governance systems and structures facilitating the potential for corps to evolve?

The question of corps identity has received national attention, addressed by the territorially wide strategy document ALOVE. Although launched in 2004, it represents the outworking of a decade and a half's reflection on the nature of church. In the 1990s many Salvationists were wrestling with the question, 'what are the fundamentals of the Salvation Army?' 'How important were brass bands and uniforms to its identity?' The debate took place across leadership, and was specifically driven by 'The Mission Team,' a reforming element within and across ranks. In answering the question, they made a special appeal to the Salvation Army's social mission, and in particular to establishing this vision for the young in ways which gave licence to create new models of worship and hence Salvationist identity – of which there are no few shortages globally. In short, the document is not so much seeking to address the youth alone, but rather, by ostensibly addressing the youth also seeking to address the corporate identity of the Salvation Army as whole.[65]

However, arguably ALOVE places too much emphasis on the new at the expense of the old, and there is little sense of its impact in the north-east where corps generally remain very traditional. Take for example the music.

Music is a striking feature of the Salvation Army. In 1879 and in March 1880 William Booth issued an order in the *War Cry* magazine for soldiers to learn instruments and form bands as a

---

[65] Alove, 2004-2006 Strategy Document, May 2004.

means to draw in the crowds. Army bands used traditional hymns but also based their performances on the melodies of well-known music-hall songs, only setting them to Christian lyrics.

The aim of all music making is to proclaim the gospel. Hence, music is taken as both a vehicle for worship – musical service is part of their total offering to God – and for mission – the aim of all music making is to proclaim the gospel. Music thus forms an essential part of each corps program and like many aspects of life is regulated.[66]

For example:

> All local music officers will be subject to Orders and Regulations for Local Officers as well as Regulations and Guidelines for Musicians. They must in every case be godly, loyal and devoted Salvationists.[67]

Yet, as one officer explained

> the institution of the Salvation Army has allowed the traditions of musical performance to highjack the living of faith, whereas they become more important than discipleship. So the institution that nurtures and maintains that set of priorities is counter-productive to growing and moving on in faith, simply because the priorities have been the wrong way around.

As he pointed out

> at one level 75% of our congregation are involved in playing in the band or singing in the choir […], and all the energies required in maintaining musical performance usurps any freedom or opportunity there might be for developing someone's faith.

Martyn Percey's volume *Why Liberal Churches are Growing* (2006), makes the argument that churches like people are at best 'studies in contradictions'.[68] Where pockets of vitality are discerned in old-line protestant churches (i.e. what used to be main-line churches) it is within those churches that embrace liberal streams, and in particular with a configuration of intentionality, contemporary worship and spiritual practices and programs. Those without strong intentionality and program are not likely to grow while those with high intentionality and contemporary worship are most likely to grow. The relevance of contemporary worship should not be overlooked. Those churches with high intentionality and program are good, but without contemporary worship and spiritual practices are unlikely to adapt.[69] Roozen highlights that it is not growth but this adaptive ability by which we can best discern pockets of vitality of which Horden's Kool-Kids music group is a good example.

'Kool-Kids' is the Corps choir. It meets on a Friday evening in the hall and is led by Mary. There are seven or eight under-tens, and a handful of teenagers and eight to ten adults, plus

---

[66] See Salvation Army, 'Regulations and Guidelines for Musicians,' 2000.
[67] Ibid, 14.
[68] Percy, 'Paradox and Persuasion: Alternative Perspectives on Liberal and Conservative Church Growth' *Why Liberal Churches are Growing*, ed. by M. Percy and I. Markham, (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 74.
[69] David Roozen, 'Oldline Protestantism: Pockets of Vitality within a Continuing Stream of Decline,' in *Why Liberal Churches Are Growing*, ed. by M. Percy and I. Markham, (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 119-142.

Sheila. The group clearly enjoy singing together. They are remarkably good, enthusiastic and disciplined, and their music-making is accompanied by a lot a smiles. There is some overlap with worship: they were preparing songs for the Mothers' Day [sic] Morning Meeting, but there was also simply the joy of making music together in the best Salvationist tradition of refusing to let the Devil have all the best tunes. Everyone is included, regardless of their musical ability, but they are encouraged to bring their best efforts to the common cause. One woman, clearly very nervous, was persuaded to sing a solo and was given warm encouragement by her friends. The words, even of familiar songs, including, for example, Beatles' favourites, are given an explicit and distinctive Christian slant as also befits the Salvationist tradition. Some words and music are official Salvationist settings, others are home-grown. In this respect, Salvationist music making is unlike that in any other Christian tradition.

However, the northeast as a whole remains wedded to its cultural history in many respects, including pit-bands. Brass remains a dominant feature of the musical landscape of the North East and its community tradition, and especially in the Salvation Army. So while ALOVE promises much, there is a sense in which any such reforms need to be context led, and part of a mixed economy of worship styles.

## Leadership

With overall figures for candidates falling, an International Conference of Leaders was held in Melbourne in 1998, following which an International Commission of Officership was established with the aim

> to review all aspects of the concept of officership in the light of the contemporary situation and its challenges, with a view to introducing a greater measure of flexibility into the service of officers.

There were two main considerations underlining the various terms of reference: first, the role of diverse ministries, e.g. the possibility of introducing short-term officer service or envoys (while strengthening the ideal of life-time service), or alternatively 'tent-makers', officers who engage in part-time secular employment by way of assisting the funding of their appointment.

However, many of the debates about new ministries fall within the tensions posed by the dichotomy between status and function. The introduction of clerical status to the commissioned officer (i.e. ordination) places the emphasis within officership upon life time service; while the shift to incorporate short-term services emphasises the functionality of officership and, hence, a less formal nature. The latter not only questions the traditional association of officership with corps work, but the hierarchical distinction between a soldier and an officer; i.e. there is nothing the officer can do that in theory cannot be done by the soldier. In the U.K. the number of people offering themselves for officer-training has been roughly equal to those offering themselves for auxiliary officership.[70]

---

[70] H. Hill, *Leadership in the Salvation Army: A Case Study in Clericalism*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 332-333.

A further problem underlying the development of leadership arises from our study of formation. Consider the following comment by a Corps Officer:

> I think what happens is, we don't give them any training for that part of the role. We don't say, this job is gonna entail this, or give you some training when you come in, what opinions or how to put a proposal forward. How do you know? You just expect people to come in, so the lollipop man might be in, he might have a valid contribution to make but tends to sit quiet because he does not know how to approach the situation; there is not an analysis of strategy plans; but that's to do with training. We could do a lot better with that.

The above example highlights something of the adult learning experience within corps life. To take the example of Horden, it is neither systematic, nor explicit, nor immediately obvious, but is related both to the worshiping life of the corps and perhaps especially, to its ministry of welcome, acceptance, and service. The meetings of the Home League provide an example of this, in that friendship and acceptance come first.

Informal learning, through the many opportunities to talk, reflect and serve together afforded to the corps every week, is considerable. Through these means members discover the meaning of their Christian commitment in an atmosphere of acceptance and safety, and are enabled to explore their hopes and fears. Thus, in practice, the function of the Drop-In or Home League varies very little from many groups that gather with the more explicit purpose of Christian formation.

All of this bears on strategy. When our lay interviewee was asked about strategy she was unable to cite a corps' strategy as such. As to reasons given:

> No, and that's because we're not getting the strategic thinking coming from the corps council. We might get it from one individual to another, but to work effectively it needs to be more consolidated to what is presently.

The interviewee highlighted the need for more formal training of lay representatives on the Corps Council.

The tension then lies between the desire on the one hand to develop innovative examples of corps life, in response to decline, including the possibility for auxiliary ministry, and the lack of formal training on the part of the soldiers. How might creative strategic thinking be developed within the context of spiritual formation?

## Structure

The final question concerning the future of corps life concerns the lack of a 'middle' tier in the overall regional governance structures. The Army currently operates a two-tiered structure: Division and corps. However, the reduction in corps membership, coupled with a rationalisation of worship centres raises questions about the level need for intra-corps support. By this I do not mean instances where an Officer may run two corps, but where there is a good working partnership between corps or localised clusters working together to rationalise governance and resources, and indeed allow for mixed economies of worship. Part of the problem lies in the creeping congregationalism – the result of rationalising worship centres, aging congregations, and a program of formation which obscures the potential for

future leadership. This counters the ordained structure of an army on the move together. A further problem lies in the hierarchical nature of leadership: how would authority operate between Corps Officers in a situation where churches may need to work as 'clusters'?

## Conclusion

The picture that emerges then is of an institution whose worshiping members (and thus future leaders) are in decline. This, coupled with financial considerations, has led the Division to rationalise in the direction of local service, and away from worship. Existing corps continue to function, offering local services, as well as an intimate family structure for their members, although continue to decline in covenanted membership. The corps that continue to show pockets of vitality are those with innovative worship and a series of programs, although these do not qualify as corps always in the traditional sense of the word. However, with ageing congregations facing the loss of leadership in the form of the traditional Ordained Officer, there is the sense that the congregation remains unformed in respect of training for leadership. Those corps that are doing well often do so because they model fresh expressions, where an innovative approach to worship is offered, such as Sanctuary 21 – Prayer 24. (I recently heard a lady looking in at the prayer cards adorning the walls say 'I never knew the Salvation Army prayed!). Yet these expressions equally eschew the traditional forms of music worship and identity which form part of the North East.

A final issue in regard of leadership concerns the three-yearly Mission Plan. The Mission Plan should give directive to the Corps Officer, with a view to the mission of the local corps. However, the indication is that the system is not working properly.

In thinking about the future of the Salvation Army in the North East, these tensions have to be negotiated with a fresh look at the pragmatic capabilities of the governance structures and leadership to facilitate the mission of the Army in a way which ensures that it remains rooted in a worshiping community.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

*Marcus Pound, Jacqui Chapman Helen Savage and Jeff Astley (learning and formation), Tom Redman (Leadership and Ministry)*

# Phase I: Mapping the Tradition

## *Introduction*

Despite a long history of Catholic settlement in the North East stretching back to Roman times, the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle was formally established when Rome restored the hierarchy in 1850. As an organisation headed by Vicars Apostolic, it became a Diocese with a bishop in charge. The move followed the struggle for the recognition of Catholic civil and political rights following the turn of the 19th Century and an expanding population. Following the wake of industrialisation in 1800, Catholics in the northern counties numbered around 80,000, yet by 1839 the total had increased to over 250,000 with 190 missions. The Diocese was originally established as the Diocese of Hexham but renamed Hexham and Newcastle when the western half of the Diocese was split off and established as the new Diocese of Lancaster. In 2013, the Diocese had 163 Parishes and 177 Diocesan churches in active use serving and served by approximately 36,661 recorded mass-attendees.

## *Ecclesiology*

The ecclesiological self-understanding of contemporary Catholicism arose in the wake of the great reforms of the Second Vatican Council.[71] The general understanding of the Church prior to Vatican II was one in which Christ – the head and founder of the Church – communicates revelation to the apostles, after which it is passed down through apostolic succession to the bishops and priests through ordination[72] who subsequently teach and instruct the laity who have their own apostolate through baptism. In this understanding, the laity is subordinated to the hierarchy through their obedience. By contrast, in *Lumen Gentium,* the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the word is addressed to the whole people of God and authority is described in terms of service to the body of Christ.[73] For

---

[71] Pope Benedict has interpreted the relationship between Vatican II and pre-Conciliar Catholic theology and practice on the basis of a 'hermeneutic of reform' within the continuity of tradition rather than either straightforward 'continuity' or radical 'discontinuity' and 'rupture'. See Benedict XVI, 'Christmas Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia,' December 22, 2005. See also Paul D. Murray, 'Reading Unitatis Redintegratio with His Holiness Benedict XVI Roman Pontiff Emeritus,' in *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context, and Practice*, ed. Paul Grogan and Kirsteen Kim (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 99–120.

[72] The chain of documentary evidence is not without contest, there are historic moments of ambiguity even in the undivided church. For instance, see Herve-Marie Legrand, 'The Indelible Character and Theology of Ministry,' *Concilium* 74 (1972): 54–62; Herve-Marie Legrand, 'The Presidency of the Eucharist According to Ancient Tradition,' in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. K. Seasoltz (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 196–221.

[73] Vatican II, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*' (Vatican, November 21, 1964), §§ 2–3, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

example, the Church is doctrinally set out as a living body to share in the ministry of God's Trinitarian life, rather than an organisation.[74]

These statements were underpinned by a renewed understanding (articulated in *Lumen Gentium*) that 'all the faithful […] participate in the threefold ministry of Christ by virtue of their baptism'.[75] The significance of this baptismal participation is that all Christians share with equal dignity in building up the church. Hence, the laity 'may enjoy, [be] permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church'.[76] At the same time however, the 'laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds,'[77] just as pastors should 'recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church'.[78]

The realisation or practical implementation of these goals relies on canon law, the internal ecclesiastical law which the Catholic Church and its ecclesiastical authorities adopt to provide governance and organise its members. As Myriam Wijlens has observed, laws are 'norms of action for the community, set by the legitimate authority, for the appropriation of values, and intelligently and freely received by the members'.[79] So where theology is indicative in its mode, narrating God's revelation and bringing our reflections to bear upon it, canon law is undertaken in the mode of the imperative, translating doctrine into structures for the Church[80] or, to quoteWijlens, 'if theology is faith seeking understanding, then canon law is faith seeking action'.[81]

Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI called on canon lawyers to adopt the h*abitus mentis*, or 'new attitude of mind' and apply it to legislative renewal in the light of the wider liturgical renewal underway.[82] So whereas the Code of 1917 treated the church by

---

[74] Ibid., §§ 2–4. This is further exemplified by the *Sensus Fidei* (sense of the faith), and the *Sensus Fidelium* (sense of the faithful). See Ibid., § 12. 'They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals;' and reiterated in the Catechism: a 'supernatural appreciation of faith *Sensus Fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals' (CCC §92). For more, see the recent ITC document on the International Theological Commission, 'Sensus Fidei (In the Life of the Church)' (The Vatican, 2014), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html.

[75] Vatican II 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*,' §31. 'The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world'.

[76] *LG*, §37.

[77] *LG*, §37.

[78] *LG*, §37.

[79] Myriam Wijlens, 'The Church Knowing and Acting: The Relationship between Theology and Canon Law,' *Louvain Studies* 20 (1995): 28.

[80] Ibid., 23.

[81] Myriam Wijlens borrows this phrase from Ladislas Örsy, see Myriam Wijlens, 'For You I Am a Bishop, With You I Am a Christian,' *The Jurist* 56 (1996): 80–81.

[82] As the introduction to the 1983 Revised Code of Canon Law states, 'careful attention was to be paid to all the decrees and acts of the Second Vatican Council since they contain the main lines of legislative renewal either because norms were issued which directly affected new institutes and ecclesiastical discipline, or because it was

starting from the perspective of clerics and office holders, the 1983 Code begins with the community and situates the hierarchy within the community. For example, the second book of the 1983 Code starts with the 'People of God,' and treats what is in common through baptism.

In other words, the Church is no longer seen primarily as a juridical authority, rather juridical authority flows from sacramental consecration which means (from the perspective of canon law) that legislation does not proceed from the perspective of juridical power: the code is complementary to the Council, which remains the central point of reference, as opposed to being the means for an authentic interpretation of the Council.[83]

## *Leadership and Ministry*

The primary function of ordained ministry is to provide for the sanctification of the people of God by celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Eucharist can only be celebrated under the presidency of a validly ordained priest, although the lay are not simply spectators, they actively take part in its offering and administering. Authority rests primarily with bishops, on whom the fullness of the sacrament of orders and juridical authority is conferred by Episcopal consecration […] which is thus the acme of sacred ministry[84] and in whose ministry priests and deacons share. There is one priesthood of Christ in the church, in which all the baptised share, but two distinct modes.[85] Ordained ministry is not just an expression of a fuller share in the royal priesthood which all receive at baptism, but belongs to another realm of the gift of the spirits. The difference is one of essence rather than degree,[86] performed purity, an essentially different mode of performance (visible, public, and officially authenticated) of the one priesthood of Christ in the Church. Like baptism, ordination has its own distinct sacramental and unrepeatable character. This is seen as a divinely inspired evolution of apostolic ministry derived from the ministry described in the New Testament.

The purpose of ordained ministry is twofold. First: to provide leadership in continuity with Christ's own ministry in its threefold function as prophet, priest, and king, for teaching and sanctifying disciples. Second: to establish the sacramental structure of the *koinomia* (communion) that is the Church. Yet this is not to undermine the various ministries performed by the laity. The definition of 'laity' given in *Lumen Gentium*: 'These faithful are made one body with Christ by baptism and put into the People of God'. In their own way they are made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and play their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world[87] suggests

---

necessary that the doctrinal riches of the Council, which contributed so much to pastoral life, have their consequences and necessary impact on canonical legislation.  For a critical appreciation of this point, see Myriam Wijlens, 'The Church Knowing and Acting:  The Relationship between Theology and Canon Law,' 328–349.

[83] Myriam Wijlens, 'The Doctrine of the People of God and Hierarchal Authority as Service in Latin Church Legislation on the Local Church,' *The Jurist* 68 (2008): 330.

[84] Vatican II, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church:  *Lumen Gentium*,' §21.

[85] *LG*, §10.

[86] *LG*, §37.

[87] *LG,* §31.

that the lay people have been baptismally incorporated into Christ and therefore share in His threefold office.

Indeed, when a priest or bishop is ordained both the clergy and laity of the Diocese are present, as are clergy, laity and, in the case of ordinations, bishops from other Diocese. The rites invite the whole congregation to share in the sacramental passage. In this way they underscore the intrinsic link between the clergy and the lay faithful.

## *Governance and Structure*

Central in the governance of the diocese is the role of the bishop, the head of the diocese; the chief shepherd who, as the vicar and legate of Christ, is entrusted with the pastoral care and governance of the 'particular church' (i.e. the diocese) by the authority and sacred power of Christ, in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles.[88] Bishops teach in communion with the successor of Peter, and are the visible source of unity in their particular churches.[89]

Vatican II states that the Bishop receives three *munera* [powers] to facilitate their threefold role: first, to teach (i.e. to lead, and oversee Gospel preaching and Catholic education in its various forms); second, to sanctify (i.e. provide for the administration of the sacraments and the holy living of Catholic life and mission); and third, to legislate (i.e. administer and act as judge in matters of canon law as they pertain to his diocese).[90] As Wijlens' argues:

> The munus of the bishop is not primarily an exercise of power, but more a service to and in the community of faithful. For the faithful he is a bishop, with them he is a Christian. The legislative task of the bishop is organically connected with other tasks he must exercise in order to carry out his mission. This task is not just a right of the bishop which he enjoys because of his ordination, but it is also a duty toward the faithful.[91]

However, the bishop can only exercise these functions in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college of bishops. In addition, while each bishop possesses the necessary power to fulfil his office, this power is not derived from the Roman Pontiff, but from Christ himself: 'A bishop is not a vicar of the Pope, but a vicar of Christ for his church'.[92]

With the bishop and clergy, the laity and faithful of a diocese, or 'particular church' are those Christians whose vocation it is to bring the gospel message into the world, sharing in the threefold ministry of Christ through their baptism.[93] Although hierarchical in structure, consultation and 'collegiality'[94] are a key recommended aspect of Catholic governance;

---

[88] *LG*, §13. and *Code of Canon Law* (Vatican, 1983), 330–331, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM.
[89] Vatican II 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*,' §§ 23, 26. See also *Code of Canon Law*, 368.
[90] *LG*, §21.
[91] Myriam Wijlens, 'For You I Am a Bishop, With You I Am a Christian,' 89.
[92] *LG,* §21. Myriam Wijlens, 'For You I Am a Bishop, With You I Am a Christian,' 74.
[93] *LG,* §10
[94] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican, n.d.), 9.4, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

grounded theologically in the principles that Christ gathered the Twelve Apostles[95] and bestowed the Spirit on the entire community. By extension, the Church is the People of God gathered around their bishop and incorporated into the ecclesial Body of Christ with a shared responsibility and participation in decision-making process.

As Robert Kennedy points out, decision-making is not the same as power, and shared responsibility does not mean wrestling power from those who are considered to have it, i.e. those in ecclesial offices.[96] Viewed from the perspective of power, decision-making quickly becomes viewed in the narrow terms of choice-making – the power to make the final choice in a deliberative voting process. This subsequently impacts upon our understanding of consultation. From the perspective of the clergy, it is a good option because it poses no real threat to ecclesial authority, given that it is not determinative; from the perspective of the laity, consultation is not enough because what is being sought is precisely a definitive voice in contributing to the course of action. All of this leads to what Kennedy calls 'the crippling impasse of consultative versus decision-making approaches'.[97]

However, Kennedy offers a hypothetical situation in which a people are convened to decide on a resolution. A lengthy debate ensues during the course of which a stranger enters and offers a persuasive idea which the gathering chooses to accept. Who exercises power in this example? The moral of the story is that choice-makers themselves can be held captive by ideas and that it is 'persuasive consultation that runs the world'.[98] Decision-making power is diffused across people with creative ideas and those who choose the final course of action.[99]

This is why, as Wijlens argues, while the bishop is the principal legislator for the diocese 'the tradition of the church has always been to talk long enough to be able to arrive at a decision that reflects more or less a consensus of all involved'.[100] Wijlens draws on the work of Hans Hattenhauer, who points out that Christian consensus should not be conflated with the principle of majority:

> 'It is not a majority vote that decides the issue, but a time-consuming and painstaking procedure in which God and the faithful participate, leading to a consensus'.[101]

It does not imply that all speak with the same authority, but that all have participated. To put this another way, this theological picture of the bishop will not translate into proper juridical practices if the pastoral or lay council is not in consensus-mode. In the next section, we will highlight the current obstacles that continue to prevent the bishop from consensus-building at a local level.

To sum up, after the Second Vatican Council there was renewal in canon law regarding a shift away from viewing the church primarily in terms of office holders to a broader view of

---

[95] Vatican II, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*,' §11.
[96] Robert Kennedy, 'Shared Responsibility in Ecclesial Decision Making,' *Studia Canonica* 14 (1980): 5–23.
[97] Ibid., 9.
[98] Ibid., 10.
[99] Ibid., 11.
[100] Myriam Wijlens, 'Parish Pastoral Councils,' in *Parishes in Transition*, ed. Eugene Duffy (Dublin: Columbia Press, 2010), 144.
[101] Ibid., 144–145, fn 27.

the church as 'the people of God'. This wider, more biblical perspective is theologically rooted in baptism as the proper category. This renewal had important ramifications for the role of the bishop. Following the picture of Christ washing his disciples' feet , the three powers of the bishop are now framed in terms of leading the faithful in service to Christ.

## *Structure*

The basic unit of the diocese is the parish which according to canon law is

> a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop.[102]

Parishes are organised into deaneries, 'special groups', to 'foster pastoral care through common action'.[103]

To a large extent the governance arrangements within a diocese are at the discretion of the bishop, and cease or fall into abeyance when the Bishop dies or retires. The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has experienced a number of changes over a relatively short period of time, with the retirement of Bishop Ambrose in 2004 and the unexpected death of his successor, Bishop Kevin, in 2008. This was followed by a period when the current Bishop, Séamus, was acting as Diocesan Administrator (with limited authority over governance arrangements) before his ordination as Bishop in 2009. Thus here has been a period of uncertainty and disruption, with a number of stalled initiatives. Going forward the new Bishop has now established his vision for the Diocese: *Forward Together in Hope*

At regional level governance is formally exercised through the Episcopal Council. This was established in 2005 by Bishop Kevin Dunn, in accordance with canon law:

> 'Where the bishop has judged it expedient, he can establish an Episcopal Council, consisting of the vicars general and Episcopal Vicars, to foster pastoral action more suitably.'[104]

This takes the place of a diocesan synod. The Trustees' Report also highlights the advisory role played by a number of diocesan councils and committees comprised of experts in the relevant field, including:

- the Board of Education, which oversees the schools in the Dioceses.

- the Council of Priests, an advisory body referred to more commonly in canon law as the Presbyteral Council, which it describes as 'a group of priests which, representing the Presbyterate, is to be like a senate of the bishop and which assists the bishop in the governance of the diocese according to the norm of law to promote as much as possible the pastoral good of the portion of the people of God entrusted to him'.[105]

---

[102] *Code of Canon Law* 515 §1.
[103] *Code of Canon Law* 374 §2.
[104] *Code of Canon Law* 474 §4
[105] *Code of Canon Law* 495 §1

Canon law also states that when a see is vacant, the Presbyteral Council should cease, its role taken over by the College of Consulters.

- Council of Laity, an advisory council giving voice to the lay members of the Church.

- the Pastoral Council must consist of 'members of the Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church, clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, and especially laity, who are designated in a manner determined by the diocesan bishop'.[106] Again, canon law states that the council cease when the see is vacant.

- Diocesan Youth Council

- the Diocesan Finance Committee. The establishment of the Finance Committee is a matter of charity and Canon Law. 'In every diocese a Finance Council is to be established, over which the diocesan bishop himself or his delegate presides and which consists of at least three members of the Christian faithful truly expert in financial affairs and civil law, outstanding in integrity, and appointed by the bishop.[107]

There are also various other commissions that report through these committees or directly through an episcopal vicar or the vicar general. Occasionally specialist working parties are set up to report back to the Trustees, for example, the Retired from Office Clergy Working Group, comprising members of the Council of Priests, a Trustee, and relevant Diocesan Officers; or, the Buildings Working Group, comprising a Trustee, Financial Secretary, Property manager, and Clerk of Works.

In practice, governance is also exercised through a number of other bodies including:

- The College of Bishops: 'a permanent institution, […] who jointly exercise certain pastoral functions for the Christian faithful of their territory […] especially through forms and programs of the apostolate fittingly adapted to the circumstances of time and place, according to the norm of law'.[108] Bishops are 'ministers of governance'[109] but can only exercise that governance in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college.

- The College of Consulters, is constituted by a number of members from the presbyteral council (not less than six or more than twelve), freely elected by the diocesan bishop.[110] It was the College of Consulters who met and elected the Vicar General as the Diocesan Administrator.

- The Diocesan Curia: described as 'those institutions and persons which assist the bishop in the governance of the whole diocese, especially in guiding pastoral action,

---

[106] Canon 512 §1.
[107] Canon 492 §1.
[108] Canon 447.
[109] Canon 375 §1.
[110] Canon 502 §1.

in caring for the administration of the diocese, and in exercising judicial power'.[111] The Curia are appointed by the diocesan bishop, with the vicar general serving as moderator.[112] In practice, this includes the canon law specialist, who is likely to deal with amongst other things matrimonial cases etc., and the Chancellor who presides over the curia - disseminating information. Its role appears mainly administrative.

## *Learning and Formation*

The International Council for Catechesis, a consultative body of the Congregation of the Clergy, summarized the Church's teaching on the centrality of the catechesis of adults in terms of 'the catechesis of Christian maturity and the goal of other kinds of catechesis'.[113] The document rehearses the objectives that 'specify more concretely the catechetical journey':

> § 39. A basic understanding of the Church's faith, presented in a sufficiently organic way together with the reasons for believing. It should be drawn directly from the sources of Revelation; that is, the Bible, the Liturgy, the Fathers, the Magisterium of the Church, other great documents of the Tradition, and the experience of Christian living in the ecclesial communities.

> § 40. An appropriate assimilation of the theological and cultural heritage in which faith is expressed. This implies a knowledge of the major religious signs and symbols of faith, the role and use of the Bible, a grasp of the significance and practice of liturgical and private prayer, and an awareness of the impact of religious belief on culture and its institutions.

> § 41. The capacity of Christian discernment in various situations, particularly regarding ethical principles which bear on human life and dignity and which have to do with respect for justice and the cause of the weak and the poor. Always in a spirit of respect for others, one also needs to develop a critical sense in the face of other religions or ways of life which people find meaningful.

> § 42. Finally, the acquisition of those skills and abilities which allow the adult believer to carry out his Christian witness in the most diverse circumstances, in the community and in society.

In § 17, the report discerns a number of identifiable contemporary needs that 'require a new approach in adult catechesis', recognising that a great need exists:

- a more adequate language of faith, which will be comprehensible to adults at all levels, from those who are illiterate or quasi-literate to those who are highly

---

[111] Canon 469.
[112] Canon 470.
[113] *International Council for Catechesis, Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines* (St. Paul's Publications, 1990), §§ 4, 29.

educated; unless this language is addressed to them, they will feel alienated from the Church and perceive catechesis as irrelevant;

- more accessible places where un-churched adults will feel welcomed, and where adults who have gone through their catechumenate or some other form of initiation can continue their faith journey in a Christian community;

- a wider variety of catechetical models responding to the local and cultural needs of the people;

- the popular religiosity of the people, both in its content and expression, to be taken seriously; the aspects which reflect the Gospel should be prudently incorporated in catechesis;

- a more consistent effort to reach out to all adults, especially those who are un-churched, alienated or marginalised, responding to their needs, so as to counteract the widespread proselytizing by sects;

- a more visible expression of sensitivity, availability and openness on the part of clergy and church institutions toward adults, their problems and their need for catechesis.

The document also stresses that 'adults do not grow in faith primarily by learning concepts, but by sharing the life of the Christian community', a claim that implies an integration of adult catechesis with 'liturgical formation and formation in Christian service' and coordination with catechesis for other age groups (§§ 28–29). It emphasises that a central feature of the adult formation process must be 'the establishing of a friendly and dialogical rapport' in which adults are accepted 'where they are' – that is, in terms of their specific human and religious needs, cultural background, faith experiences, potential and expected (§§ 54, 56).

In the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle all educational activities are integrated into one Education Board, serviced by one Diocesan Education Service. This is located in recently-built premises at St. Cuthbert's House, West Road, Newcastle, where a staff of some eight advisers, supported by an equal number of administrators, work across the educational field – but with an inevitable focus on the 162 diocesan church (aided) schools. The last Bishop of the Hexham and Newcastle Diocese viewed adult education as an important agent for change and reform in the Church. Nevertheless, it remains – at least financially – the Cinderella of christian education (as it does for a number of other denominations).

In addition to specific diocesan activity, adult Christian education is also provided by a diverse and largely uncoordinated group of other autonomous Catholic organisations, including religious orders. Many concentrate on specific areas of work, such as Marriage and Family Life, Liturgy, clergy formation and so on. There is a fairly heavy provision of courses that lead to formal qualifications such as the Catholic Certificate and Diocesan Certificate in Religious Studies and the Certificate in Pastoral Theology, and considerable emphasis is laid on work in the area of sacramental preparation. The Education Service runs a range of study

evenings, currently under the heading 'Questions in the Church Today,' in addition to evening sessions and Saturday study days for the Diocese's Catechist Network.

The Diocese administers a Lay Training Fund to enable and support Catholic laity to grow in maturity and to make an informed contribution both to the world and to the church.

## *Strategy*

In recent years, under the pastoral guidance of its bishop, the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has worked hard to address precisely this issue as part of a wider initiative to encourage the active participation of the laity in the life of the church. As the Diocesan website has recently asked, in the context of a new initiative: 'Forward Together in Hope: Who will lead our Diocese in 2016? This is not a question about our next Bishop. It is not a question about how many priests and deacons we will have in three years' time. It is a question about how to empower lay people for leadership'.

In other words, The diocesan strategy 'New Directions: Forward Together in Hope'[114] is a concerted effort to address the role of the laity in the light of shifting demographics in the North East including:

> A) the falling numbers of those coming forward for ordained ministry;[115]

> B) a decline in church attendance. In the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the drop in attendance over a ten-year period is 27.8 % (2001-2010). If that period is extended back to 1994 the drop is 47.6% thereby suggesting that the trend is increasing. In our questionnaire we asked the degree to which people thought about either quitting or switching Church. Generally, the level of quit or switching intent in the diocese is low. For example only 2% compared to Methodist 7%; United Reformed Church 7%; Salvation Army 10%; Northern Baptist Association 6% were thinking of quitting the church. [116]

> C) An increased rationalisation of mass centres with church closures and clustering.

The strategy highlights three key areas which became the framework for a large-scale consultation exercise:

> 1. Promote spiritual development: all we do must be rooted in our friendship with Jesus. Unless we listen to Him, we will fail. Jesus tells us that 'without me you can do nothing' (John 15:15). We are to become more Christ-centred, with Jesus at the heart of the joys and hopes of our Diocese. We must know Him better in

---

[114] Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, 'Bulletin Board,' *New Directions*, accessed April 11, 2012, http://www.bulletinboards.com/v2.cfm?comcode=hexnew&loginpswd=yes&stm=yes&bypass=yes&ExpandTop ic=yes&msgid=1791750&fm=1&nw=x.

[115] The drop in priests from 236 (in 1994) to 169 (in 2010) is 28.3%.

[116] Subsequent comparative statistics will be abbreviated as M = Methodist; URC = United Reformed Church; SA = Salvation Army; NBA = Northern Baptist Association.

prayer, in the Scriptures, and in the celebration of the Sacraments, especially Mass. We learn how to trust him through silent prayer.[117]

2. Formation for all: which means empowering people, clergy and religious together for the work Jesus calls us to do. This will enable us to grow in our knowledge of the Lord and His Church, and to understand how to pass on the faith to others. As we develop spiritually and together in faith, we will be better equipped to use what the Lord gives us.

3. New structures: If we truly trust in Jesus, we will not panic, or look back with nostalgia to what seemed to be the Church's golden age. Jesus calls us to faith in Him now; to work well with the resources He gives us to be the Church of today. Decisions will continue to be made about Mass times, buildings and parishes.[118]

## *Questions Arising*

The following can be identified as strengths which the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle can offer to other traditions:

1. Regional level authority is considerable, but is applied lightly and perceived by those in parishes as guidance. Clergy regard the Diocese as essentially supportive.

2. The success of clusters in some areas is based on good communication and cooperation between the clergy and laity. This however does not apply in all areas.

3. There are flexible arrangements within parishes, giving scope for the utilisation of the skills and interests of all parish members, subject to the ability of the parish priest to delegate.

4. The increasing focus of training at deanery level, including, for example, the provision of training for baptism and marriage preparation, which gives the parishes considerable support. A coordinator for adult formation has been recently appointed.

## Open Questions

The following can be identified as open questions which the diocese might seek to address, and where learning from other traditions may be of assistance:

1. The ability of the diocese to support parish priests to increase the level of delegation to lay people within the parishes, in order to reduce the pressures, put on them by reducing numbers of clergy.

---

[117] In our questionnaire, we used a scale developed for use with religious populations which employed a widely ecumenical definition of spirituality. The Catholic Church respondents score highly with 98% agreeing that their relationship with God contributes to their sense of wellbeing compared to M 93; URC 91; SA 97; NBA 100.

[118] Pastoral Letter for 16th Sunday of the Year - Weekend of 17th / 18th July 2010.

2. The development of intermediate level governance structures, which are currently complex and piecemeal and therefore do not facilitate strong relationships between the laity in parishes and the diocese.[119] This would enable meaningful consultation.

3. The development of a strategy for change management, addressing how the falling numbers of clergy will be addressed, addressing both the configuration of parishes and how the potential increase in lay involvement could shape the church. A mechanism for implementing such a strategy is also required.

4. Address the need for fresh models of ministry, e.g. mature married men, permanent deacons, non-stipendiary and part-time ministry.

## Phase II: The Empirical Investigation

### *Governance*

In our round of interviews, we tried to tease out attitudes to the governance arrangements of the parish, deanery, and diocese. The responses bear directly on the question of lay-participation.

The pattern of comments follows the broader stream of governance within the project. Within the parish arrangements are at the discretion of the parish priest, the only requirement under canon law being that there is a finance committee. Hence there is considerable variation between parishes. Some priests have embraced sharing of responsibility with lay volunteers through Parish Councils and sub-groups, dealing with, for example, buildings and liturgy; while other priests have taken a more authoritarian approach. Increasing lay involvement can be seen as very positive with one regional level clerical interviewee commenting 'any priest that does not encourage the gifts of the laity, I don't know what's wrong with him because it's setting him free'. As one lay member put it, there was

> confusion as to what is expected of us at this time of crisis. On the one hand the message is clearly that we face a future of effective priest-less-ness and that lay people need to embrace change and take responsibility for the running of our parishes […] on the other hand, there is a real sense that the hierarchy of the Church is trying to resist the empowerment of lay people and tighten control in the hands of the ordained by effectively attempting to roll back Vatican II. All this is very confusing and even, to some degree, rejecting.[120]

Hence the perception remains amongst some that increasing lay involvement is a pressured response to falling numbers of clergy. As one parish priest suggested,

> lay people have to take on roles that perhaps up to now they never had to. They're basically being forced to take roles, and will be forced to take more roles in the future.

---

[119] Clergy have a much more direct relationship with the diocese.
[120] Open Day P/P.

The lack of any compulsory arrangements within the parish allows lots of flexibility to respond to the needs of the parish. One lay person described how

> we've got quite a strong tradition of music and liturgy, therefore, you work those people into the governance structures. We've got quite a strong tradition of being twinned with a parish in India, in North India, so you work that into the governance structures. Now in other parishes it might be an outreach service to young mums, it might be some work with the Missionaries of Charity, or with older people or with the SVP, and I think the flexibility in the Catholic system allows the parish priest to weave in the interests and the individual characteristics of the parish into the governance structures.

Similarly, the priest can utilise the skills of the people to the advantage of the parish. As one priest put it:

> It's about the parish priest looking at his congregation and picking out their skills or developing skills or actually pulling people into a position where they're using skills that they might not know they have.

Problems occur when the parish priest does not have the necessary skills or fails to encourage and delegate. The positive results of encouragement and delegation are clearly articulated in the following account by one parish lady, 'part of that ability to mobilise is his ability to step back from situations, thereby throwing the onus back onto the laity. As an older member pointed out, he is also very encouraging:

> The priest encourages people to be involved, and most people don't come forward readily, they have to be approached by the priest. People think 'I'm not good enough to do that; when I was asked to be a Eucharistic minister, I said, I'm not good enough, and Father said, well everybody says that, and I'm not good enough, we need to be empowered.

This understanding was reflected in the priests own self-understanding of leadership. 'I'm good at encouraging, I try to do the communal, but personal encouragement is more effective'. The importance of this type of encouragement on the part of a priest (i.e. any priest) was underlined by Lara, who described herself as an 'on/off' Catholic for many years. She explained how she only rediscovered the church after receiving an invitation from a previous priest to celebrate first communion. She was subsequently asked to join a Diocesan wide collaborative ministry group which she described as a 'wonderful experience'. As she said, the secret to lay participation was 'the priest making a point of asking someone'.

There is some sympathy with the difficulties faced by priests and recognition that a lot is required from them. One regional level lay interviewee commented

> it amazes me that in the training of priests, there is no management course whatsoever. And yet that is the major job they are expected to do when they come to a parish. And some of them can't manage a thing. They've no idea what management techniques are or involving people or man management you know. And to think that they never get any kind of course in that is just, to me, mind-blowing.

Moreover, there are a number of issues with a reliance on volunteers. In a parish where there has not previously been much delegation, it can be hard to get enough people to volunteer, although parishes with an established pattern of lay involvement tend to find this less

difficult. While some lay volunteers are of a high calibre, there is no or little training for chairs of parish councils or, on a wider basis, training to help lay people to understand their role in the church. One parish priest talked about the limitations of Parish Councils.

> Doing the buildings because it's taking a job off Father, typically is kind of the way parish councils often work.

Parish council members can also have limited time to spare in order to fit in evening meetings. It can be difficult to get parish councils to get involved in wider aspects of ministry, partly because people do not feel confident enough to get involved and partly because of tradition. 'I'd say there's inertia in the system, an understandable kind of resistance'.

We asked the interviewees where they thought decision-making power actually lies and how well-distributed it was? Decisions relating to day-to-day parish life were made within the parish but where in the parish decision making power actually lies depends on the attitude of the parish priest and the extent to which he is willing to delegate to the parish council. One parish priest considered that decisions were made by the parish council 'with a steer from me'. Yet for another parish priest,

> all of the things in canon law are kind of stacked against the parish council really taking much initiative and seeing itself really, as anything other than a sounding board. Really the governance is seen as all kinds in the hands of the parish priest.

Even in parishes where there is a high degree of delegation, the parish priest in practice retains a high level of influence and can veto decisions. In one parish where there was an active parish council it was seen as essential that the priest came to council meetings as 'people just wouldn't make a decision without the priest being there'. Similarly, in another parish

> to do anything without the parish priest's ok-ing it, you might as well forget it, because people would say, well does Father know about this. So it wouldn't be taken seriously.

Yet the ability of a good parish priest to steer decisions was illustrated by a parish level interviewee who described a decision taken in the parish relating to building alterations. Following a consultation process the parish had reached a decision. A new incoming parish priest preferred an alternative proposal, held another consultation, and the parish was able to reach a different decision.

Given the context of the diocese and the demographic shifts we asked:

> to what extent did the people in positions of authority see their role as church management?

and

> to what extent do people in positions of authority see their role as managing changes that occur in the organisation?

Significantly none of the lay interviewees at the local level saw themselves as primarily managers but referred to other people who would see themselves as managers, taking

pressure off the parish priest so that he is freed up to take care of spiritual leadership. As for managing change at regional level, the need was clearly embraced positively with one interviewee saying:

> one of the big changes, and it really is a good change, one which we should embrace and rejoice in, is the involvement of lay people and parishioners in the work of a parish. And seeing as it's their parish, they take responsibility for it.

Likewise, one lay interviewee considered change management to be one of the particular roles of the parish council.

> Things aren't fixed – parish structures, parish boundaries, parish buildings, none of them are fixed. And it's about the careful management of that change.

Yet because change was also being perceived as being forced by circumstances, most obviously by reducing the number of priests, the increased responsibility required on the part of the laity was received somewhat bitterly. Yet, this reception may be a historical phenomenon. Historically lay people have never been encouraged to be self-sufficient and embrace mission . Were they to take on increased leadership, how would their work be validated in the eyes of the parish or other clergy. As one priest put it:

> I think that the laity have [sic] to reflect the church of the past because that's where they've come from, that's what they've been offered by the church.

Yet for some this inheritance is precisely something to rub against, as one person at Whitley Bay said, 'There is lot about being a Catholic I don't agree with'. And again, also at Whitley Bay:

> The fellowship of the [Justice and Peace] group is a powerhouse for me personally; it helps me deal with my resentment for the Catholic Church.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

We asked church members about their attitudes to their current immediate church leader. 234 church members had been members of the Catholic Church for an average of 55 years; member of their specific church for 30 years and known their church leaders for 4 ½ years. 34% of respondents were male; 66% of respondents were female.

Our questionnaire tapped into lay Catholic views about the leadership styles they experience and their attitudes to their church roles and involvement in the church and produced some interesting findings in regard of the drive for lay participation in the decision-making processes of the church. As our study highlights, there is strong evidence from the data in that ministerial leadership matters for the attitudes and behaviours of church members with servant leadership styles as opposed to the more 'cultic' forms of ministry being positively associated with important variables such as spiritual wellbeing, life and role satisfaction and willingness to engage in extra effort on the church's behalf.

For example, organizational identification – the degree to which a member defines him/herself by the same attributes that (s)he believes define the organization – is high with 81% (M 85; URC 90; SA 82; NBA 92) agreeing that they usually say 'we' rather than 'they'

when talking about the Church and 73% (M 67; URC 62; SA 81; NBA 77) agreeing that when someone criticizes their organization it feels like a personal insult. Organisational identification taps into the way that an individual's beliefs about an organization become self-defining: when people identify with their church, being one of its members is an important part of their identity. People think of themselves in terms of their membership in the church. They see themselves bound up with its successes and failures.

The findings also suggest a high degree of loyalty to the priest with only a small minority of respondents reporting low levels of loyalty. For example, in relation to the latter 4% (M 9; URC 8; SA 7; NBA 5) of respondents disagree they have a sense of loyalty to their priest. This was positively captured in the percentages of trust in the immediate priest reported in the diocese with only 7% (M 9; URC 7; SA 7; NBA 7) of members reporting that they did not fully trust their priest.

Trust is an important psychological mediator in allowing priests to foster for example a sense of empowerment amongst church members. Indeed, we asked a series of questions designed to assess the respondents' sense of empowerment in their church roles. Empowerment has been seen as providing organizational members with a sense of meaning and challenge in their church work, which can improve motivation and performance. In general, our respondents feel that their roles are very meaningful and that they themselves feel that they have the necessary skills and abilities to perform them. There appears to be an empowered church membership particularly in terms of meaning in their work with 94% (M 93; URC 95; SA 75; NBA 98) agreeing that their church role was personally meaningful for them.

We employed a scale also for perceived organizational support, i.e. a way of measuring organizational members' perceptions of a favourable social exchange with the church. Essentially it asks questions about the extent to which the organisation values their members, looks out for their interests and well-being, and provides help when members need it. Respondents generally feel positive about the amount of support they receive from the organization, although less so than the other denominations (which may be a reflection of size), 75% (M 80; URC 84; SA 86; NBA 91) feel their church cares about their opinions.

However, in terms of self-determination and the possible impact lay Catholics have on the life of the church, responses were largely less favourable with 57% (M 47; URC 46; SA 42; NBA 40) disagreeing that they had any control over what happens in their church. While organisational identification is strong, personal identification with the leader (and hence the potential for empowering leadership) is rather weaker in comparison with 18% (M 44; URC 31; SA 20; NBA 18) disagreeing that when someone criticizes their priest, it feels like a personal insult. Nowhere however are Catholics lack self-determination more evident than in attitudes towards creative approaches to liturgy. A staggering 71% disagree with the statement: 'My priest encourages creativity in matters of liturgy and devotion' (M 5; URC 1; SA 8; NBA 13). This last statistic was the biggest variable in all the questionnaire data and offers itself for further consideration.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the laity exhibit high organizational identification and a high degree of loyalty to the priest, mediated through high levels of trust with the minister which clearly facilitates a perceived sense of empowerment amongst church members as reflected in the responses in terms of meaningfulness in their work. Generally,

respondents felt supported by the diocese, although one senses by comparison that a stronger level of support might be fostered. However, in terms of self-determination the laity feel they lack control over what happens in their church, especially liturgically, and while many strongly identify with the church as a whole, personal identification with the leader is rather weak. Clearly the laity value their participation in the life and action of the church; yet their place in the decision making process of the church remains an area for development.

## *Learning and Formation*

In the course of our study, attitudes to learning and formation were seen to vary understandably amongst the participants. However, over the course of the audits a general narrative emerged tied to the changing historical place of learning and formation within the Catholic Church, and the demographics of the older participants. Many in discussion spoke of their formation in youth, learning by way of the penny catechism, rote taught, learning the doctrines and meaning of the mass, alongside a devotional understanding as expressed by one participant:

> I was brought up to know about God being present on the altar.

Reflections and assessments on it varied. On the one hand there was the viewpoint that learning at that early age with methodological rigor instilled the tenants and sure foundations of their faith. As one responder put it:

> Because our faith was cultivated in the catechism, we can still remember it, and now we can analyse it and make it a tool.

From this standpoint the shift in patterns of formation and learning were viewed negatively with the current emphasis on 'autonomy' in learning identified as contributing to a malaise within Catholicism. As one interviewee put it: 'that's why the Catholic faith is in decline.' Another participant suggested in a similar vein that

> a little knowledge is a dangerous thing […] You can think too much and make problems for yourself.

On the other hand, such an approach was also viewed negatively. First, it was felt that once the foundations were in place, learning and formation could/would cease: 'I think a lot of people's education stopped when they were 16'. Likewise, another reported that 'I don't feel the need to learn as a result'. For another it meant 'We take it [the learning] for granted'. Second, some women had been left 'disaffected' by the experience (whilst remaining in their faith). Third, while the Catechism is itself predicated upon scripture – one of the twin planks of Catholic learning along with tradition, the bible itself was often overlooked. Fourth, it appears in some cases that the giveness of faith found in 'cradle Catholics' led to an increased anxiety on the part of converts who lacked such schooling, i.e. who couldn't take the learning for granted. In the words of one interviewee:

> As a new Catholic I felt very unstable and without sure foundations.

And

> I don't know how to pray the rosary.

Fifth, and relating more generally to the culture of Catholicism in the 50s and 60s, was the repeated sentiment that Catholics were 'brought up by a religion of fear' whereas now the Catholicism was a 'religion of love'.

However, an oft-repeated sentiment was that learning and formation required 'gentle nurturing:'

> I think there is a need for people to be gently led into religious instruction.

> We are nurturing people.

Discussion around learning and formation fell quite distinctively between scripture, ethics, spirituality, RCIA, and various others.

## Scripture

Scripture was felt to have been overlooked in past catechetical teaching: 'we thought the readings were just stuff, to fill out the program'. Yet as one participant explained, with the emphasis on scripture 'we now listen in a way we didn't before'. In short, 'the study of the scripture, that's been a huge change' or 'since we were able to have the bible, that really has done a lot of learning for me'.

Participants were reading/receiving scripture in a variety of contexts including Bishop Tom Wright's Lenten courses and the Big Read, a series of bible based 'café courses,' individually motivated approaches such as 'take a piece of gospel and put it on the fridge and reflect on it through the week', reading in the context of charismatic prayer, and reflecting on it through the homily or daily missal readings. Many Catholics reported discovering 'how little I knew about the Gospels'.

## Spirituality

By spirituality, one can include under its umbrella a number of forms ascribed to both charismatic and experiential approaches. Two things are of note in this regard: first, many of the comments and all of the examples given regarding the experiential approach were by female participants. Second, the particular context in which these terms are employed was significant.

For one participant the context was related to prayer meetings, and the role of spirit-led worship which reinvigorated the reading of scripture:

> Reading the bible was head learning, and it wasn't until I went to the prayer meeting that the Spirit jumped out, it was as if God was speaking to me, after that I have been able to read the Bible.

This particular prayer group had been formed by a group of women who 'were at a low point in our lives and so we came together in a time of need,' and significantly, had led one participant to seek out ecumenical groups: 'as a development from that I have joined an ecumenical healing group'.

Another reported their groups involvement with a Pentecostal minister who 'came to us for prayer, and we learnt an awful lot from him too' – thereby also emphasising the ecumenical dimension to formation. For another participant, the spiritual element was underlined through her association with female religious order:

> I work with the dynamic sisters in this country […] Brignall Garden in Newcastle […] there is spirituality there in the Sisters of the Good the Shepherd.'

Also cited as means of spiritual formation were meditations on the rosary.

## Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)

Many of the learning and formation experiences discussed were underlined or framed by people's experience of RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). While this is traditionally considered as the means by which unbaptized, or those baptized in another Christian tradition are received into the Catholic Church, the program is variously applied. Some open the program out to existing members of church attending as part of an on-going formation (sometimes referred to as the Journey in Faith). Others restricting it to those as yet un-received, or individual catechetical instruction with a priest. As one parishioner succinctly explained in a manner which captures this distinction as well as the quality of learning:

> at a parish level it's accessible for people who want to become Catholics, but not inaccessible for Catholics, but not appropriate.

Central for many of the discussions about learning and formation was the specific role of the leader/teacher/priest. As another parishioner reflected,

> quite a lot depends on your teacher; making it more human in way; talking about God in a way that people believe with the value ascribed to the quality within which one was taught to think about their faith.

However, relations of dependency of a congregation upon the priest for on-going formation can obscure the creative means by which the laity can continue their on-going formation. One parishioner put it, while

> the lead should come from above, one senses a need to offer positive examples of lay initiatives such as the prayer groups where the lead comes from below.

## Liturgy and Works of Mercy

The *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community* stresses that 'adults do not grow in faith primarily by learning concepts, but by sharing the life of the Christian community,' integrating adult catechesis with 'liturgical formation and formation in Christian service,' and coordination with catechesis for other age groups (§§ 28–29). Aspects of this can be readily found. For some the Mass was and continued to be the principle site of learning and nurturing people in and into the faith:

> Yeah, it's about the mass, I think if people are brought into the Church, they would learn to love it, because they would learn to remember, it, we are nurturing people.

The loss of street processions was mourned and participants recognized, albeit marginally, the role of works of mercy, i.e. visiting the sick, aiding asylum-seekers, in the on-going process of Christian formation. Hence, for one parishioner the learning experience was defined in terms of 'action – I don't feel the need to have someone who gives an interpretation'.

## Other

Some churches offered, or had previously offered, in various forms 'renewal weekends'. These might include parish based retreats. The weekends were praised for their ability to involve all and encouraged a parish to 'live it'. One parishioner described them as an 'empowerment weekend'. Again, specific ministers appeared key in the organization of such events, although in one example this dependency had led to the cessation of such events. As one parishioner put it: 'we don't do it now because it's too tiring for the priest'.

The ecumenical dimension of learning was often flagged up and again reflected changing patterns of understanding within the laity. Ecumenical initiatives included lay involvement in formal bodies such as Churches Together, the Big Read, J. John, or simply attending other church services (usually on holiday).

Allied to the ecumenical dimension for one participant was the issue of gender – disaffected by her early formative experiences in the Catholic primary education system of the 50's she had gone on to offer formal talks in ecumenical settings about precisely why she was 'still a Catholic when women have little say'. The issue of gender was further cited as the reason she was 'more at home in the ecumenical setting than in my own group'.

Electronic Media did not appear to play a significantly prominent role in the learning formation experience, although some parishioners who were fortunate enough to own Sky reported watching the Catholic Channel and UCB on Dab radio. However, an audio-visual of J. John appeared a popular media amongst many of the congregations. Use of the Diocese website was not widely reported, and seen to have too few resources for learning and formation, and to be rather complicated.

The family was also cited as a key area in which learning and formation took place, with many participants having learnt at their parent's knee, and the experience of childbirth in one case prompting renewed periods of faith:

> I learnt mine from my mother, but had several periods of unfaith, but my faith came back when I had my son, and a sense of needing to give my son the catholic schooling I had.

Responses to the role of the diocese in learning and formation were varied, and depended upon two key factors. First: the level of learning. Initiatives from the Diocese Education Council were perceived to be of a 'high level, or narrower and on a specific level,' with another parishioner suggesting 'I think there is a need for people to be gently led into religious instruction'. Naturally, others valued diocesan initiatives including talks at the cathedral and the various public lectures:

> We really are eager for learning.

> There is a lot of learning from the diocese […] If you want it, it's all there […] there are refresher courses we all do to re-knew.

> I enjoy challenging talks – they would be too challenging for some people.

The second was geographical. Formation events centred at the diocesan level were seen as 'isolated' and concern for getting there was expressed by parishioners, an issue compounded by the increasing age profile of parishioners.

On the basis of the audit, one finds in the responses a desire for a basic understanding of the Church's faith, presented in terms of Bible, liturgy, and the experience of Christian living in the ecclesial communities, albeit with relatively little mention on the part of participants to encyclicals and documents pertaining to the magisterium of the church. Coupled with this was the need for Christian discernment. Charismatic prayer groups reflect the popular religiosity of the people, as well as an openness to learn from other Christian denominations.

The need for adult learning is clearly articulated on the part of a laity 'hungry' for learning, and driven by a) particular needs (for example a prayer group in a time of difficulty), b) the priest, ensuring, for example, the on-going formation of a parish or individual catechetical instruction. These are in turn facilitated, in some instances by wider Catholic bodies such as cluster initiatives, or ecumenical bodies such as Churches Together. Past formative Catholic experience often shaped the desire and receptiveness to learn 'a different way of looking at the faith we grew up with' and the lay people take an active responsibility in that learning.

While the old catechetical methods were valued, the need for 'gentle nurturing' was seen to work well, especially as it occurred either in the Mass or through more informal discussions where the value of different perspectives, including the ecumenical experience, was key. Despite the renewed role of scripture, one group reported difficulties in sustaining interest in a bible study. The success of any given event, including the Mass, could rely greatly on something as simple as transport, an issue compounded by clustering. Big group meetings were not as successful as small groups, as people did not always have the confidence to come forward, and nurturing gentle discussion appears the order of the day.

However, the drive for spiritual formation needs to be balanced with the types of formation that assist in the practical governmental aspects of the shifting picture of churches. For example, how might the increased focus of training at deanery level be broadened out to include formation for those working in parish councils, or setting up councils?

## *Case Studies*

### St. Bede's, the church and its setting[121]

---

[121] I visited St. Bede's on 8 occasions. I attended the 10.am Mass once. The morning Masses were followed by coffee where I was able to chat casually with 8 church members. I also attended the Sunday Mass on 2 occasions. Further to that I have participated in a parish BBQ, two Parish Council Meetings; an adult learning event aim at Catholic social teaching: Christ in the World, and an 'open house' even organised in conjunction with St. Cuthbert's care. I have also undertaken 6 interviews with parish members. These were usually undertaken in people's houses in and around Beddlington, a local coffee shop, or the church.

St. Bede's is a modern church with an old history. It is one of 8 churches in the deanery, administered to by 6 priests and two retired priests. As of 2010, the church had an average mass attendance of 251 within a catholic population of 1,400 (2008). In the same year, there were 18 confirmations, and two candidates undertaking RCIA. The weekday morning Mass (10am) has a regular attendance of about 20 parishioners, who meet for coffee afterwards.

The church includes a large hall which hosts private initiatives (e.g. Zumba – 5 nights a week), Coffee Mornings, and church events such as St. Bede's Open House.

The priest describes it as an 'insular' church, in the sense that it is geographical distant from its neighbouring churches (the nearest being 4 miles). This means that the church's identity is very locally formed (one might contrast this with a city church or large town when congregation flow between churches may be more fluid). In his personal assessment of the church he described it as 'healthy; we have much more involvement from the laity;' i.e. involvement by the laity is his determination of health.

The parish finances run a surplus although this is supplemented by the priest's chaplaincy work, which is to cease thereby reducing the surplus by half.

## Ministry and Leadership

I observed the church at a point when it had been through a number of upheavals following a succession of priests. Reflecting back some of the older generation from large families who had gone to the Catholic school beside the church recalled there having been a 'tremendous community,' not least because their families had contributed to the rebuilding of the church in 1992 on its existing site. They also spoke of 'tremendous involvement with the laity which went on for many years, with lots of young families'. However, with a change of priess over a number of years, one reported that 'committees fell away […] there was no collegiality. It was 'uninspired'. There had been 'a parish council but at election no one stood. We were without the PCC for about two years and without a resident priest for 3 months and 'No consultation'.

St. Bede's now has a residence priest who has been in residence for the last 18 months. The priest described his style as 'strong leadership' by which is meant 'having a strong vision' and a great 'enthusiasm' to work 'alongside the laity'. Church members were very supportive and overwhelmingly complimentary about the priest with comments including: he 'really brought a sense of community by being very honest and very open to doing things;' 'Everyone is willing to help but you need a catalyst. Fr. Chris became that catalyst;' 'the enthusiasm of the church is largely down to Fr. Chris;' 'The priest is very open, broke down the vertical relationship'.

## Strategy

The priest set about undertaking a SWOT analysis. The priest identified the following strengths (Sound Financial footing; Strong working groups; Strong leadership; more structure to the future ideas for the parish; Strength in our history, long standing families creating continuity), weaknesses (loss of 9 o'clock Mass; little adult faith formation; little interaction with the High School; stronger focus on peace and justice issues needed; and witness to wider

community), opportunities (to develop further links especially with the Catholic School and more generally work to facilitate new young active members of the parish), and threats (developing bureaucracy; the possibility of not having a priest at St. Bede's and sharing a sharing of priest based in another parish; the continued drift of people from the Churches).

This was fed into the priest's vision for the church and put forward in a document called 'Parish Imaginings' St. Bede's Roman Catholic Church. This was not a manifesto as such, but a means by which to prompt a series of reflections on the parish by outlining a series of key areas by which the parish may engage or fulfil its mission as part of the body of Christ, as well as offer an outline for the re-establishment of the parish council. The reflection was prompted by three sources:

1. Passion for Christ and his Kingdom which reflects a broad emphasis on pastoral practices, and the exercise of love which draws on the gifts of the parish members.

2. Seven priests in active ministry for eight parish communities. Priests will be reduced and so a vision is required that is able to 'sustain itself with a priest having a role of celebrating the sacraments and overseeing the parish though with less responsibility for the day-to-day running of its mission'.

3. Reestablishment of the parish council around a number of key pastoral practices including: worship, evangelisation, adult formation, pastoral care, social action, administration, ecumenical relations, and community development.

## Adult Learning

Adult learning was targeted through two key groups, one practical, the other contemplative. The 'Christ in the World Group' was initiated by the priest in consultation with a parish member who had worked in education. The aim of the group is 'to seek to explore and discuss and respond to some of the social, cultural, political and moral issues that face us today'[122]

The basic concept is to 'reflect upon various topics of current social importance, with a Christian viewpoint. In some cases 'act' may be practical in nature, however sometimes it may be a growth in one's personal perspective on the subject'. In many senses this shared the ecumenical learning fostered in the wider community. Previously, ecumenical meetings had been standardized, reports on what had happened etc. and planning for lent/advent. They were also involved in a regeneration scheme for the area, but this fell apart when government funding ceased. Then, as one parishioner put it, Fr. came along and things changed. On his initiative they formed a sub-committee to lobby the MP, who has subsequently invited engagement at a national level. The MP saw it as an opportunity to access diverse communities. In the past, the different churches remained disparate, now there is a sense of cross ecumenical links, rallying together around secularism (meeting 2-3 times a year).

---

[122] Parish Bulletin 28/09/2011.

At a meeting of the recently formed spirituality group a questionnaire was developed with a view to finding out what type of worship and prayer parish members would like to see developed: Silent adoration of the Blessing (16 votes); The Rosary (15 votes); Stations of the Cross (13 votes); Scripture study and reflection (10 votes); Imaginative contemplation (9 votes); *Lectio Divina* (8 votes); Christian meditation/prayerful review of the week (7 votes); Charismatic prayer (4 votes); People preferred to meet on the church rather than a home, monthly (5 votes) to weekly (4 votes).

<span style="color:red">Key Questions</span>

Clearly, the parish felt that Fr. Chris provided both stability and a level of empowerment through his own cynicism towards cultic ministry. There was a vibrant sense in the church, an openness of community spirit, partly a function of the Vatican II inspired church building. The parish council was positivity reported, 'it seems its role has changed, it is more active; there are more people involved'. Little wonder clustering was not talked about despite wider talk of amalgamating with another deanery to make better use of priest distribution and geographical shaping. Instead came the suggestion that the church needs to modernise its theology (e.g. contraception) without abandoning its fundamental values.

In terms of practical aspect, greater communications with deanery was felt to be needed and ongoing links to the schools to frame ongoing participation. While there was strong element of traditionalism and more young families attracted through the school, there was a perceived need to be more proactive in translating baptisms into conformations and fostering an ongoing family. Yet there was also an impending sense of anxiety: 'I worry about the day when priests are not here'.

In such a church, as one lady pointed out, men will have to play a stronger role.

> My recognition of the parish in my life is the family. I appreciate it more as I get older, I joined an 'autocracy' in which the Father was the pillar of the church. Women are more involved now. I think it is because men are frightened. […] When my father died the priest visited every day. […] I felt support from the parish; if the chips were down they were with you.

It highlights at a local level the sense a church can gain of itself and the level of participation when the clergy and lay work together through key administrative functions such as the development of a parish council.

## St. Agata's

> I envisage the future of Bettleswaid to have two Mass centres. We may not have a residence priest, but we need a structure to help empower other people.[123]

---

[123] All names are fictional. I visited St. Agata's on a 12 occasions. I attended the 11.am mass on the 24th October, 31st October, 7th November, and Sunday 12th December. I also attended the evening mass of 30th January, and a Saturday morning Mass (4th December). The Sunday morning Masses were followed by coffee where I was able to chat casually with church members. I have also attended the Friday morning Mass at the nearby St. Patrick's (28th January). Further to that I have participated in a day of reflection (4th December), and an 'open day' for the church to reflect on its governmental structures. I have met with a small focus group (4

In many respects our case-study of St. Agnes both exemplifies a leadership style which encourages a participatory laity, yet also highlights the tensions that arise between the parish and the pressures placed upon it by the wider demographic shifts envisaged in the deanery/cluster.

## The church and its setting

St. Agata's is a large Victorian church with a town-centre location and a reported Mass attendance of 498 in 2010. It lies between solid wealthy housing and old street housing, which is in the process of redevelopment as part of the West Central Bettleswaid's New Deal area. The parish includes some of the 'best' parts of town and some of the poorest areas. The church itself has a visibly large body of young families, older parishioners, a Polish community, and Philippine community. The resident priest is also in charge of another parish.

The church maintains a parish room and a large hall. One room is used by a local independent group. The hall and car park are often used throughout the week, both by the parish, e.g. catechetics, ecumenical breakfast club, Mother and Toddler Group, coffee mornings, parties etc., and the wider community including the Muslim Community. In the absence of a mosque it serves for study days as well as social events to which 30 to 40 Muslims may attend. There is a Premises Committee but, in practice, the parish priest gives out the key. This parish is well equipped to continue and extend its work in the community.[124]

## Leadership and Ministry

St. Agata's is one of seven churches in the Bettleswaid deanery. Bettleswaid is a rather isolated town. It sits out on the peninsula, off the main rail and road routes, as well as sitting out on the Eastern edge of the diocese. My sense, corroborated by the priest is that this isolation creates an internal cohesion amongst the parishes, evidenced by their proposal to unite as 'one' parish.

The church has a resident priest who is well liked, and often praised for mobilising the laity. Part of that ability to mobilise is his ability to step back from situations, thereby throwing the onus back onto the lay. But as an older member pointed out,

> The priest encourages people to be involved, and most people don't come forward readily, they have to be approached by the priest. People think I'm not good enough to do that; when I was asked to be a Eucharistic minister, I said, I'm not good enough, and Fr said, well everybody says that, and I'm not good enough, we need to be empowered.

This understanding was reflected in the priests own self-understanding of leadership.

---

participants) to reflect on the nature of adult learning and formation as well as participating in an evening event of spiritual reflection within the deaneries Formation Programme. I have also undertaken 9 interviews with parish members (including three ordained). These were usually undertaken in people's houses in and around Bettleswaid.

[124] The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle: Regeneration Group: Report of a Pilot Study on the use of Diocesan Buildings, Bettleswaid and Stockton/Billingham 2009.

> I'm good at encouraging, I try to do the communal, but personal encouragement is
> more effective.

Central to the priest's understanding of his ministry was 'low-key' approach: 'I'm not very clerical, I see my ministry to people on the fringes'.

For Michael, one of the few young people (mid 20s) I was able to spend some time with, the priest's central strength was cited as his ability to render relevant the Gospel. Michael recognised also the encouragement given by the priest, and articulated a real sense of devotion to the stability the church had offered, especially after returning from university. Yet he disagreed strongly over the charitable nature of the church: 'We shouldn't just help people, people should help themselves'.

Along with the minister, the pattern of ministry is strongly lay led, with a core team of dedicated lay, a Deacon and Religious Sister, youth worker, facilitated by encouraging priestly leadership.

## A Church in Transition

Since at least January 2010, churches as a whole in Bettleswaid have been faced with the possibility of seeing a reduction in the number of priests (confirmed in July of that year at a meeting of the Bishop with the clergy of the town). They were encouraged by the Bishop Séamus to think about the future of their church. In January, a short paper was put together outlining five different proposals for the future of the parishes on a spectrum including retaining the current model at one end, to designating the whole town as one parish with two further Mass centres at the other.[125]

The initial consensus appeared to be a move to designate the whole town as one parish with two further Mass centres. What this meant was not always clear. For some, it spelt the real loss of church buildings and a reduction in Mass centres and accessibility. For Mr Black, 'The one parish idea is not really to do with buildings, it is to try and come up with something which will do whether we have 4, 5, or 15 priests. We are trying to change the culture, to get people more involved, irrespective of the priest'.

A paper – drawn up by a younger priest from another parish in the deanery – was sent to the Bishop entitled 'One Parish in Bettleswaid: Possibilities' and a meeting held to discuss the proposals.[126] The deanery priest informed the group that the Bishop had been approached with a view to designating the whole town as one parish.

A number of issues around the role of the priest and the effect on the laity were raised. Regarding the role of the priest, canon law states that a parish can only have one priest. Consolidating the parishes into one therefore created a series of questions regarding the remaining priests; e.g. would the other priests be subordinated to the one, or could a rotational approach be adopted? How would priestly functions be allocated? For example,

---

[125] Proposals for the Future organisation of Bettleswaid Parishes. No author is given.
[126] The Deanery Priest, a Deacon, a Religious Sister, and two parishioners. Minutes of meeting held Monday 18th January 2010 to discuss basic implications of the one parish notion.

should they be allocated geographically or on a skills-based criteria? What extra training would be required on the part of the priests in support of the new form of governance?[127]

Regarding the effect on the laity, how might the quality of relationship between the priests and laity work? How would cohesion in the provision of services (Baptisms, weddings, etc.) be maintained? What extra training would be required on the part of the laity in support of the new form of governance?[128]

Current parish structures came under consideration: what areas of church life existed in the parishes? It was agreed to consult with each parish with a view to discovering the pool of experience and expertise in the area. This would further identify what type of lay formation would be required to assist the laity in this transitional period. Finally, it was also suggested that an external facilitator be brought in to assist.[129]

The Bishop offered broad support to the initiatives, recognising that a sufficient period of consultation was required, and recommending the parishes work together in advance of any such formal recognition as one parish whilst taking into account several practical points including volunteers, finance, schools, buildings, and unity.[130]

In April 2010, the Pastoral Area Council (PAC),[131] met for general discussion including the attitudes of priests, the need to respond to the Bishop's questions, and how to be a better church. It moved to establish two sub-committees: the first would deal with practical questions; the second – 'the Pastoral Vision Committee' of the PAC would explore the purpose of the church in Bettleswaid.

In May, the Pastoral Vision Committee,[132] drawing on an example from a church in France, explored a number of areas around which the community might envision itself including:

> The big Study (studying the readings prior to Mass); creating a better understanding of liturgy and the new missal; recognising God in everyday life; recognising the importance of reconciliation prior to the Eucharist; ensuring baptism was integrated into the Eucharist; preparing couples for marriage; visiting the sick or families in mourning; offering financial advice; retraining priests to work in new areas; and training for evangelism and decision-making.[133]

In June the Practical Committee of the PAC met.[134] An African priest who had visited St. Patrick's some years prior. When asked at the end of his stay what the difference between English and African parishes was, answered: 'In Africa the lay people work'. Recording

---

[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Comments from the Bishop and Episcopal Council: January 22, 2010.
[131] Bettleswaid Are Pastoral Council: Minutes of the Meeting, held on 22nd April 2010, St. Agatas. Comprising: 3 priests, 2 religious, 11 lay.
[132] Comprising: 2 lay, 1 youth worker, and 2 priests.
[133] PAC Vision Sub committee 20 May 2010.
[134] Comprising: priest and 5 lay.

these words the committee stressed the urgency of identifying lay members to take on parish work – in particular in regard to the formal establishment of Parish Councils.[135]

In July, a day of consultation for all the parishes of Bettleswaid was undertaken, facilitated by an external person. During the course of the event, parishes who were asked to identify their community's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Following the discussion, a round of voting was introduced to identify the key opportunities to address.[136] These were, in order of the most votes, Formation and Education (13 votes), Renewed Spirituality (8 votes), Review of formation of lay ministers (6 votes), Develop formation programme (4 votes), Develop Pastoral Plan (4 votes), Use of local people (1 vote), Gather as deanery (1 vote).

The biggest strength of the deanery was cited to be the increasing collaboration. The biggest weakness was its lack of lay leadership.

When the bishop visited that month, he further indicated that Bettleswaid would be seeing a reduction in the number of priests. Speaking at the Deanery Mass in August, the Bishop asked how the parishes uses the gifts of people to engage in evangelization and encourage laity to be more actively engaged in baptism preparation, marriage formation, visiting the sick, etc. The Bishop used the phrase 'clinging to our patch,' citing it as a temptation, and that inevitable change was a time of opportunity. Each parish was encouraged to hold a series of meetings so all voices could be heard.

In October, three subcommittees were established to cover the three areas suggested by the Bishop's strategy: formation, spirituality, and structure.[137] Confusion was aired as to whether the 'one parish policy' had been ultimately agreed. An exercise investigating a possible area of liaison between parishes in the field of finance was reported to have been initiated, and the need to maintain a wider commitment to evangelization within the town was aired.

In November, the Practical Subcommittee of the PAC met to undertake a purposeful 'mechanics of restructuring'.[138] This included: 1) the development of a database of parish activities: what is it parishes do? 2) Diocesan recommendations for a uniform system of financial accounting; 3) A proposal that each parish should have a parish council (St. Agata's is currently without, in the process of establishing one – Feb 2011.) comprising of persons responsible for specific but similar areas of parish activity. In short, a model parish council would be devised in the hope that all the parishes would adopt it. The model parish council would comprise 7 areas. 1) Pastoral, incorporating Eucharistic ministers, parish visitors, Apostleship of the Sea, bereavement Counsellors etc.; 2) Liturgy (including readers, catechists, children's liturgy, church cleaners, alter servers, sacristan greeters, etc.); 3) Finance (all areas); 4) Sacramental preparation Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage preparation, first Holy Communion preparation, first Reconciliation preparation etc.); 5) Social representatives (trips, senior clubs, sewing clubs, pantomimes, parent toddlers, shows, slimming groups; 6) Youth (all youth activities); 7) Administration (secretarial, registrar,

---

[135] PAC Practical Sub Committee, 9th June 2010.
[136] PAC 14th July 2010.
[137] PAC Minutes 7th October 2010.
[138] PAC 22nd Nov 2010.

archives, key holders, bulletin etc.). The uniformity of these areas across the seven churches of Bettleswaid would then facilitate amalgamation at a later date.

<span style="color:red">Open Day</span>

St. Agata's Open Day was the second of its kind, initially organised in response to Kit Dollar's consultation. At the previous Open Day, a number of themes were discussed. The aim of this Open Day was to feed back the discussion and develop a shared understanding of these areas. The three areas overlapped with the Bishop's proposals to examine Formation, Spirituality, and Structure. Some of the ideas developed in the PAC sub-committees were fed into the meeting.

The first area explored was the vision for the parish community with the following suggestions forwarded.

1. A Christian community who worships God through prayer, scripture and look after one another in a practical way.

2. A welcoming and vibrant place where people's gifts are recognised and developed.

3. A place where people work well together.

4. A place which reaches out, both locally and globally.

5. A place with strong leadership and greater participation from the lay.

6. A parish which works closely with others in sharing ideas and resources.

The biggest barrier identified to realising these goals was that 'Lay people are not empowered to take leadership roles'. Historically, lay people have never been encouraged to be self-sufficient and embrace mission; and were they to take on increased leadership, how would their work be validated in the eyes of the parish or other clergy. As one parishioner put it,

> It's not just getting them to do the practical things, a lot of work has gone on to help people fulfil their own baptismal promise, but they've never had to, so what we're trying to do is do both together, to be practical but also try to get them to understand that the worlds is not the world of 40 years ago; the participation of the lay is key.

Mr Black's further comments introduced a subtle distinction into the debate about a shared understanding of church. 'When you talk to a young person about prayer life, it will differ from others, so it's trying to build a situation where you have an understanding of the other'. In other words, instead of a community of disparate people trying to reach a common understanding of church in terms of x, y, and z, shared understanding is reached at the point where we appreciate the church is a place of different understandings of church.

Positive steps to overcome difficulties included: more formation for lay leaders, better communication, fundraising events, develop recognised new leadership structures, coordination of pastoral and practical life of the parish, increased responsibility for decision making in the life of the parish.

I joined the Structure group where a scheme for parish pastoral councils (PCCs), was explored. In the feedback, a resolution was put to the whole group to initiate a PCC. The group voted to do so in what was felt, and recognised by participants to be a 'a great moment,' one in which discussion and plans were transcended in a moment of active resolution. The participants felt they were doing something active and positive.

## Adult Christian Learning

St. Agata's has a clear program of formation. The programme is distinct from the RCIA. Where RCIA had previously been for both Catholics and non-Catholics, it is now specifically for non-Catholics, whereas the formation program serves the rest of the Catholic population.

Broadly speaking, the programme falls between two areas: In the first instance, formation that responds to the structural crisis within the churches: helping form laity as active participators; in the second instance, responding to the spiritual needs of people. While the two need not be opposed, some felt a slight tension between the two. Mia, responding to a question about the churches structure replied:

> I'm not interested in structure so much; spirituality is important […] I would like to see less talk about structure and more about spirituality.

Lara, an 'on/off Catholic,' having also reflected on the structural formation replied 'we need structural formation, liturgists, and catechists who are trained. You need training, but I crave some sort of spiritual sharing'.

> I think we are losing, the structure is in flux, no one knows what to do, I think it's good but don't know what to do, but I want the parish to be about building faith.

For Martin, it was not just a desire for spiritual formation over structural formation, but that structural changes are 'easier than changing practices' (i.e. the internal change required of spiritual formation). Moreover, he felt that spirituality was the place people connect to, not structures. What was needed then was more akin to a cultural evangelisation and change. Structural changes 'only demand a degree of faith and commitment when what we need is to be reformed'.

Returning then to the program, the title of the years events is given as 'Forming Our Community: One Church – Priests and People Program'. The very title indicates the link between formation and the strategic drive on the part deanery toward one parish, as reflected in the choice of courses. The programme looks like this:

1. Moving forward together – looking at the Washington consultancy (three sessions).

2. Four encounters with Christ in the Mass (four sessions).

3. How does Scripture transform our Faith, Church and Prayer life (four sessions)?

4. The legacy of Vatican II in the Church today (three sessions).

5.  Prayer (three sessions).

6.  Personnel Spiritual Development (four sessions).

7.  Ministry within the Church (four sessions).

The programme has its roots in a deanery wide initiative. As Mr Black explained, 'we have a group here, with someone from every parish, where we look at formation, and come up with talks, courses, to try and help form us all, particularly the lay like becoming liturgical leaders, Eucharistic ministers, but also trying to develop people's ability to participate more in whatever way'. Blocks of sessions are held in consecutive churches around the deanery.

The programme begins with a look at the 'Day of Conversation' or 'Washington Consultancy', a Diocesan wide event which was attended by people, priests, councils and Bishop Séamus. Discussion was led into three different stands: formation, spirituality, and structure.[139] This indicates the link between Diocesan wide strategy and local formation, as does the final course – yet to be held – on 'Ministry within the Church,' which offers four weeks exploring the faith journey of both religious and lay people within the Church.

At the session called 'Prayer' that I visited a religious sister presented the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, what elsewhere might be called 'creative visualisation'. The religious sister explained a little about the process, including anecdotes from her own life as a religious sister. She placed a picture on chair, a contemporary piéta. The session closed after meditation with no formal discussion.

Spirituality is catered for with Personal Spiritual Development. In another session that I visited, a priest offered up four images on a screen for contemplation. The aim was to challenge the way the congregation thought about Christ.

The images included:

1.  a picture of the Earth from space [the Cosmic Christ – alpha and omega];

2.  an Iron gate left ajar [Christ's saying - I am the Shepherd and the Gate];

3.  a shepherd and his flock in a border dwelling; and

4.  an intimate friend.

As the pictures were shown, plenary discussion was invited on what the image spoke to us. We were then encouraged to spend a few minutes discussing them in more detail with our neighbour. The lady I sat next to spoke with great enthusiasm about the evening and how it challenged her to think of Christ in new ways.

The following week the group was to be shown a film: *The Son of Man*, in which the life of Christ is retold in the context of an African township.

---

[139] 'New Vision,' *Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle*,.http://rcdhn.org.uk/newvision/newvisionmain.php

One of the intriguing additions was the three weeks spent on Vatican II. This is significant not only to denominational formation, but more particularly the question of lay participation. Again, as Mr Black explained, while recognising that for some Vatican II comes down to receiving the Mass in English, its importance relates precisely to the question

> do we know where we are? […] A shared parish isn't one of the consequences of Vatican II, it is a fundamental expression of where the church is today, and when they put Vatican II into practice, we'll move on.

In short, his point seems to be that the documents of Vatican II give licence to the level of lay participation required in today's church.

But clearly the shifts in Vatican II were seen by some ordained to have created its own set of contemporary issues related to the churches efforts. As Fr. Darian put it:

> for the Second Vatican Council to have really had an effect in people's lives, we should have been preaching about it for the last 40 years. But we're told through the Vatican documents that we need to preach on the Scriptures, yet the only place we've got really to speak to the masses are our Masses.

In other words, the very emphasis on scripture has stifled conversation about structure.

This is not to downplay the appreciation of the congregation for the scripture, and in particular the way one priest provides, a) a useful one-line explanation prior to the reading in the mass, highlighting its key point, b) renders the text relevant. Rather, his point was that the places to propose the question of structure to general congregation are limited.

Beyond the formation programme, St. Agata's is a congregation active in other forms of both implicit and explicit formation including: Apostleship of the Sea, bereavement counsellors, liturgical leaders including readers, catechists, those involved in children's liturgy, youth activities, and sacramental preparation, altar servers, social representatives. Beyond that, there is also evidence of small informal groups meeting to discuss issues or bible study (an example of what Bishop Séamus has called 'Theology on Tap'). These were reported with varying degrees of success and generally seemed short-lived.

My discussion with members also threw up a number of other opportunities which might be developed. Edna for example suggested 'Open up a shop; a place for prayer, ecumenical endeavours'.

> Churches are for building up, not for demolishing.

As to how to how laity fill these roles, key seems to be the strong directive of the priest. As Mia, a relatively new member of the congregation having settled in England from abroad, pointed out, she was asked by the priest to become involved in a planning group. Yet, 'my first objection to joining the group was that I was new, and didn't want it be seen as new and introducing something new'. She commended the priest for encouraging her to join and as with her involvement as a Eucharistic minister: 'ministry changes my point of view, I saw all the people'.

My experience then suggested that, through reflection on wider diocesan discussion, and concerted open days in the parish focused on questions such as 'What is your vision for this parish community', there was strong evidence of a shared conversation about its self-understanding encouraged by the diocese in the light of impending changes. The programme of open day reflection, development of task groups such as the vision committee, and ongoing adult formation, evidence strong links to the vision and how that is strategically attained. In particular, the church is looking to consolidate the Christian community in the town, and prepare for the possibility of no resident priest.

The pattern of ministry is strongly lay led, with a core team of dedicated lay people, a deacon and religious sister, youth worker, facilitated by encouraging priestly leadership. These voices are often mobilised in ongoing conversations and rounds of planning through various sub-committees with a view to facilitating greater lay participation in the light of diminished priestly vocations.

The most obvious tensions concern discussion over precisely how the church is to proceed with the prospect of reduced priests, church closures in the deanery, and greater sharing. Discussion ranges across a spectrum from those who are prepared to think new models of ordained ministry and widened access to those who resolutely resist church closure. The church has taken an active role in understanding the changing role of ordained ministry, most visible in the structuring of a PC. The decision on the part of the church to adopt a PC was a moment of great cohesion.

Interestingly, adult learning was concertedly structured to address the questions (e.g. the legacy of Vatican II explores those documents which licence greater lay participation; Ministry within the Church (four sessions)). How well these have worked remains to be seen. The church is part of an ecumenical partnership, and indeed, is geographically situated next-door to an Anglican church, however, there is little evidence of ecumenical impact.

Despite a sense of internal cohesion identified within the parishes, the greatest change cited was in the diminished sense of 'insularity' amongst Catholics. For example, Catholics who identified as 'Christians;' and within the church, a breaking down of the distinction between laity and clergy. This was seen as a positive move.

The church has to develop greater ties to its sister churches in the area and become more independent of priests. The proposals put forward by St. Agata's in the months covered by my attendance testify to a positive move in this direction. However, it is worth noting that at the present time of writing, several months from the initial interviews, a PC has yet to be established. Are the churches discovering that despite their enthusiasm the process requires a longer time of reflection and shared conversation with all involved? Or does the issue lie in the balance between a leadership style which, while personally encouraging, avoids strong directive. The tensions exhibited in these instances offer some means of discerning how to change.

In sum it might be argued that what links these two case studies is the way in which at the local level the parish council mobilised a sense of action within the church. In the first study,

it gave cohesion to a singular parish; and, in the second it became the basis for a more unified cluster by providing an administrative hub with obvious links. How then is this reflected at regional level?

## *Summary*

### Questions Arising: Building Consensus in Lay Committees and Councils

The practical governance of the diocese is served through a number of key canonical bodies including: The College of Consulters who serve as advisors to the Bishop.[140] The Council of Clergy (or Council of Priests/Presbyteral Council) represents the presbyterate and assists the bishop in the governance of the diocese.[141] This body is also obligatory. The presbyteral council possesses a consultative vote only; however, 'the diocesan bishop is to hear it in affairs of greater importance but needs its consent only in cases expressly defined by law'.[142] In other words, while the council is only consultative, the Bishop is nonetheless obliged to listen on some matters. As canon 495§1 puts it, the council is

> to be like a senate of the bishop which assists the bishop in the governance of the diocese according to the norm of law to promote as much as possible the pastoral good of the portion of the people of God entrusted to him.

By way of explicitly responding to Vatican II and the emphasis on clergy and laity together, canon 511 enabled the legislator (i.e. the bishop) to establish for the diocese a lay council in which laity and clerical voices could be heard together. However, within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle there is currently no Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC). This was superseded in favour of a Strategy Group, led by the bishop and including the Spiritual Director for the Diocese, former members of the DPC, the Youth Services, Education Service, Evangelisation Group, and Episcopal Council. This is the group that now plans diocesan initiatives and is tasked with developing relations between clergy and laity.

Within the diocese, the current structure implemented to realize the juridical right in canon law for the Christian faithful to make known their needs and desires to the pastors of the Church is the Council of Laity, a consultative body to the bishop, where the bishop is president and there is a lay chair. As its descriptor says, 'it represents laity from all areas of the diocese'. Representatives are sent from clusters, deanery area councils, or where there are none of these, directly from parishes, it usually meets twice a year plus prayer days. It includes a steering group, and from time to time and a sub-group tasked in one way or another.[143]

However, the Diocesan Pastoral Council (the constitution of which allowed for joint clergy and laity to meet together) was felt by Bishop Ambrose during his incumbency to be too unwieldy for efficient practice in decision-making. It was therefore deemed better to have

---

[140] *Code of Canon Law* 502 §1. Some juridical acts on the part of the bishop require as a matter of Canon Law, consultation or consent from the College of Consulters, thereby underlining their importance.
[141] *Code of Canon Law* 495 §1.
[142] *Code of Canon Law* 500, §2.
[143] *Code of Canon Law*. 212 §1-3.

two separate councils (the Council of Priest and the Council of Laity) with a smaller DPC acting as the working party to take initiatives forward.[144] The Council of Laity was therefore introduced as a consultative body to offer a wider representative voice for the DPC. The Council of Laity and DPC continued to function under Bishop Dunn. However, because the Council of Laity, like the DPC, is not mandatory, it, along with other non-mandatory bodies, ceased to function during a period of interregnum and following the instatement of the current bishop, the smaller DPC was not re-established.

The strategic direction of the Council of Laity is given by the bishop. As one interviewee highlighted:

> When the steering committee met for the first time with Bishop Séamus, at an early stage he said he didn't just want to pick up and go with it. He wanted to use the opportunity to think about what the Council of Laity was doing, and indeed the other councils. And the view he was giving us, was that, he didn't want the meeting to be, I suppose a formal committee, driven.... almost he didn't want it to be agenda-driven in the way that it was, and updates to people and that sort of thing. He wanted it to be based far more on prayer, and his initial request was that the Council should come together initially to pray. And then to build on that for the issues that the Council got involved in.

The suggestion that the group meet without an agenda supports the view that the Council should serve as a platform for creative thinking and highlights the strength of this approach. However, there is the sense now that the Council of Laity is not working particularly well. The relation between the councils remains problematic.

As stated, the Council of Laity unlike the DPC does not have lay and clerical bodies constitutionally built into it.[145] Yet, as one interviewee highlighted:

> There's always been a proposal that the council of priests and the council of laity should be one council, there shouldn't be two. But the point is always made that much of the business of the council or priests is to do with priests – retirements, salaries, problems and that laity wouldn't really be in on it if you like.

Thus there has been some resistance although arguably on both sides. Also as another interviewee explained:

> The Bishop has said it [clear relationships between parish councils, pastoral area councils, and the council of laity] is good practice and he has told the clergy that he expects them, but if the clergy don't do it, only the Bishop can do something about it.

A number of days have been held looking at the difficulties of working together, facilitated by an external agent although it remains to be seen what will come out of those consultations.

---

[144] Pat Kennedy, 'The Council of Laity Is about Sharing, Reflecting, and Then Seeking Action,' *The Northern Cross*, April 2014, 4.

[145] A pastoral council consists of members of the Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church — clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, and especially laity—who are designated in a manner determined by the diocesan bishop'. *Code of Canon Law* 512 §1.

The issue here is that in offering wider representation to the laity through the council, the laity is at the same time disenfranchised from the very structures which give expression to clergy and laity working together. More recently, the bishop informed the council that

> the Board agreed practical steps needed to effectively manage diminishment in the Diocese in order to enable a flourishing Catholic Community. There had been a proposal that meetings of priests and lay people together, should take place in the five Vicariates before Easter, however it has now been decided that these may be a little premature and that they be postponed until a later date. A sub-group of the Board has been established to progress the thinking and decisions made with a view to offering a framework to help develop an active, empowered and engaged Catholic Community into the future.[146]

While clergy and laity clearly can agree on the need for relations that empower the Catholic community as a whole, arguably the decision to develop a sub-group without representation from the council further risks disenfranchising the council as a consultative body as it raises the questions as to its purpose.

In a round of interviewees with members of the council, a number of issues were raised contributing to the above picture. First: the issue of representation. As one representative on the Council of Laity commented, things were rarely received from parishes by the Council of Laity and 'basically the only couple of things that ever came forward on that basis were really by nature of people looking for an escalation route'. Another regional level lay interviewee commented on how no business came to the diocese from the Council of Priests. Moreover, it can be difficult to get people to commit, particularly at present when, as one interviewee put it 'they don't know what it is they're committing to'. A related point was that 'any area that hasn't made its pastoral area work is almost disenfranchised from the Council of Laity'. The implication of this statement is that the bulk of representation pertains to individual churches rather than clusters or pastoral areas. Hence a further member of the Council of Laity commented that there can be an imbalance between people speaking on behalf of a group, cluster or pastoral area and those who speak for a PPC or even as individuals. It can be difficult for the bishop to give adequate weighting to these differences.

Second, the direction and purpose of the council remains unsure. This is particularly acute for the steering committee. As Pat Kennedy recently reflected:

> In 1997 we had joint training days on 'Leadership Skills' with the laity and clergy, a day on 'Putting Management into Action' as well as doing surveys on the average age of clergy in the diocese, and lay involvement in parish management.[147]

However, since 2011, the main remit of the meetings has been to develop an understanding of the sacraments and putting 'Spirituality into Action,' exploring mission possibilities. A Social Justice Working Party was established to look at issues for them to work on (e.g. supporting food banks alongside some more practical issues such as communication) and was warmly received. However, the emphasis on spirituality and formation arguably renders fewer opportunities for formal and structured discussion around the pressing matters of church

---

[146] Bishop's Letter, 23rd January 2014.
[147] Pat Kennedy, 'The Council of Laity Is about Sharing, Reflecting, and Then Seeking Action,' 4.

governance in the light of clustering – a major issue of concern for the lay and clergy together. As one interviewee put it, the meetings tend to be 'more of a reflective meeting'.

Indeed, this is arguably a feature which characterises Catholic learning and formation in the diocese more generally. In our comparative study of learning and formation many of the denominations evidenced a high degree of ecumenical experience and cross-over within groups that voiced similar concerns around the purpose and nature of learning (e.g. an experiential approach to the bible; developing friendships, etc.). The Roman Catholic groups we met covered a slightly wider spectrum than those of other traditions although the bible study groups we visited differed in no significant ways in style, process, content or language from the majority of bible study groups from other traditions.

For example, two groups met primarily to explore and practise charismatic spirituality groups rather than to learn. Two other groups focused on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), provided specific examples of how 'formation' within a tradition may be linked to adult learning. The content of learning in RCIA groups was again, broadly similar to that encountered in other traditions and they carried out the process of learning in a similar way, too. Yet there was a difference, it was that they seemed to assume a more explicit agenda of 'becoming a Catholic' than of, for example, becoming an Anglican or Baptist within similar groups within those traditions. For those who join the Roman Catholic Church from other traditions, this is manifested most clearly in the need to know about distinctive liturgical practises. However, no other denomination offers such a strong school-based initiation in the life of Christian tradition as the Roman Catholic Church. Members of the Holy Family Darlington Bible Study group remembered childhood catechism 'as the basis of faith and moral judgment;' even claiming that 'you were born with a Catholic conscience'. Also, at St. Cuthbert's Hartlepool, 'We learnt about our Catholic faith in school, with the penny catechisms, we learnt them off by heart'. Or, 'It instilled a sure foundation. You don't learn, you just know'. However, very rarely is parish learning and formation used to explicitly address the organisational changes.

Third, because the Council only meets three times a year, progress is very slow. Following on from the bishop's input on reconciliation a leaflet was produced. Yet this took a whole year to develop, and despite the possibilities offered by electronic media this remains underused by the council steering group.

Putting all these points together it might be argued that by divorcing the Council of Laity from a meaningful structural relation with the Council of Priests, and rendering the basis of its function spiritual direction, the structures affirm what is arguably the liberal consensus that perceives a split between politics and spirituality. The Council of Laity places an emphasis in its program on developing spirituality, and yet is divorced structurally from the wider polity of church life. In this way the very structure arguably compounds the very viewpoint it seeks to overcome: a dis-engaged laity.

## Questions Arising: Rationalisation

Returning to the diocese's strategic direction, the history of the diocese like that of the Catholic Church in Northern England more generally, is, as Chris Fallon puts it, 'a story of survival and flourishing, of expansion and decline'[148] enriched and enlivened by successive waves of Catholic immigrants. Churches were built wherever the Catholic population grew. As noted, recent years have witnessed a seismic cultural shift registered in the declining numbers of Mass attendees and those coming forward for priestly vocation. The situation is compounded further by the loss also (since 2011) of Ushaw College, which located within the diocese, functioned as the Catholic seminary for the North of England as well providing services for on-going formation.

However, as Chris Fallon argues, the perceived decline is in part the legacy of too many buildings, and the growth in ordained ministry, which reached its peak in the 1950s. To take Liverpool as an example, while there are fewer priests now than in recent years the ratio of priests to Mass-goers is higher now than at any time in the last 80 years.[149]

While the current strategy seeks to ameliorate the decline by looking for new structures, it does so on the basis of a rationalisation of Mass centres and clustering. Yet to what degree can the strategy be said to derive from a 'diminishment'[150] of the church in terms of numbers, or a prior failure to engage the laity in a more active commitment to the life of the church, relevant ongoing formation, and service within their communities? And while the strategy is tightly focused on 'formation for all,' laity and clergy alike, the increasing rationalisation of parish churches may mean that the basis of a site for lay people and clergy to share in the threefold ministry of God may well have vanished.

## Final Thoughts

To sum up: our research has uncovered conflicting areas that need to be addressed in order for the insights of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent renewal in canon law to be received locally by the bishop in the diocese. First, there is a tension between the rationalization of Mass-centres and the desired outcome of 'formation for all'. Second, the emphasis upon spiritual formation could have the undesirable outcome of encouraging passivity in lay participation in church governance. We believe that these two conflicting areas stem from the fact that currently there is no Diocesan Pastoral Council. Although the DPC is not mandatory, the current situation with the ineffectiveness of the Council of Laity does not prove to be the proper solution.

---

[148] Chris Fallon, 'Who Do We Think We Are? A Study of the Self-Understandings of Priests in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool' (Durham University, 2013), 25, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6983.
[149] Ibid., 41.
[150] Bishop's Letter, 23rd January 2014.

# The Northern Baptist Association

*Marcus Pound, John Claydon Tucker, Helen Savage (Learning and Formation), Tom Redman (Leadership and Ministry)*

## Phase I: Mapping the Tradition

### *Introduction*

Baptist churches have been founded in this country since the 1640s. They emerged as a result of the Radical Reformation and were shaped by the influences of English Puritanism, Separatism and the Anabaptist movement in Europe. Puritans were influenced by the reforms of John Calvin, and were called as such because they insisted on purity of doctrine and practice within the Church of England, along with a characteristic emphasis on the vernacular biblical, its teachings and practices.[151] Separatists gave up hope of reforming the church from within and formed their own independent congregations. By 1600, there were several such congregations in England which in the space of twenty-five years quickly began to grow.[152]

Amongst the Separatists were Quakers, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and assorted Independent and Nonconformists' churches. Some Separatists eschewed infant baptism in favour of the baptism of believers. These groups were called Baptists, initially a pejorative term but one that was quickly adopted for self-designation. They also shared a commitment to congregational church government and separation of church and state. They endured persecution both before the English Commonwealth and after its demise, with many fleeing to Amsterdam, but began to flourish following the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689.

From the outset Baptists emerged as two distinct groups: General (Arminian) Baptist Churches and Particular (Calvinist) Baptist Churches. General Baptists were so called because they believed in general atonement, i.e. Christ died for all people and whoever believed in Christ would be saved. Nonetheless, as Leon McBeth highlights, they maintained that one could 'fall-from grace'.[153] The first General Baptist church was led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. Smyth had been a minister in the Church of England, but joined the Puritans until frustration over reform led him to adopt a Separatist position. The dangers of persecution led him to Amsterdam, where he founded the first General Baptist church in 1608. Its members were drawn from English refugees who had fled England to escape religious persecution.

In Amsterdam, they came into contact with Dutch Mennonites, a branch of the Anabaptist family that taught religious liberty and exclusively baptism of believers only. Smyth became increasingly convinced that his own Separatist church was invalid because a majority of its members had only received infant baptism, and the church was formed on the basis of

---

[151] Leon McBeth, 'Baptist Beginnings' (1979) www.baptisthistory.org/baptistbeginnings.htm (last accessed 2013).
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.

'covenant' rather than a confession of faith in Christ. Smyth therefore disbanded the church and reformed it on the basis of personal confession, followed by believer's baptism.

It was Thomas Helwys, with members of Smyth's church, who resettled back in London in 1611 and established the first Baptist church in England. By 1650, there were at least forty-seven General Baptist churches in and around London.[154]

Particular Baptists were deeply influenced by the teachings of John Calvin. In distinction to General Baptists they believed that Christ died only for a particular group: the elect. They emerged out of an Independent congregation, which unlike the Separatist's congregations sought to maintain autonomous congregations without a radical break with the state church implied in Separatism. The first Particular Baptist church dates at least from between 1633 to 1638. By 1650, there were a number of Particular Baptist churches in and around London.

In addition to particular atonement, they taught believer's baptism. The First London Confession of Particular Baptists, adopted in 1644, says of baptism, 'The way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under the water'.[155] General Baptists were practicing immersion – although not exclusively, by 1650.

It was this practice of Baptism that led to their designation as Baptists by opponents. Early Baptists called themselves 'Brethren' or 'Brethren of the Baptized Way'. The first known reference to 'Baptists' in England was in 1644.

The present Baptist Union of Great Britain is the oldest and largest national organization of Baptist churches in Great Britain. Its present manifestation was formed when the General Baptists and Particular Baptists came together in 1891, but the Baptist Union actually dates itself from 1813. The Baptist Union of Great Britain currently consists of about 2,150 congregations with a total membership of almost 140,000 individuals. Local churches belong to both the national Union and also to regional Associations.

The earliest known Baptist church in the North East was founded in 1650 as a consequence of the Parliamentary Army's presence in Newcastle upon Tyne. The Northern Baptist Association can trace its history back to a Particular Baptist Association formed in 1690. Today the Northern Baptist Association covers the area equivalent to the North East of England, stretching from Northallerton to Berwick and from the coast to Great Asby, near Appleby, with a small cluster of churches around Kirkby Stephen to the west. There are approximately 51 churches in the Northern Baptist Association in an area of approximately 3000 square miles. Church size ranges from the smallest churches where membership is less than 5, to the largest which has about 385 members. Total membership as of 2012 is approximately 2,885 although the worshiping community size is estimated to be around 4,500, or 0.17% of the population. Gender is split: 58% female and 42% male. In a period from 2000 to 2012, the Northern Baptist Association records a decline in membership of

---

[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

4.21%, which amounts to a decline of 0.35% a year making the Northern Baptist Association relatively stable.

## *Ecclesiology*

A number of significant biblical and theological themes converge in shaping Baptist Ecclesiology. Arising out of understandings of the Old Testament, but developed in the New Testament, is the belief that God has called a people to be God's 'covenant people' and to be a distinctive witness to God's Kingdom. Such a call and relationship is fundamental for Baptists who believe that it is in, and through, the gathered people of God that God engages with God's people in a corporate sense. Therefore, the term 'assembly' becomes significant in reflecting the understanding that just as in the Old Testament God called God's people together to belong to God and to one another, so also the local church is an expression of such a covenant community with Christ promising to be present when people gather in his name.

This gathered community, filled with the Spirit, with Christ in the midst, is seen to be competent to discern the mind of Christ for its life and mission. Consequently, Baptists affirm strongly the liberty of each church to discern the mind of Christ for itself. The implications of such an ecclesiology is that whilst those called to be ministers, elders, or deacons will be expected to take the initiative, discern vision, and take a lead. It is the gathered church in fellowship with their Lord that is to discern what is right. This is expressed in the Church Meeting, a meeting of church members[156] who make decisions by consensus or formal vote. The emphasis upon the local church congregation is dominant in this ecclesiology. Yet this inherent independency is to be balanced by an interdependency that is reflected in the life of regional associations and a national union, which ecclesiologically would be seen as having authority as a gathering of the churches to discern the mind of Christ together. In this sense, the assembly acts as a collective form of Church Meeting.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

Baptists grew from a radical libertarian sect and have historically considered the autonomous local congregation the manifestation par excellence of the church universal. This position distinguishes Baptists markedly from denominations that stress the local community's sacramental and juridical integrity, whilst nonetheless envisaging a wider conciliar authority – the union, as the vital collegial expression of the communities' common life. Baptist ecclesiology asserts the priesthood of all believers, i.e. each may be a priest to another within the final high priesthood of Christ. In short, there is no separated priesthood. Christ is taken as the model of ministry: incarnate, kerygmatic, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church is an extension of that ministry, and all who share in Christ share that ministry. Ministry is not to imply apostolic elitism, but belongs to the whole church: a fellowship of believers, a corporate seeking of the mind of Christ.

---

[156] The category of 'membership' generally includes those who have undergone a Baptism of faith, along with elders or deacons, and nationally accredited ministers.

Moreover, Baptists are unconvinced by historical and theological arguments for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, opting instead for a twofold view of ministry: those called and ordained at a national level, and those called and recognised in the local church (e.g. deacon/elder). Thus, while Baptist ecclesiology asserts the priesthood of all believers, this is not to say that some are not called to particular ministries, i.e. set apart for the purposes of leadership. Also churches may accommodate nationally accredited ministers, lay Pastors and preachers, alongside deacons and elders.

The Northern Baptist Association recognises ministry under a number of accredited schemes: a) Nationally Accredited Ministry (although there are currently no nationally accredited ministers in the Northern Baptist Association); b) Lay preachers for whom there is a training expectation which gives them a national accreditation; c) Locally accredited ministers (which may include specific ministries such as chaplain). There are approximately 41 paid ministers in the Assembly; 8 (17%) are part time; 33 (72%) are fulltime. Seven churches in the Assembly are pastored by unpaid ministers and in some cases churches share a minister. Six churches have no pastoral oversight.

## *Governance*

### Association to Assembly

The oldest form of organization beyond the local church was the Association – that designated a regional grouping of Baptists. Early Baptist churches entered into fellowship with other believers who shared their faith. For example, in 1624 and again in 1630, a number of General Baptist churches in London came together to discuss matters of doctrine.[157] The Regional Associations provided a translocal means of fellowship, a wider platform for general discussion of Baptist issues, and a means to propagate Baptist teachings, as well as clarify Baptist doctrine among the churches. While early Assemblies were informal, they highlight nonetheless the translocal nature of Baptists in their early days, and gave a common sense of identity to Baptists. By 1650, the Baptist Associations were well established, corresponding in political terms to a county.

It was short step from Assemblies to a national body for the regional Associations. General Baptists were first to develop this national organization, with evidence of such a body by 1653 with representatives from the various churches and associations.[158]

In a time of persecution they offered, as McBeth puts it, 'fellowship, counsel, and comfort'.[159] General Baptists developed a particular understanding of the function of General Assembly with an emphasis on conformity. The 1678 confession outlines the role of Assembly in the following terms:

> General councils, or assemblies, consisting of Bishops, Elders, and Brethren, of the several churches of Christ [...] make but one church […] And to such a meeting, or

---

[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

assembly, appeals ought to be made, in case any injustice be done, or heresy, and schism countenanced, in any particular congregation of Christ.

The National Assembly introduced a degree of jurisdiction or control over local congregations. By contrast, Particular Baptists placed the emphasis within the Assembly on protecting the freedom of the local church. For example, the Second London Confession – adopted in 1689 – states that

in cases of difficulties or differences,[…] it is according to the mind of Christ, that many Churches holding communion together, do by their messengers meet to consider, and give their advice in, or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the Churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any Church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the Churches themselves […] or to impose their determination on the Churches, or Officers.[160]

## Local Structure and Governance

The basic unit of the Northern Baptist Association is the local church, which come together in a General Meeting or 'Churches in Assembly'. Each church is autonomous and is voluntarily a member of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and of the Northern Baptist Association. It is possible to belong to only one of these bodies, but not usual. As one Baptist minister reported:

there is no such thing as the Baptist Church – all Baptist churches are autonomous, they can do whatever they want. What we do in Baptist terms is associate together, hence Northern Baptists Association.[161]

Churches are not accountable to the Northern Baptist Association (NBA), nor are ministers formally accountable to the Association or the regional team.

Baptist churches should base their life and practice on that set out in the particular church's trust deed. These can be varied and can contain interesting peculiarities, although more recently established churches will have adopted model trusts provided by the Baptist Union which are in keeping with the Baptist and Congregational Trusts Act of 1951. The local trust will deal with the matters of church membership, ministry, and governance. For example, the model trust states that

the Holding Trustees shall permit such Ministers as the Church shall from to time appoint to act and function as pastoral overseers of the Church who have been Baptised,[162] who affirm the Declaration of Principle, who hold to the authority of the Holy Scriptures and that interpretation of them usually called Evangelical, who maintain and practice the doctrine and rite of Baptism and whose name appears on

---

[160] Para. 15
[161] All quotes taken from M. Pound (ed.) *Receptive Ecumenism and the Northern Baptist Association: A Report*. (Durham University: 2013).
[162] This means believers by immersion as set out in the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle.

the Register[163] provided always that the Church may make written application to the Union for such mentioned qualification to be waived.[164]

Some foundation deeds, which take precedence over the model trust deed, will require all members to have been baptised as believers, but many do not make this requirement.

At a local level churches are free to establish their own governance structures, although a common theological background, developed historical customs and a need to incorporate model Trust deeds into local constitutions results in a number of features in common. At a local leve, the key decision-making body is the church meeting, with some delegation to a leadership team. Normally this leadership team is a lay diaconate, or a group of elders, or both. It functions somewhat similarly to a trusteeship committee within a local charity, yet recognising the authority of Christ in the church meeting. For example, the schedule to the model trusts states that

> church members in Church Meeting shall meet together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit under the Lordship of Christ to discern the mind of God in the affairs of the Church, and as such, shall be the final decision-making authority for all matters relating to all affairs of the Church save for those matters reserved for decision approval or action by the Holding Trustee.[165]

The leadership team of the church fulfils the role of 'managing trustees'. Holding Trustees, who legally own the building to enable the church to function, will be appointed by the church. These may be individuals, or a 'Trust' body such as the Baptist Union Corporation acting for churches throughout the country, or an Association operating a Trust Company.

## Local Finance

Local churches are financially independent and tend to work within their resources, financial and otherwise, with potential recourse to loans or grants to support specific activities. Many churches fund the costs of their own ministers, either full-time or part-time, while others receive a Baptist Union Home Mission Grant to help with this. Churches are asked to contribute, on a purely voluntary basis, to both the Baptist Union Home Mission Fund and the Baptist Missionary Society, in line with suggested target amounts. The current target for the former is 5% of church income; nationally, actual giving is approximately 3.8%.[166]

## Local Strategy

In line with the Baptist Union's Declaration of principle 'that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His [Christ's] Laws,' churches are expected to develop their own life and mission. Help and guidance is made available through both the Union and the Association. This will consist of advice, mission/church consultancy and the provision of resources. Traditionally, Baptist Churches are 'gathered churches', gathered together in response to the call of God, but they may also be gathered from a wider

---

[163] This refers to the 'Baptist Union's Register of Covenanted Persons accredited for Baptist Ministry'.
[164] Baptist Union Corporation Guidelines B.9, *Baptist Model Trusts for Churches* (2003), 5
[165] Baptist Union Corporation Guidelines B.9, *Baptist Model Trusts for Churches* (2003), 10.
[166] National Accounts 2009.

geographical area. The latter factor can often set a tension in terms of the mission focus of a church as to whether it should focus on the immediate area around the church or the wider area from which the congregation is drawn.

Another way to put this is that the most significant factor influencing both governance and strategy within the Northern Baptist Association is the independence of local churches. The links between local churches and the regional level of the Northern Baptist Association – given that there is no intermediate level – are purely voluntary, and dependant on the quality of relationships between churches and the regional team. This level of church independence is both valued and respected, and can encourage a high level of commitment within churches, but can also in some cases lead to a peAs one Baptist minister put it:

> It's a matter of just associating together and finding ways to work together for the ongoing work of the Kingdom really, by finding those parts of our church life where we think that in coming together we can be more effective than individual churches basically. Our whole structures are based around that. There are situations when it is important to speak to the outside world on a regional or national basis, but in all these things you are speaking on behalf of individual churches, who in Baptist terms may not exactly be the same in all respects. There will be a commonality of belief.

Furthermore, using the designation 'Believers' Church' with an emphasis upon the baptism of the believer and believers becoming members of the church does have the effect of emphasising the reality of conversion, whether that is experienced as a gradual journey or at a 'crisis' point. The corollary of this is a natural emphasis upon mission as evangelism. However, most churches would have a wider view of mission than this. In line with many evangelicals, they have rediscovered a broader view of mission. The church's leadership in conjunction with the church meeting would be expected to help develop the church's strategy in mission. Many churches would engage in a variety of activities for different age groups ranging from sport and social activities to devotional and worship events.

## Regional Leadership

The regional staff team employs two translocal regional ministers. One gives pastoral support to ministers and churches and provides leadership for the association as a whole. The other takes particular responsibility for mission with the churches. There is also a part-time youth specialist and a part-time administrative support worker. Regional ministers are appointed by a General Meeting and as such are appointed by the churches, rather than by the Council, i.e. an elected group.

## Regional Structure and Governance: The Assembly and Council

There is relatively little decision-making at the regional level and the Northern Baptist Association has no decision-making authority over local churches. Most decisions are made by the Council. The level of business 'is primarily about the life and role of the Association, rather than directing the role of each church'. Regional structures parallel local structures with an Assembly (including representatives from all churches) and a Council (consisting of up to 12 elected members plus some co-opted and ex-officio appointees). The Assembly holds two meetings a year, which are chances for worship, sharing, formation, and decision-making. The Council meets three times per year, with supporting groups meeting a similar

number of times. In practice, most decisions are made by the Council and supporting sub-groups, although the Assembly does retain responsibility for appointment of Regional Ministers, other key officers, and the election of Council members.

There are three sub-groups of the Council with delegated authority to make decisions on its behalf. The Resources Group which deals with the details of finance and other administrative matters, the Ministry Group which handles matters relating to ministerial application and accreditation, and the support of ministers and churches, and the Home Mission Working Group which processes the applications made by local churches for a grant to support ministry. This group would make a recommendation to a national Grants Committee of the Baptist Union. There are two further groups which both report to Council. The Assembly Planning Group which plans the two Association Assemblies and the Staffing Group which handles matters to do with the staff. Hence, in terms of governance, the general Meeting receive the Accounts that have already been approved by the Council as Trustees/Directors. It will elect people to the Council, receive other reports and do any other necessary business.

There is some conflict with the requirements of the Charity Commission which requires the Council to be the key decision-making body as the trustees/directors of the charity/company. However, according to Baptist ecclesiology, decisions should be made by the Assembly (as the bigger, representative body). On a purely practical level, however, this does not cause much difficulty as there is relatively little decision-making at regional level and the Assembly is too big and meets too infrequently to handle all decision making. As the Council is a relatively large group of people, there can be some difficulties with the dynamics. As stated, the Council meets only three times per year, and similarly so for the supporting groups. However, members of the Council do not necessarily meet informally as a church leadership team would be likely to do. As one regional level, clerical interviewee pointed out, the effect of this is that the Council

> doesn't always engage with issues as well as it might because basically they are all busy doing other things in the meantime. They just come to a meeting. So it has to be driven by others who are presenting papers and reports that come into resources and ministry group and other smaller sub groups.

Other regional level interviewees also suggested that 'we tend to get a bit bogged down in terms of paperwork at that meeting' and 'the opportunity for Council to stop and reflect strategically about the direction of the Association is quite challenged'. It can also be difficult to get people to participate in the Council, which, as one interviewee suggested, may be a reflection of the perceived irrelevance of regional structures to local church life.

The role of the Regional Leadership team in relation to the Council was exemplified by the Regional Minister's identification of the need to appoint a youth worker to work across the region:

> That's the nature of leadership,' 'to keep an eye out for certain possibilities' explores those possibilities.

The final decision however was made by the Council. The Regional Minister does not Chair the council and never chairs the Assembly.

The autonomy of local churches means that the Association/regional leadership team has no real authority over local churches, and can cause some tension at regional level. Problems can develop within churches and while the regional team can offer advice and/or assistance this does not have to be accepted. This can result in failure to resolve small problems which turn into bigger issues.

This potential tension was recognised by local level interviewees, one of whom commented,

> I can see that there are times when a local church really needs the expertise and the input from outside, the oversight if you like, the wisdom that a Regional Minister can bring. But a lot of churches don't think of involving the regional staff at an early stage if they've got difficulties over something.

Another commented:

> But there seems to me to be the danger that there are some churches that go through periods in their lives that actually need somebody from the outside to come in and, dare I say, sort them out and take a very strong hand with them.

In the course of our interviews, we asked interviewees at the local level to provide a word or phrase which described their perception of regional governance. In general, the responses highlighted its 'advisory and supportive' role, 'resourcing' churches should they require it, 'kind of laissez faire. It's there if you need it, but it's certainly not imposed'.

The Assembly has more of an accountability role although some decisions such as the appointment of Regional Ministers and changes to the constitution are made by the Assembly. A business element (the AGM of the Association) is included in the general meeting which is part of the spring meeting of the Assembly, where the accounts are received and appointments endorsed, but this is only a small part of the day, and for most people is secondary to other aspects of the day – 'worship, teaching, seminars, preaching'. At the autumn meeting, when there is no requirement for a business meeting, the business element does not always happen. One regional level interviewee speaking as a church member said: 'In practice what happens is most people find the business meeting very boring and don't go'.

One regional level interviewee suggested that the level of questions asked in the Assembly on things such as finance had reduced. Given the nature of the day as a whole, the time allocated to the general meeting is limited.

> We do give space for questions but there tends not to be many and there is always the danger that people say we no longer have the kind of input that we used to have'

The Northern Baptist Association has no role in the management of change in relation to the reorganisation of local churches, which features strongly in some other denominations. One regional level interviewee commented that the regional team were 'change agents only in the sense of possibly mission terms. New ways of mission etc.' Interviewees referred to constitutional change with particular reference to the ongoing dialogue with the Independent Methodist Connexion, and the efforts made at regional level to include them on the Council and to give adequate time to consider the issues in bringing the two denominations together. The regional role has had to deal with discontent among Baptists who believe the

denominations to be incompatible, particularly with regard to believer's Baptism, to explain and to enable discussion of issues.

However, at the initial time of writing, a review of the life and work of the Association had been underway focusing on the work of the regional ministers and staff and the work of the Northern Baptist Association. The work is designed to assess the basis of the sense of purpose and the strategic planning of the Northern Baptist Association. The review incorporated consultation by means of interviews and questionnaires. The subsequent development plan was based on things that could be put into effect by the Association. Local churches were encouraged to 'pray about it, to think about it and see what action they might take'. However, the regional level development plan cannot be imposed on the local churches and at the time of our interviews it was too soon to establish how this would work in practice.

In short, at the regional level, governance structures were rated as well-developed, and around mid-range for effectiveness. Success was attributed to the calibre of the people involved. One key difficulty is getting people to participate at a regional level because many people are already active at a local level and the regional level was perceived to be of little relevance. Churches are not formally accountable to the Association, although the latter does have some role in approving grant applications and providing support with the appointment of new ministers. On the whole, regional ministers can only intervene in local church business with the consent of the church.

## Regional Finance

The Northern Baptist Association is not financially self-sufficient, and manages only limited resources. The Association does not own property; its main expenditure is the employment of the Staff Team which includes two full-time regional ministers, and a part time youth specialist, and administrator. The Association's chief source of income is from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, a 25% return on regional offerings to the Home Mission Appeal. A further grant is given to fund the regional minister, and some income generated by the interest on capital.

## *Learning and Formation*

As with other aspects of Baptist work and ministry, programmes for discipleship are determined and delivered locally using resources supplied by the Baptist Union (of Great Britain) and other bodies. Much of this work is focused on children and young people, and often takes place independently of the minister. Adult Christian education is largely ad hoc. While the Union commends material for study from time to time, local churches use a wide range of discussion and Bible study materials from a variety of sources. The minister functions as a gatekeeper for the adult Christian education delivered in the churches.

Baptists take a high view of the importance of preaching as having a major role in adult Christian education and the work of the minister, and expository sermons typically last for twenty to thirty minutes. Lay preachers are common; they are called by the local church but while training is available, most do not seek it and it is not compulsory. Technically any church member may lead communion. Accredited evangelists and youth specialists may be called by the local church or church organisation.

The list of 'core skills' expected of Baptist ministers in the document, *A Competence-based Approach to Ministerial Training and Development*.[167] draws in part on the Church of England's paper *Beginning Public Ministry*.[168] Both documents specify a teaching role alongside the liturgical and pastoral roles for the ordained minister in addition to his or her competence in preaching. Indeed, Goodliff lists as the second 'core competency' of Baptist ministers, 'the ability to communicate clearly in public and private settings, including small groups, written material and preaching'.

## *Strategy*

Strategy is loosely defined at a local church level and is not generally written down. Strategy is rated as neither well developed nor effective, but there is a strong view, held by a number of different churches, that strategy evolves organically within the church, ideally through listening and discerning the mind of God. This can make the process extremely slows, and often reactive rather than proactive, but has the benefits of flexibility and of ensuring there is often a high level of buy in to church activities. Local strategy is both developed in response to and restricted by locally available human, financial, and other resources.

The voluntary nature of Association membership means that the Association is not in a position to impose any specific direction on local churches. This relationship is reflected in the nature of regional level strategy, the aim of which is to identify how the Association can best provide support for local churches. A review of the life and work of the Association has been carried out which will result in a development plan to improve this support. The hope is that this will also influence and advise the life of the local churches, although there is no clear mechanism to facilitate this. No guidance is currently given by the regional body to assist local churches in strategy development, and this is an area of support which local churches might find helpful, although consultation is offered by the regional staff.

## *Questions Arising*

The overall view is of a settled position with embedded governance structures. There is a clear focus of activity on local church life, with little evidence of concerns with falling numbers of clergy and membership, which are currently steering the strategy of other denominations. The implication being that no major structural changes are anticipated over the coming years.

However, there are inevitable problems of working with a relatively large group of individuals with differing views is clearly recognised and articulated. This goes for both the congregational and regional level. Individual churches have developed a variety of methods to ensure that both vocal people with strong opinions and those who are reluctant to speak in a church meeting are given an opportunity to contribute. Yet, can the same be said for the churches at regional level? Given the autonomous nature of the churches, how does the Assembly maintain its corporate identity, and to what extent is there collaboration between the local congregations?

---

[167] Paul Goodliff *A Competence-based Approach to Ministerial Training and Development*, 2005.
[168] ABM Ministry Paper 17, 1998

Leadership teams can consist of ministers, elders, and deacons. However the actual composition, role, and responsibilities of the team vary considerably from church to church and in general the extent of delegation to the leadership team is not clearly set out. The interface between carrying out preliminary work to inform the church meeting and presenting the meeting with a decision already made by the leadership team has to be carefully managed. Trust between the church and the leadership is essential for this to function effectively.

At the time of writing, the Northern Baptist Association Council was currently composed of 23 males and 5 females. This does raise issues about the under-representation of women, i.e. the restriction of drawing from less than half the membership. How does this affect the nature and ethos of decision making?[169] What are the effects of the 'post-denominational' attitudes governing church intake or lack thereof (e.g. the church's partnership with primitive Methodists, or newcomers to the area that eschew denominational allegiance for a church that offers them practical support like education)? How does a more pragmatic partnership reflect on the strategy as well as the core theology?

Many churches are close to the limit where individual registration with the Charity Commission will be required. For some churches this will require amendments to the existing constitutions, and some churches have welcomed this opportunity to update outdated documents, potentially in line with a model constitution developed by the Baptist Union in discussion with the Charity Commission. Other churches find the new requirements, such as the increased legal responsibility of deacons as problematic and may be discouraged from registering.

In the light of the above, the following strengths and open questions can be posed.

## Strengths

1. Direct involvement of church members in day-to-day decision-making. While managing groups of people with differing views is always a challenge, churches have a range of strategies for ensuring all church members have their voices heard.

2. Flexibility of governance structures at local church level.

3. Where it happens, one minister to every church (i.e. the churches have few group ministers).

## Open Questions

The following can be identified as open questions which the Northern Baptist Association and member churches might seek to address, and where learning from other traditions may be of assistance:

---

[169] Of the subgroups (which can include non-Northern Baptist Association Council Members): the Resources Group has 9 members, none of which are women; the Ministry Group has 14 members, 5 of which are women; the Home Mission Grants Group has 8 members, 2 are women; the Assembly Planning Group has 8 members, 2 are women.

1. The development of mechanisms for establishing a regional level strategy which will be of value in advising and directing local churches, while still enabling them to maintain their independence.

2. What is the nature of oversight by the association and its churches and how is that revealed, especially as it pertains to finance? How do the autonomous churches work together over strategy? How effective is mission / strategy at the local level?

3. How might the encouragement of collaboration and cooperation between churches be developed while still maintaining the much-valued tradition of local church independence?

4. How effective are the mechanisms of support for the development of strategy at a local level?

5. Do deacons and elders meet? What are the definitions and understanding of the roles of elders and deacons? Are they fulfilling roles given by trustees?[170]

## Phase II: Empirical Investigation

### *Governance*

In our initial round of interviews, we tried to garner a sense of the development and effectiveness of the existing structures. We know what it should be, yet how does it actually feel to be operative within its conditions? Of the 10 people interviewed, 4 represented the local level and 6 represented the regional level, although all were able to comment on the life of their local Baptist church. At local level, we spoke to 2 lay members and 2 ministers; at regional level we spoke to 4 lay and 2 clerical members. Only 2 of our interviewees were female.

We asked interviewees what they thought about their local governance. How well does it work? Is it effective? Where are the sites of tension? At the local level, day-to-day decisions are delegated to the leadership team, and in practice the distribution of decision-making power varies in accordance with the approach of the team. None of the three churches covered by interviews had formal definitions about which decisions should be made by the leadership team, and which should be delegated to the church meeting. Decisions made by church meetings generally included key appointments, such as ministers and deacons, the appointment of youth workers and the approval of significant financial outlay. However, as one local lay interviewee commented:

> it's probably sometimes a little bit arbitrary as to what we decide is a church decision and what is a leadership decision.

Some decisions channelled through the church meeting could invoke a lengthy process, although the process itself was theologically commended with one interviewee recounting

---

[170] There are guidelines produced by the Baptist Union about the role of the Charity Trustee which is effectively what the elders and deacons are.

how often decisions are reached over the course of several meetings, so that issues were thought through with prayer, discussion and revisions of the initial ideas. Consequently, when a decision is reached there is a strong degree of support and 'the whole church owns that decision – they're all on board in a sense, straight away'. In one example, a local lay interviewee referred to how the church had agreed to accept women preachers, over the course of several meetings and said:

> I think that when it works well it is when the church has taken small steps towards a big decision.

Nonetheless, two lay interviewees mentioned that it was very difficult to get people to come to church meetings. Individual meetings can be very long, and decision-making can be very slow.

In addition, another local level interviewee seemed to suggest that church meeting often masked a lack of process:

> A criticism of many church members would be that things that are brought to the church meeting by the deacons are pretty much a fait accompli type of thing.

Another lay local interviewee said that

> sometimes there is a mentality that the leadership team has got its own agenda and is going to sort that out, come hell or high water.

In view of the amount of work involved in some larger discussions, church meetings are often presented with recommendations.

In practice, ideas and proposals often come from the leadership team but church members also need the opportunity to present their ideas at the church meeting and to revise plans. One minister described how the leadership team had developed a plan:

> But of course because the rest of the congregation haven't been privy to that conversation and that journey, if you like, when we suddenly come with enthusiasm about something, suddenly it's met with slightly subdued responses. And clearly they then pick up on possibly things that we have missed. And also, any one of us can become out of touch with things that might be going on in other parts of the church, and what's going on in the life of the church. That's why a church meeting is always important because there may be somebody there who's picked up on something that we're just not aware of.

In one sense then, the quality of governance depends on the relationship between the leadership team and church meeting, as well as relations internal to the leadership team.

How then does the local church regard its relationship to the regional expression in the Association? For some the Regional Association was relatively distant. One interviewee commented that

> to be honest I think if you asked them what the regional ministers do, they wouldn't know that well, though we've had regional staff to preach and to lead particular sessions with us at particular times. So they would know what they do in a local

church from the input they've given in to our church but they wouldn't know very well what they do beyond that.

Another lay local interviewee commented:

> I don't know whether it's worth it being there if I'm very, very frank. But that's maybe a function of the fact that I don't see a lot of what goes on. They don't have much to do with what I do I suppose.

Other interviewees were more appreciative of the regional level organisation. Training provided at regional level, for example on preaching, was referred to by three local level interviewees as something that was valued. Small churches in particular may make more use of the resources of the Association.

Local level interviewees rarely referred to working with other churches. As one interviewee commented:

> There might be sort of communication or links or encouragements go on between the different churches, but it's not a strong part of our church life. Most of our church life is kind of its local church life.

However, another interviewee referred to a small churches group that has also been set up for churches with less than 40 members 'where you can just get together and feel that you are a part of something bigger'. This gives 'moral support […] and looking at issues, discussing issues, getting ideas about how you can manage without a minister, practical help'. Hence, the degree to which local churches perceived a sense of purpose of the church was seen as dependant to a large extent on the leadership team, and particularly the minister.

Local churches did not have written strategies for implementing the vision or sense of purpose. However, as one local interviewee commented:

> The kind of thing that are in our […] covenant is fairly obvious in terms of how you implement them. For example, we commit ourselves to worship on a Sunday when we gather together […] so most of them are fairly practical things. You don't require a major extra strategy to implement.

Another commented that the covenant gives 'the spiritual framework, I suppose, that we work in'. Strategy was perceived to evolve and develop and was described by one local level interviewee as 'organic'. Another local interviewee said:

> Strategy, I suppose is on-going, just communicating where things are going, praying and reflecting.

Another local interviewee referred to drifting along, but 'I do feel that there's a considerable aspect where our drifting is spirit-led'.

Little surprise then when interviewees at local level were asked to what extent people in positions of authority see their role as managing changes that occur in the organisation Change management was perceived in terms of spiritual development. One local interviewee referred to, for example, plans to deepen the corporate prayer life of the church. One local interviewee commented:

> I don't know if I see that differently from spiritual management in that nothing stays the same […] You know, people are coming and going, always new needs in the church or there's new reflections on really how we serve the community or things like that. So, I think the spiritual and change kind of go together.

## Summary

In general, governance at the church level was rated as both reasonably well developed and reasonably effective by our interviewees, although there are some key issues. There is no concept of strategy for change in the sense of reorganisation of churches and clergy, as is frequently the case in other denominations and there are relatively few examples of churches working together. Change management at local level is perceived in terms of spiritual development within the local church. However, this does not necessarily mean that churches are inward looking because there are many examples of outreach into the community. Still the overall view is of a settled position with embedded governance structures. There is a clear focus of activity on local church life, with little evidence of concerns with falling numbers of clergy and membership, which are currently steering the strategy of other denominations. The implication is that no major structural changes are anticipated over the coming years.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

Statistical analysis helps to further fill out the picture of local churches in the Northern Baptist Association. We asked church members about their attitudes to their current immediate church leader. 87 Church members had been members of the Northern Baptist Association for an average of 21.96 years; member of their specific church for 21.73 years and known their church leaders for 7.82 years. In 40. % the member was male; in 60 % female. In 88.5 % the church leader was male; in 6.9 % female (4.6% missing answer) a figure which parallels the overall regional statistics.

The data collected pertained to leadership and our study concerned two initial questions. First, does ministerial leadership matter? Second, how does ministerial leadership work? Our questions employed an axis, from servant leadership to cultic forms, and their relative effects upon the congregations. The data overall evidenced the positive effect of servant leadership in terms of church productivity, satisfaction and willingness to engage in extra effort on the church's behalf, helping behaviours towards the church as whole and other church members, spiritual well-being as well as a more general sense of life satisfaction. It was negatively associated with outcomes such as intent to quit the church or switch to another church. Mediation analysis of how ministerial leadership transmits its effect finds some important mediators, for example, psychological empowerment and trust. Our questions looked both at member attitudes and what they think about their church and minister, as well as how they behave in church work, and what they do for the church and others.

In terms of member attitudes to their church, we initially enquired about trust and loyalty. In organisational terms, there is a link between trust in one's organisation and performance. We concentrated on trust in Leadership Our report evidences high degrees of trust with only 4% agreeing that 'My minister is not always honest and truthful'. We also included a measure for loyalty, defined as being faithful and adherent to the minister. The results show high levels of

leader loyalty with only a small minority of respondents reporting low levels. 5% of respondents disagreed when asked whether they have a sense of loyalty to their minister.

Leaders often develop differentiated relationships with each member of the group that they lead. In particular, leaders usually have special relationships with an 'inner circle' of group members, who often get high levels of responsibility and access to resources. This is often termed the 'in-group,' but their position can come with a price. These organizational members will usually have to work harder, be more committed and loyal to the leader, and share the leader's administrative duties. Conversely, members in the 'out-group' are given low levels of choice or influence and put constraints on the leader. There is evidence in the Northern Baptist Association data for both in-group with 64% of respondents say their minister understands their problems and needs either quite a bit/a great deal, and a small out-group with 5% respondents reporting that their minister recognizes their potential not at all/a little.

We asked a series of questions designed to assess a respondents' sense of empowerment in their church roles. Empowerment has been seen as providing organizational members with a sense of meaning and challenge in their church work, which can improve motivation and performance. In general, our respondents feel that their roles are very meaningful and that they themselves feel that they have the necessary skills and abilities to perform them. There appears to be an empowered church membership particularly in terms of finding meaning in their work with 98% agreeing that their church role was personally meaningful for them. However, in terms of self-determination and impact, the responses are largely less favourable with 40% disagreeing that they had any control over what happens in their church.

Group potency is a measure of a church group's belief that it can be effective in its tasks and duties. In general, the data shows good levels of group potency with 63% of members agreeing that the church group has confidence in itself to a considerable/ great extent. The results also evidence high levels of cohesion. In general terms, a group is said to be in a state of cohesion when its members possess bonds linking them to one another and to the group as a whole. Thus, group cohesion is believed to develop from a field of binding social forces that act on church members to stay in the group. Groups that possess strong unifying forces typically stick together over time, whereas groups that lack such bonds between members usually disintegrate. The result show strong evidence of a high level of group cohesion, with 98% agreeing that working in the church was like working with friends.

There is a long-standing view in organizational behaviour research that a person's self-esteem in the organization, formed around organizational experiences, plays a significant role in determining their motivation and effecting related attitudes and behaviours. We asked respondents about the messages they picked up about their standing in the church from the attitudes and behaviours of others towards them. In general, church members reported high levels of organisational-based self-esteem with 97% reporting that they felt helpful in the church.

In terms of how members behave in church work, and what they do for the church and others, we employed a number of scales to explore that behaviour. In particular, we identified several key dimensions of so-called 'organizational citizenship behaviour' (OCB) whereby members

exhibit helpful behaviour which goes 'above beyond the call of duty' for everyday church members. OCB in general is defined as

> individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization'.

In this study, there are behaviours focused on helping the church as a whole, and those directed at individual members, i.e. those we would expect to see being practiced by all regular church members, and behaviours targeted at the church community in general. It seems that the most common OCBs are targeted at helping other individuals in the church and the least common ones are the community-based activities.

We used a subjective measure of church productivity in the members' survey. In essence, this measures the collective efforts of church members. The findings suggest that the levels of church effort are good, with 85% respondents reporting that everyone gives their best efforts in the church. This is facilitated by a high level of value congruence with 57% agreeing that the church has the same values as them in concern for others. The level of shared values with the minister is also high with 90% agreeing that their minister represents values that are important to them.

'Perceived organizational support' is a way of measuring organizational members' perceptions of a favourable social exchange with their minister. Essentially, it asks questions about the extent to which the church values their members, looks out for their interests and well-being, and provides help when members need it. Respondents generally feel very positive about the amount of support they receive from their church. Hence 90% feel their church cares about their opinions.

A related concept to organizational commitment is that of organizational identification. Organizational identification is a form of an individual's attachment to an organization. Organizational identification is the degree to which a member defines him/herself by the same attributes that (s)he believes define the organization. Those individual's beliefs about that organization become self-defining. When people identify with their church, being one of its members is an important part of their identity. People think of themselves in terms of membership in the church. They see themselves bound up with its successes and failures. We also measured the level of identification with the leader in the survey, a form of personal identification. The results report some fairly high levels of organizational identification among our respondents. 85% usually say 'we' rather than 'they' when talking about their church. 77% agree that when someone criticizes their church it feels like a personal insult. However, personal identification with the leader is weaker in comparison; with 18% disagreeing that when someone criticizes their minister it feels like a personal insult. Generally, the level of 'quit and switching' intent is low, with only 6% thinking of quitting the church.

In sum, members' attitudes to their church and leader, we found to exhibit high levels of trust and loyalty and overall participation in the life of the church. People felt empowered within the church setting and the church remained personally meaningful to them. The members shared a belief in their effectiveness as church, and they maintained high levels of cohesion. Being at church was being among friends. Churches were perceived to be productive in as

much as they engaged the collective efforts of its members, who showed high levels of value congruence and identification with their church. The church is a place that cares for them. All of this suggests that the local churches are relatively stable entities, an example of what Penny Becker calls 'family models of church'. However, one notes also this effect, church members are better at helping those within the church than outside. So while 63% of members remain confident in their outlook, there are low impressions of self-determination (40%). While there is strong value congruence with the church overall and in particular the minister, there remains a lower identification with the leader.

## *Learning and Formation*

In our research, the culture of learning or discipleship was explored through meetings that our researcher had with eight Baptist groups from churches within the Northern Baptist Association. The heart of these study groups was Bible study, often approached through a range of other issues such as a discussion about prayer, or about symbols and sacraments, or about other faiths. Many of the groups were seen as an integral part of the church's life, fulfilling a long tradition and expectation of meeting and sharing in small groups; although some groups emerged in response to particular needs. Participants were predominantly female, mostly aged over fifty, but with a strong minority of younger people and men. In one church, membership of the various house groups was 'shuffled' every two years, while another church group remained determinedly open: 'people invite others to come – you don't have to go to church'.

> If people don't get there, then there's no judgment, they just know that they are supported.

In most instances, it is the participants who chose what to study – guided by the minister or lay leader. As the following quotes highlight, the heart of these groups is less the learning but rather the fellowship and support: 'I love these meetings,' said one elderly lady, 'they're days when God is there'. A person in another group said: 'In groups like this we build up trust and a relationship and friendship'. And another: 'We feel safe and confident here; what we say stays within these four walls'.

The value of learning together rather than individually was often emphasised, for example: 'God's word comes to different people in different ways; in the group we can discern it more fully'. Most groups chose to meet frequently and were happy to do so. The implicit evidence is that regular meetings bolster the high level of trust and of sharing witnessed in these groups. In only one of the groups visited was the minister absent, but generally, lay leadership or shared leadership was the normal pattern of most groups. Some ministers articulated an anxiety about dominating groups or speaking too much but some groups provided striking examples of both ministers and people learning together.

The make-up of most groups was denominationally diverse. The Owton Manor group claimed Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, and Roman Catholic roots, and that is a group with only four members! In Darlington, one member said

> I am a Christian, not a Baptist or an Anglican

and

we want to break down the barriers and share with other Christians, of all/any denominations and to receive encouragement.

In Wallsend: 'I didn't choose to be a Baptist, I just came to this church. Most people here are Christians first and Baptists second'. In Blackhill: 'we have every denomination here and we have a real bond; we pray together and come together'.

The comment was made that, 'Churches Together isn't working here, but Christians do work together,' which ties in neatly with the comment made previously in Shotley Bridge that, 'informal lay contact works and is effective. Even when formal links don't exist or are sticky: we don't have barriers at an informal level'.

Some churches put aside their own programmes to join ecumenical programmes during Lent and were happy to use material from other traditions, such as The Big Read.

## Case-Study

### Wallsend Baptist Church: A Case-Study of a Local Church

Wallsend Baptist Church is set back at the end of Milfield Avenue, a 1950's William Leech estate, which sprawls just to the north of the main A1058 Coast Road. The church noticeboard is not difficult to spot, especially from the Coast Road, but as the members sometimes admit, the building itself, just behind the board, can be surprisingly hard to find. It was built in 1951, a simple, squat, brick building: a small worship space with hall and kitchen, very much of its time.

Maintenance is a constant headache for the present congregation and is a drain on precious resources. It's a struggle to keep it in good order. 'It is,' one deacon said, 'rather like a second hand car'. Something is always about to go wrong. At the time of writing, the church was in the process of obtaining estimates for essential building work to repoint the building, to try to contain the damp and to re-plaster the worst affected areas.

Despite such problems, the building is light, clean and quite well used. Regular use is not only an essential element in maintaining the fabric in reasonable order, but also, and perhaps more importantly, an effective channel of outreach to the local community. Although the signs of damp are all too apparent in the worship space, I did not notice them on the two Sundays I worshipped there. Bright banners and friendly people were much more in evidence.

Although many Baptist congregations are eclectic, drawn from quite a wide area, almost all the members of Wallsend Baptist Church live within three or four miles of the church. They are proud of its rootedness in the local community and this local focus is especially evident in its work with children and young people.

The King's Estate, in which the church is set, is itself a typical 1950's development, which offered a new start to predominantly working class families from the terraces of Wallsend, a couple of miles away towards the river. The barrier of the Coast Road isolates the Estate from the older parts of Wallsend including the town centre. Like many such estates, it has always lacked facilities. The members of the Baptist Church know this well and are pleased to see

their building used for a range of community activities, including a breakfast club and after-school club.

The estate forms the south western part of the Battle Hill Ward of North Tyneside Council. Figures published by the Council show that although there are still many children in the ward, this number has declined markedly over the last ten years. It otherwise remains quite stable socially. The population is overwhelmingly white European.

The church is quite well served by local buses which run along Battle Hill Drive, parallel to Milfield Avenue and has its own discrete parking space outside the building.

Wallsend Baptist Church's own mission statement accurately sums up its life and character:

> A loving community with a passion to grow, worship and serve its local community in Christ's love and power.

It is a relatively small, but growing church bound together by a strong, loving commitment to Christ and to one another and with a developed and profound understanding of shared ministry.

## A Church in Partnership

Wallsend Baptist Church is an enthusiastic member of Wallsend Churches Working Together, which brings together Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Salvation Army congregations. A lot of the contact is personal, as one member said simply, 'we have friends in the other churches'. Much of the joint activity is social, for example 'safari suppers,' aimed at deepening friendship, but it also includes a highly significant social outreach project, 'Walking With,' which supports asylum seekers and refugees in the North Tyneside area. Other partnerships are with the organisations that make use of the church buildings, including the regular breakfast and after school clubs, and with uniformed organisations: Scouts, Cubs and Beavers.

## A worshipping church

Sunday worship takes place every week at 10.45am. Evening services are at 6pm. Communion is celebrated monthly. Leadership of both services is shared between the minister and a large group of others, including the deacons at Wallsend. One of the impressive features of Wallsend Baptist Church is that shared leadership embraces worship as equally as it does governance, and as I was told, 'no-one's precious about their role'. Sunday morning is the main act of worship and attracts around thirty to forty people of all ages, including on Sunday mornings, young families. One member summed up the character of services at Wallsend Baptist Church as 'cheerful and bubbly'. Unlike in some churches, the older members really seem to relish the cheerful atmosphere.

Both services are firmly centred on the preaching of God's Word. This may take the form of a traditional sermon, or especially on the occasion of a family service, as on the day I was present, be far more interactive, with ready dialogue between the preacher (Sarah) and the congregation. This even extended to a wheel-barrow race up the aisle, with much hilarity, but, as improbable as it might seem, was clearly related to the theme of the day. The overall

sense of worship at Wallsend Baptist Church is of a community that cares deeply for its members and is unafraid to laugh or cry together. Prayers, as in the Baptist tradition, are usually extempore and the songs and hymns are accompanied by a digital backing track, with words projected onto the front wall. Copies of the New International Version of the Bible are provided for every worshipper. Evening worship is much more intimate, with a handful of worshippers. On the occasion I attended, it took a traditional form: clearly structured, yet relaxed and quite informal. It was led by Chris Hodgson, a deacon and formally Church Secretary.

Coffee and tea are served after morning worship, which gives the congregation an opportunity to meet and spend time together.

## Ministry and Leadership

In 2005 Sarah was called by the members of Wallsend Baptist Church to become their minister. For the church at the time, this represented a very considerable act of faith and could not have been envisaged without generous financial support from the Home Mission of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Sarah is employed half time, which is nominally twenty hours per week. She needs to find other employment to make ends meet. The church does not provide a manse. Sarah lives in a flat a few minutes' drive from the church. In the Baptist tradition, governance rests in the hands of the Church Meeting, made up of all the members, but its executive is an elected diaconate. At Wallsend there are eight deacons. Sarah describes them as keeping 'low key' with the aim of affirming every member's life and mission. Another comment was, 'a lot of people put a lot of work in,' and 'we don't do cliques'.

## Money matters

It is clear that money is in short supply and that were it not for the support of the Baptist Home Mission, it would not be possible for the church to employ a minister, even on the part-time basis that Sarah has fulfilled over the last nine years since the church invited her to serve at Wallsend. That said, Jackie, the Church Treasurer was quick to point out that although relatively few members are in paid employment, stewardship is fundamental, and the church has benefitted from a number of generous gifts which have enabled it to balance its books. Rent from the organisations that make use of the building is also a significant factor in keeping it open and maintained.

## A learning and nurturing church

Learning is very much at the heart of the life of Wallsend Baptist Church. The church's vision on the appointment of Sarah, nine years ago embraced a specific recognition of the need 'to develop the children's and young people's ministry'. There is an equally clear recognition that learning is for everyone:

> As we continue in that vision - serving, praying, learning from God's word are vital tools in our hands.

A Bible study group has been meetin monthly for several years and has slowly grown in membership and the church's main focus of children's and youth work is the Thursday

evening Kid's Club for 6 to 11 year-olds, followed by Youth Matters. Twelve leaders and four 'helpers' sustain these initiatives. Learning is also explicit in much of the church's Word-based worship (as was very clear at the Sunday morning worship I attended) and implicit in a range of other activities, such for example as the Banner Group and Walking group which both provide an opportunity, mostly for ladies, to come together, talk together, support each other and in and through that, to provide an opportunity for reflection.

## A serving church

Service is essential to the vision recognised by Wallsend Baptist Church. It is both individual and corporate. For a small church with limited resources a lot is achieved, testament to the strength of the vision perceived by the church and a willingness to work together to achieve it.

A key element in this is the recognition of the need to 'get alongside people'. The Walking and Banner Group and, of course, the Children's Club all provide an opportunity to do this, as do a number of other social and even fund-raising events, which enable people to 'filter in' to the church community. The deacons have a deep desire to see their building being used for the benefit of the community.

The other activities undertaken by other agencies on the church premises are thus also seen by the congregation as being significant wider acts of service, meeting the very real needs of the local community.

## The Key Questions

Baptist Churches are self-governing. By definition therefore, they are free to develop their own strategies. Nevertheless, Wallsend Baptist Church enjoys good relations with the Baptist Union and always sends representatives to the Northern Baptist Assembly and welcomes its support, prayer and practical help. In turn, it is clear that the Baptist Union endorses the ministry and mission of Wallsend Baptist Church to the extent that it continues to fund a part-time minister there through its Home Mission.

In terms of the pattern of ministry in this church, the Church Meeting, made up of all the members is 'the final decision body of church government in matters of discipline, finance, evangelism action, ministry, service'. As already explained, at Wallsend this is supported by a genuine acceptance of all member ministry in which the ordained minister provides and coordinates pastoral care and preaches God's Word in collaboration with the elected deacons and the wider membership of the church. I was told that if members feel that if they wish to volunteer to do something specific, their willingness to serve is welcomed and encouraged.

Indeed, there is remarkably little evidence of tension at Wallsend Baptist Church around evolving patterns of ministry. There are, of course, differences of opinion and of emphasis, but the overwhelming impression is of a community in which different gifts are accepted and most importantly, where any criticisms are overshadowed by a genuine delight in other people, by who they are, and what they bring. There is no hint of unease over women's leadership. Sarah is clearly much loved. Although fairly tight-knit communities are not always comfortable places to be, Wallsend Baptist Church has long been characterised by 'a

lot of love' and a spirit of welcome. It may help, of course, that with around forty active members it is a community just large enough to embrace a certain level of diversity, but is small enough to be a community in which everyone may have a part to play and which allows everyone a genuine opportunity to get to know everyone else.

Christian learning, as I have already noted, is at the very heart of the life of Wallsend Baptist Church. Its purpose is, in part, to deepen understanding, faith, and commitment. The Bible study group is evidence of this as is also the formation provided, week in week out through preaching at Sunday worship. Adult learning and formation is also the means whereby the church may be better equipped to spread the word of God in and to the community in which it is set. In this respect, Wallsend Baptist Church is true to its evangelical purpose, but that equipping is subtle. The model of evangelism at work seems to be primarily one of friendship, welcome, and acceptance backed by prayer and wholly consistent with an understanding of church as a 'locus of God's transforming power through the Word of God'. It is of primary importance therefore to 'sit under' the Word in Bible study, as it is proclaimed through preaching and also in private, individual reading of the Bible.

Wallsend Baptist Church has not changed greatly over the last ten to fifteen years. The biggest changes have been in the gradual development of shared ministry, but more especially in the style of worship Sarah has helped make possible. As one older member, who has known the church for forty years told me: 'There's always been a lot of love here, but Sarah has made it more fun'.

The biggest decision over the last ten years was undoubtedly the appointment of Sarah as minister and the recognition of a vision to develop further work with children and young people.

Another member said: 'there's not been a lot of change, but we kept pace with the time'. Others hinted a slightly greater sprit of openness. It would seem that, for the most part, Wallsend Baptist has become a church that is very much at ease with itself. Even if Sarah has brought new warmth, fun and imagination to worship, the broad pattern of it does not seem to have changed greatly, nor would it seem, has its theology. Perhaps the biggest visible change is the adoption of a digital projector to make a wide range of new songs possible, complete with backing tracks and the projection of images.

Unlike many other churches that are now small, Wallsend Baptist has never been large. In recent years as older members have died, new members have joined and over the last ten years the congregation has grown slightly. It is also significant that as one member told me, 'considering the size of the church we have quite a large periphery;' in other words, people on the fringes of the church who come to social events such as the summer Strawberry Tea, or who take part in the Banner or Walking Groups show some allegiance to the church.

When I asked what might explain the growth in the church community, both in terms of numbers and in closeness, several members spoke about the significance of prayer. Prayer in the church community here is talked about more openly and naturally than in some other churches I have observed. Thus, at Wallsend Baptist I was told that if people need prayer, other members will text each other to alert them to pray.

Another reason for the recent growth is, all agree, the warmth of the welcome offered to newcomers. There have been several incidents of people new or returning to the area, who, after trying larger more apparently dynamic churches, found the depth of spirituality and commitment they found at Wallsend to be enormously infectious. It was not only a church that welcomed them but one that made them feel they were needed. Clearly one aspect of this is the relatively modest size of Wallsend Baptist which makes it possible for everyone to know everyone else in a way that is never possible in a large congregation. Not all members have a Baptist past, though most have worshipped in other non-conformist denominations.

Yet, another reason for growth was the prior willingness on the part of the deacons and church meeting, some ten years ago, to seek a new vision for the church. They took a risk in appointing a minister, who might have been less sensitive than Sarah has proven to be in working with that vision, and in supporting rather than trying to replace the existing strong ministries.

It might be tempting for Wallsend Baptist to feel just a little complacent, but quite apart from any convictions it may have about future mission, the continuing and utterly mundane headache of maintaining the building ensures that the church is all too readily aware that its future is not secure. Two years ago, the church itself described its mission as follows:

> We need to stir ourselves and be stirred by the Holy Spirit to keep the passion alive. The town of Wallsend's spiritual walls (barriers to the message) are still keeping people from responding. But the vision to see those walls coming down is ours. With love, faith, unity, perseverance, and compassion in service and prayer we will see the growth we need.

What might this mean in practice? Clearly the resource of the building, something of a double-edged sword, remains central to the mission of Wallsend Baptist. Little, perhaps, can be done to make the church building more visible, but if the fabric can be made secure, if the electric circuits could be upgraded and the kitchen brought up to catering standards, a lot more might be possible. Everyone I spoke to would like to see the building used more. There is an awareness perceived both by those who have lived in the area for many years and by those who have arrived more recently that the King's Estate can be a lonely place to live. There is an abiding need for a simple, but very genuine ministry of friendship, and if the building were better equipped and able to be open more it would be possible to reach out more effectively to those around it. It might provide a venue for a bereavement group or for a drop-in. One person suggested that the church might produce a monthly community newsletter. It surely speaks volumes for a church community that already knows how to take risks and which listens to the community in which it is set, that it should still have members who say, as some do, that it should now be prepared to take even more risks and to listen even more acutely. It is clear that without a deep willingness to listen to God's word and such a level of deep commitment to Christ, founded on prayer, this would not be possible.

In summary, it should be noted that Wallsend provides an exception to the paradigm presented in the research thus far to the extent that it is a 'pocket of vitality' within a pattern of overall institutional decline. Little wonder it exemplifies three of the key factors and predictors of numerical growth identified by Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce: 'caring

for children and youth; participating in the congregation; and welcoming new people'.[171] Yet it also highlights much of the 'congregational' outlook which can preclude translocal ministry. So while Wallsend is doing well, the question remains whether it could continue to do so in the light of reduced funding.

## *Summary*

Baptists are a 'covenant people' a gathered people of God in the corporate sense, both at the level of the local church, formally expressed through the church meeting, but also across the region, formally expressed through the 'assembly'. Hence while Baptists affirm the liberty of individual churches in discerning the mind of Christ, this should also be the case for the region as a whole. However, as our data has shown, the ecclesial emphasis resides with the local church congregation in ways that can impede the need for interdependency, both as an ecclesial expression of Baptists and in the practical matter of organising mission as such. The issue is brought into relief when one considers the statistics for ministry with 17% of churches having part-time ministers, 13% of churches being pastored by unpaid ministers, and 11% without pastoral oversight. The need for greater interdependency will only increase.

Part of the problem is that local churches are perhaps too good at creating close family bonds within the church. For example, the types of discipleship fostered through small group meetings, undertaking bible study, discussion, and the likes, are valued for the close bonds of trust and acceptance they provide. Yet this very sentiment can be said to preclude the shift to a wider appreciation of mission. The danger is that churches that have strong internal relations modelled like a close family threaten those very bonds by focusing their resources outwards. In regard to Baptist regional structures, local churches view the leadership team in terms of a 'consultative model' with resources for churches who take the initiative.

While general governance at the church level is rated as reasonably well developed and effective, there is no substantial concept of strategy for change that addresses the practical issues of governance. From the regional perspective, the task of getting people to participate was found to be difficult and structurally impeded because regional ministers can only intervene in local church business with the consent of the church. Hence, the overall view is of a settled position with a clear focus on local church life but little evidence of concerns with falling numbers of clergy and the subsequent need for greater interdependency.

The problem may be put in overall terms as the need to foster translocal ministries. There are already examples at the local level of ministers, operating across individual churches, and the regional ministers are translocal by nature.[172] Translocal ministry would facilitate the support of smaller – or indeed larger churches – as well as conversation and strategic thinking with a view to mission and resourcing mission. The question remains how these might be supported, encouraged and facilitated. What can the Baptists receive through ecumenical practice?

---

[171] Deborah Bruce and Cynthis Woolever, *Fastest Growing Presbyterian Churches* (Louisville, KY: Research services, Presbyterian Church, USA). See Ian Markham, 'Two conditions for a growing liberal church,' in *Why Liberal Churches are Growing?* Ed. by Martyn Percy and Ian Markham, (T & T Clark, 2006), 165.

[172] John Claydon, *Bound Together in the Liberty of Christ: Renewing Baptist Collaboration in Mission*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Theology and Ministry in Durham University, 2013.

Our study explored three principle areas: governance, ministry, and discipleship. We can address the above concern by developing translocal ministry through these areas, set within the wider resource of ecumenical engagement.

# The Methodist Districts of Newcastle and Darlington

*Marcus Pound, Neil Cockling, Helen Savage and Jeff Astley (learning and formation), Tom Redman (Leadership and Ministry)*

## Phase I: Mapping the Tradition

### *Introduction*

In the summer of 1729, Charles Wesley formed his first religious society, known by others as the 'Holy Club,' at Oxford University, which his brother John joined that autumn.[173] As the society became known by the title 'Methodist,' so the subsequent, independent, local societies connected with the Wesley brothers in other places were also given that title.[174] By the early 1740s, those societies that looked to John Wesley as their 'Father in God' were asking to be placed under his spiritual authority. The first 'United Society' was accommodated at the New Room in Bristol. In 1743, Wesley published his *Nature, Design, and General Rules, of the United Societies*, in London, Bristol, King's-wood, and Newcastle upon Tyne, and in 1749 the London Society was recognised as the parent society. Thus, we see the beginnings of interdependence, or connexionalism: societies united by a common discipline and single authority, and functioning in their respective cities as the local focus of a regular preaching circuit. Wesley's own itinerancy was undertaken to ensure the unity of his Connexion, and he was to insist on it for his own preachers, both among and within the circuits. By 1766, Wesley expected each circuit to be represented at the annual Conference.

### *Ecclesiology*

The particular (British) Methodist contribution to ecclesiology is the 'Connexional Principle'. Originally a pragmatic device for ensuring the greatest possible flexibility in sending preachers where they were most needed whilst ensuring disciplinary effectiveness amongst preachers and members, it has come to be valued as a deep reflection of the church's nature and self-understanding. It reflects the interlocking, interdependent nature of the church as it exists at and across the various levels, and is rooted in the interdependence of the apostolic fathers, as reflected in the Biblical use of *koinonia* ('common life'). It is the medium by which different groups and individuals exercise collegial, corporate or personal (lay or ordained) expressions of oversight (*episkopé*). This means 'watching over one another in love,' reflecting on experience in order to discern the presence and activity of God in the world, such that oversight cannot be self-sufficient or independent of each member, but is intrinsically linked with the other expressions.

---

[173] Detailed historical notes may be found in Frank Baker, 'The People Called Methodists 3. Polity' in Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (Eds.), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Vol.1 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 211-55; also A.W. Harrison *et al*., *The Methodist Church: Its Origin, Divisions, and Reunion* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1932); This preamble, written by Neil Cockling was published as 'The Missional Nature of the Circuit' in *Agenda of the Methodist Conference 2008,* The Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church, *98-108.*

[174] There were other 'Methodists' in the 1740s who were not connected with the Wesleys – e.g. George Whitefield and his Societies. As with the name 'Holy Club' the Wesleys did not coin the term 'Methodist' nor did they welcome it.

In this way the connexional principle attempts to exclude the extremes of independency and autocracy within church government, balancing the local and the universal, ministerial authority, and co-responsibility. The connexional principle ensures that societies have a global sense of priorities, dictated by their understanding of the needs of others rather than their own domestic concerns. Herein lies the authority of the Conference, the heart of oversight in the Connexion.

The Conference authorises people and groups to embody and share in its oversight in the rest of the Connexion. Church authority therefore is not about centralisation. Local churches are represented in the synods and conferences, which listens to their concerns and respect their local autonomy. This is not to say that it does not recognise structures of authority based on rank or differentiation but rather, it recognises that its members and authorised representatives accept the responsibility of participating in the task of ordering its life in a way which does justice to the divine Spirit whilst rendering them accountable. Connexionism is about mutual responsibility and accountability at every level.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

While Methodism presupposes that God calls all people to the Christian ministry, ordained ministry recognises an office which is set apart for 'the sake of Church Order, but not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office'. Hence the Deed of Union (1932) defines the relationship between those who are ordained and the whole Church:

> Christ's ministers in the church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation and have a principal and directing part in these great duties but they hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people and they have no exclusive title to the preaching of the gospel or the care of souls. These ministries are shared with them by others to whom also the Spirit divides his gifts severally as he wills.

Written in a time of historical complexity this statement reflects the fact that British Methodism had only one order of recognised ministry within the church, the minister (presbyter). Put negatively, the statement can be said

> to prevent particular types of understanding of priesthood or a priestly caste being applied to Methodist ministers and, by inference, particular types of understanding of what it is to be a church being applied to the Methodist connexion.[175]

Subsequent Conference papers have attempted to progressively soften traditional Protestant unease with any talk of a distinctiveness to the ordained that is found in the Deed of the Union through making significant use of the notion of the ordained as representing in an official capacity the ministry of Christ in the Church. In short, the church is as much itself 'in the world' as it is 'in church,' and ordained ministry also functions as a representative selection. A public people who represent God in Christ and the community of the church in the world and the world and the community of the Church in Christ before God, and sign of

---

[175] 'What is a Presbyter?' *Methodist Conference 2002 Report*.

the presence of Christ in the church and in the world.[176] While ordination does not imply any special priestly powers, it does imply total commitment of a life-long vocation and an unrepeatable decision; participation in the worship and mission of the church both as a disciple along with all the other disciples, and to coordinate and equip other disciples in their worship and mission.

Ordained ministry encompasses a twofold distinction between presbyter and deacon alongside lay ministry. As a member of the order of presbyters, one exercises oversight of the ministry of the word, the ministry of the sacraments, and the ministry of pastoral responsibility. The combination of these is exclusive to and definitive of the presbyter. In diaconal ministry, the focus is on servant ministry, which makes clear the meaning and nature of this ministry: encouraging and enabling others to undertake this ministry in their daily lives; i.e. enabling others to exercise servant ministry in their discipleship and calling. The core emphasis of Methodist diaconal ministry is to assist God's people in worship and prayer, to hold before them the needs and concerns of the world; to minister Christ's lov and compassion, to visit and support the sick and suffering, to seek out the lost and the lonely, and to help those you serve to offer their lives to God.

Each person has spirit-endowed gifts facilitating different aspects of ministry (e.g. charismatic or functional):

> As all Christians are priests in virtue of their access to God, so all Christians are ministers in virtue of their membership in the one body.

At the heart of lay ministry is an understanding of vocation. Methodism continues to stress that vocation is about self-understanding and life choices concerning the living out of discipleship for those who are not called to ordination. Methodists are called to minister in their daily life and work, as well as in the Church. In short, lay ministry acknowledges a practical distinction between ministry in the world (i.e. involved in groups and organisations whose aims are other than the glory of God), and in the church (i.e. a gathered community of Christian believers with its own needs and functions in the service of God). In practice, lay ministry might include local preachers, pastoral secretary, lay workers, youth workers, ministerial formation, coordinating secretaries, vice president of conference.

## *Governance*

At the regional level, Methodist churches are structured around three interrelated tiers: the local church, the circuit, and the district. The local church, with its membership and large church community, exercises the whole ministry of Christ where it is and shares in the wider ministry of the church in the world.[177] The local church is overseen by presbyters and deacons. These positions are not appointed to the local church, but to the circuit. However,

---

[176] Representative Selection: 'as a perpetual reminder of this calling and as a means of being obedient to it the Church sets aside men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focused and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world' (*Ordination* 1974 para. 14; cf. Called to Love and Praise para. 4.5) [1].
[177] Standing Order 600, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2007), 548. [Hereafter *CPD*]

each local church is usually the particular responsibility of a designated minister. Class Leaders are appointed to share in the pastoral care of all those on the community roll of the local church.[178]

There are at least two church stewards in a local church, who 'are corporately responsible with the minister or probationer exercising pastoral responsibility in relation to the local church for giving leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life and activity'. In addition, there is a treasurer, and an auditor, and the church may appoint communion stewards, to make provision for the Lord's Supper, and for 'love-feasts' (agapes), to direct the approach of communicants to the Lord's Table, and account for any benevolence fund collections taken at such celebrations. There may be appointments of workers with children and young people, youth and/or community workers, and other lay employees. The local church may also appoint worship leaders, who may also help lead worship in other local churches under the oversight of the superintendent.

In constitutional terms, local churches are formed into circuits 'for mutual encouragement and help (especially in meeting their financial obligations)'.[179] Hence, the circuit is the primary unit in which local churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help.[180] Circuits are overseen by the Superintendent. The Circuit Superintendent exercise individual and corporate oversight over the affairs of the circuit. The Superintendent (always a presbyter) is charged to 'visit all the Local Churches in the Circuit to provide encouragement, challenge and support'.[181] The superintendent has oversight of all the ministers, deacons and probationers stationed in the circuit;[182] supervising the probationer, ensuring appropriate pastoral care and support is provided within the circuit (SO 724(2)); adequate instruction in duties are given etc. But the Superintendent's role is not only that of a supervisor but also a role model for ministry. Other ministers 'appointed to the several circuits are appointed by the Conference to preach and exercise pastoral charge in those circuits on behalf of the Conference'.[183] The Circuit Stewards[184] (at least two per circuit) share responsibility with the ministers 'for the spiritual and material well-being of the circuit, and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the circuit meeting'. Other officers [of the Circuit] may be appointed by the Circuit meeting. In particular, the circuit meeting may appoint (paid or unpaid, full-time or part-time) lay workers, lay evangelists, and workers with young people or community groups.

The primary purpose of the district is to advance the mission of the church in a region, by providing opportunities for circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel, and expertise which may not be available locally and by

---

[178] All members are divided into 'classes' and the ministers are charged to visit their meetings once per quarter and to issue the tickets of membership. Where they do not meet, the class leaders are called 'Pastoral Visitors'.
[179] Deed of Union 38, *CPD*, 233.
[180] Standing Order 500, *CPD*, 500.
[181] Standing Order 522, *CPD*, 514.
[182] Standing Order 700(9), *CPD*, 579. This includes those not appointed to the Circuit.
[183] Standing Order 700(7), *CPD*, 578.
[184] Section 53, *CPD*, 517-8.

enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole.[185] The District Chair exercises individual and corporate oversight over the affairs of the circuit. The District Chair (always a presbyter) works in conjunction with the Synod (the region's Assembly), and is responsible to the Conference for the observance of Methodist order and discipline within the district. The Chair exercises oversight of the character and fidelity of the presbyters and probationers in the District.[186] The Chair's duty is to uphold the rights under the Methodist constitution of the Superintendent of each circuit, ensuring that the district accounts are audited.[187] In conjunction with his or her colleagues in the connexional stationing committee, the chair is responsible for matching presbyters and circuits in the annual stationing process.[188] Each district is headed by a Chair of District (stipendiary),[189] who is always a presbyter 'in the active work'.[190]

## Demographics

Newcastle: The area served by Newcastle-upon-Tyne District[191] includes the Scottish Borders from Selkirk to Eyemouth; Northumberland (excluding Gilsland), Tyne and Wear, and the towns of Consett, Lanchester, Chester-le-Street, Murton and Seaham in Co. Durham. The population of this area in 2001 was 1,596,000.[192] Total membership[193] on 1 November 2007 was 9,809, 0.6% of the population. The total number[194] of people on the 'community roll' of the local churches (all those within the pastoral care of the local church) was 25,854; the proportion of the population who are in the pastoral care of the churches of the Newcastle upon Tyne District was thus 1.6%. Average weekly attendance at all services (counting each person once per week during October)[195] was 9,698.

Darlington: The northern extent of Darlington District[196] includes the settlements of Easington, Pittington, Sacriston, Langley Park, Esh Winning, and the District of Wear Valley. It extends southwards to include the rest of County Durham, and has a southern extent which

---

[185] Standing Order 400A 'Nature and Purposes' in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church,* Vol. 2, (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2007), 454.

[186] Deacons and diaconal probationers are the responsibility of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order, acting in conjunction with the Convocation of that Order.

[187] Standing Order 012 (4), *CPD*, 280.

[188] Standing Order 782, *CPD*, 639-40; 'Guidance on the Stationing of Ministers and Deacons' in *CPD*, 726-734; 'Code of Practice for the Stationing of Presbyters' in *CPD,* 735-738.

[189] See 'What is a District Chair?' in Methodist Conference *Agenda 2006*, (London: The Methodist Conference Office, 2006), pp. 84-107.  Only in 2004 did the title formally change to the inclusive term 'Chair', though women had been ordained presbyter since 1974 and the first female Chair appointed in 1987. Some Districts have a Lead Chair assisted by one or more Co-Chairs.

[190] Standing Order 420, *CPD,* 469.

[191] Most of the information about The Methodist District of Newcastle-upon-Tyne can be found in *District Directory 2007-2008*, The Methodist Church Newcastle-upon-Tyne District.

[192]  www.nomisweb.co.uk   (last accessed June 4, 2008), Statistics are accurate to ward level, with the total rounded to the nearest thousand.

[193] Figures obtained from the Connexional Database.

[194] Figures obtained from the Connexional Database.

[195] Note that figures before 2002 counted those people who attended more than one service each time they attended a service, so there is some 'double-counting'.

[196] Most of the information about the District of Darlington can be found in The Methodist Church Darlington District *Synod Handbook and Directory 2007-2008*.

includes the whole of Richmondshire and the towns of Bedale, Catterick, Ingleby Arncliffe, Chop Gate, Danby, Glaisdale, and Staithes. The population of this area in 2001 was 1,120,000.[197] Total membership[198] on 1 November 2007 was 7,777, 0.7 % of the population. The total number[199] of people on the 'community roll' of the local churches was 19,307, 1.7% of the population.

## Levels of Governance

Governance in the local church is exercised through the church council and the general church meeting. The church council 'has authority and oversight over the whole area of the ministry of the church, and takes decisions for the church to manage its affairs to this same end'. These include the management of its property, aims and methods, the determination and pursuit of policy and the deployment of available resources are its proper responsibility.[200] The General Church Meeting has a responsibility to consider the whole ministry of the church and in making appointments to ensure the cooperation of the whole church in that ministry. This requires a proper representation of all those present in the local church, including those who are newcomers to it.[201]

The church council meets at least twice a year – in October, following the September circuit meeting, and in February, before the March circuit meeting. The church council consists of the superintendent, presbyters and deacons appointed to the Circuit or exercising pastoral responsibility in the local church, any lay workers employed by the circuit meeting or the local church to work in that church, the church stewards, the treasurer, the secretary of the Pastoral Committee, the secretary of the council, between six and fifteen representatives elected by the General Church Meeting, up to fifteen additional co-opted persons (in particular, to ensure a young person is on the council), and a circuit steward.

All members of the local church are voting members and make up the general church meeting.[202] The meeting is held at least annually, except in churches with less than 50 members, when its functions may be discharged by the church council. Those on the community roll who are not members are also welcome to attend and speak.

> The meeting shall be held for fellowship, for mutual counsel respecting the condition of the local church, including its financial affairs, for the election of church stewards and representatives and for any other purpose which the Conference may direct.

The Pastoral Committee has oversight of the members and those in training for membership, and encourages fellowship through class meetings and other groups. It meets at least annually. The committee has the power to remove people from membership when they have 'ceased to meet' in worship without sufficient reason.[203] In churches of 50 or more, the pastoral committee consists of the superintendent, the ministers appointed to the circuit, the

---

[197]  Nomis: Official Labour Market Statistics ( www.nomisweb.co.uk) last accessed June 4, 2008.
[198] Agenda of the Methodist Conference 2008.
[199] Agenda of the Methodist Conference 2008.
[200] Standing Order 603, *CPD*, 549.
[201] Standing Order 602, *CPD*, 549.
[202] Section 62, *CPD*, 557-8.
[203] Standing Order 644, *CPD*, 564.

church stewards, and the class leaders and pastoral visitors.[204] Yet, other committees are formed in large churches to ensure 'that every area of the church's life and witness may receive examination and encouragement, and to enable as many people as possible to make a contribution to the leadership of the local church'.[205] Powers may be delegated by the church council to any committee, except obligatory appointments, approval of persons for membership, and the accreditation of workers with children and young people.[206]

At the intermediary level, the Circuit Meeting is principally responsible for the affairs of the circuit. It tries to exercise a

> combination of spiritual leadership and administrative efficiency, which will enable the circuit to fulfil its purposes […] and shall act as the focal point of the working fellowship of the churches in the circuit, overseeing their pastoral, training and evangelistic work. The meeting shall encourage leadership within the circuit which involves the circuit stewards and other lay persons along with the ministers and deacons appointed to the circuit.[207]

The circuit meeting is held at least twice per year – usually in September following the September district synod and before the October church councils, and in March, following the February church councils and before the May synod. The meeting consists[208] of: the ex-officio members;[209] ministers stationed in or residing in the circuit but not appointed to it, any lay worker, lay evangelist, youth worker, or community worker who is employed by the circuit and a member of the Methodist Church, the secretary of the meeting,the secretary of the local preachers' meeting, one church steward and the church treasurer from each local church, representatives from each church council (numbers determined by the circuit meeting, between 1 and 8), and co-opted members to ensure that all areas of the life of the circuit are adequately represented.[210]

The circuit meeting is the place from where invitations to presbyters[211] to serve in the circuit are decided upon (subject to the Conference's power to station them). The circuit meeting approves preachers on trial for admission as local preachers on the recommendation of the local preachers' meeting, has an overview as to how frequent the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the churches, and has special oversight of worship in churches which are so small they are considered 'isolated classes' of another local church. The circuit meeting may address the Conference directly in a 'memorial'[short presentation] on any connexional subject. The circuit meeting may appoint other committees, and delegate any of its powers to them. Further to that, there is the Invitation Committee which considers recommendations from the circuit stewards as to initial invitations to ministers, or re-invitations to ministers, to serve in

---

[204] In smaller churches, the functions of the Pastoral Committee may be discharged by the Church Council.
[205] Standing Order 640(2), *CPD*, 563.
[206] Standing Order 642, *CPD*, 563-4.
[207] Standing Order 515, *CPD*, 510.
[208] Standing Order 510, *CPD*, 505. Special provisions exist for single-church circuits and ecumenical areas.
[209] The Superintendent, all presbyters, deacons, probationers and persons of other communions and connexions authorised to serve the church as ministers or deacons appointed to the circuit, and the circuit stewards, are ex-officio members of all meetings connected with the Circuit.
[210] They may not exceed the number of church council representatives, and the meeting should consider its composition as a whole with regard to age, sex and ethnic origin (Standing Order 513, *CPD*, 509).
[211] Deacons are directly stationed by the Methodist Diaconal Order, and may not be invited to serve.

the circuit. It may have power delegated by the circuit meeting to invite a new minister, but the circuit meeting cannot delegate the power of re-invitation.

At the regional level, The District Synod is the policy-making court of the district[212] and serves as a link between the Conference and the Connexional Team on the one hand, and the circuits and the local churches on the other. The particular role of the ministerial session of the synod, which consists of the presbyters and the (non-voting) presbyteral probationers, is defined as follows: 'The members of the Ministerial Session meet to recall and reflect upon their ministerial vocation, to watch over one another in love, to make recommendations to the Conference concerning ministerial probationers and to consider the work of God in the district'.[213] It is generally the place where presbyters make the annual renewal of their ordination vows and where they 'account for their ministry and are accounted for by the Church'.[214] Although the synod has oversight over all district affairs, it is recognized that policy formulation actually happens generally outside of the synod meeting itself.[215] The District Policy Committee is the executive body of the district (which in Newcastle upon Tyne is called the 'District Coordinating Group;' in Darlington the DPC has a smaller executive group which is the 'District Policy Executive'), which may itself delegate its responsibilities to sub-committees or even individual officers.[216] The responsibility of the District Policy Committee includes:[217]

> formulating and promoting policies for the advance the mission of the church in the circuits and the local churches, and in particular to supervise the use of resources of personnel, property and finance and to assist the local churches and circuits having exceptional problems; as well as fostering inter-circuit and ecumenical cooperation; acting in an executive capacity in matters remitted to the committee by the synod; keeping within its purview all district concerns not dealt with elsewhere; and contributing and respond, as the case may be, to the development of connexional policies as reflected in the work of the Conference and the Methodist Council, and to carry out its other responsibilities with any such development in mind.[218]

The DPC has oversight of City Centre projects, chaplaincies (hospital, forces, workplace, prison etc.) and Methodist Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled schools.

## Finance

The first charge on the funds of the local church[219] is the Circuit Assessment which covers stipends (60-70%).[220] After that, funds are allocated on the basis of, a) the relief of poverty

---

[212] Special provisions apply to Yr Eglwys Fethodistiadd yng Nghymru / The Methodist church in Wales. There are also legal differences in the Scotland, Shetland, Isle of Man and Channel Islands Districts, and in Gibraltar and Malta which are Circuits in the South-East District.
[213] Standing Order 481, *CPD*, 489.
[214] Standing Order 700(6), *CPD*, 578. Deacons give account for, and accounted for, their ministry in the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order (Standing Order 701(8), *CPD*, 580.)
[215] Standing Order 412, *CPD*, 461.
[216] Standing Order 402, *CPD*, 455.
[217] Section 43, *CPD*, 476-482.
[218] Standing Order 431, *CPD*, 476.
[219] Section 65, *CPD*, 566-8.
[220] Standing Order 650, *CPD*, 566. Collection rate is therefore 100%.

and distress (applied first to the congregation and neighbourhood), and work among children and young people, b) the support of any connexional, district, circuit or local fund of the Methodist Church, c) the support of any ecumenical work in which the local church is engaged, d) the support of the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust, and the support of any other charitable fund or body that is not contrary to any purpose of the Methodist Church or to Methodist discipline.

The circuit is the place that almost all the financial activity takes place (some 90%). Income is generated principally from the assessment paid by the local churches. The bulk of expenditure goes toward paying minister's stipends. This has mission implications because the way in which ministers' stipends are generated precludes the possibility of establishing a new local church. Capital money arising from sale of property or land is paid into the Circuit Advance Fund. This may only be spent under strict guidelines, and with the permission of the District Property Committee.[221] At a regional level, district funds are generated from the Circuit Assessment, (10% of the initial 60% offered up by the local churches for the Circuit Assessment). Districts also have a levy on circuit advance funds (the District Advance Fund).

## Learning and Formation

In 2006, the Methodist Conference accepted 'Extending Discipleship and Exploring Vocation' (EDEV), a programme of accessible and flexible local courses assessed by a portfolio of work. This exploration was primarily intended for those who wish to explore the outworking of Christian discipleship and vocation in a disciplined and structured way, with the anticipation that the majority of those undertaking the course will not be intending to candidate for ordained ministry (Methodist Conference Resolution 45, adopted 2006). The novelty of the programme, as suggested by its title, is that the process does not contain a set period for the 'completion' of exploration. People are expected to move on as they begin to discern and seek to respond to their own calling. In this sense the period of exploration will be open ended. This will allow circuit or area and regional programmes to work together and encourage people considering entry to anticipate making a sustained commitment for a limited period.

The EDEV format was piloted in the North East, and was judged to be working well. While most of the participants to date have indeed gone on to develop their Christian vocation, very few have sought to do this within presbyteral ministry. Administration of EDEV was in the hands of a regional the network comprising the four Methodist Districts in Yorkshire and two in the North East proper, together with Wesley Study Centre in Durham and the University of York St. John.

The Wesley Study Centre (WSC) was an independent centre of theological education located within St. John' s College, Durham, and sharing its courses, staff and facilities. It provided training in three areas:

---

[221] Standing Order 955, *CPD*, 696-8. There is a levy each year to the District Advance Fund, to enable redistribution of surplus funds around the District and Connexion. Methodist ministers receive their stipends from the Circuit to which they are appointed. The Chair of the District is paid by the Connexion. Only those ministers appointed to the District (such as the District Evangelism Enabler in Newcastle) are pain by the District.

- foundation training for those who wish to explore their Christian vocation;

- initial training for ordination for those who have been recommended by the Methodist Church for training for presbyteral or diaconal ministry;

- lay training and education in cooperation with the churches and agencies in the North East region.

WSC was one of the three colleges approved for Methodist training that still receive bursaries for full-time students. The Connexion in effect directs students to its colleges (albeit in consultation with the student), which means that WSC does not have the interviewing/recruiting role of, for example, Cranmer Hall. It had three full-time and a number of part-time staff, and was currently responsible for 21 students in training prior to its closure.

Subsequently however, a process of centralisation been underway nationally in regard of ministerial training which was ratified through the report *Fruitful Fields* and led during the course of this study to the withdrawal of Connexional support for the Study Centre meaning that student ministers no longer train in Durham.

Following the withdrawal of Methodist ministerial training in 2014. WSC plans to become a research centre working alongside Cranmer Hall within St. John's College.

In addition, WSC wants to develop into a centre for research in Methodist and Free Church Studies, further developing existing strategic international partnerships for research and continuing to attract doctoral research students, and maintain a Methodist stream on the MA programme

## Local Preacher Training

The Faith and Worship training course for Local Preachers is a national operation, involving 18 paper-based, distance-learning units, with local tutorial support. These units cover a range of biblical and doctrinal topics, together with material on worship and preaching. Much of the content is now regarded as rather traditional, as is the course's delivery and assessment. The cost, however, is low, £50 for materials per student.

The original 'Hind' proposals broached the possibility of Anglican Readers and Methodist Local Preachers being taught together, but implementing this would give rise to a number of issues, including the facts that

(1)     the number of Methodists in training for this form of ministry is some three times greater than the number of Anglicans;

(2)     the bar is set at Diploma level for Anglicans, whereas Methodists appear to prefer courses at Certificate level.

## Youth Work

Much of the value of materials for 'youth work' or Christian education for young people is in helping the leaders to be theologically formed as well as helping them to make connexions for the young people with religious themes and experiences.

## *Strategy*

District Synod formally frames its strategy in mission terms – a reflection of their adoption of the Calling of the Methodist Church (worship; Service; learning and caring; evangelism) and the Priorities of the Methodist Church (affirming God's love; God-centered worship, community development, evangelism; fresh ways of being church, nurturing a people centered culture within the church). Strategic aims supported the initiatives articulated at local level, i.e. Fresh Expressions, social services etc., although it has a more encompassing, pragmatic and directive purpose in sight: reviewing Circuit boundaries with a view to amalgamation.

This was only partially acknowledged at local level in discussions around strategy, but cited where examples of tension between synod and the local church were invited (although this might be more properly expressed as a tension between local church and circuit). Broadly speaking, as one local interviewee put it, the local churches are put into a position of having to justify practically and financially their continuing existence. However, the degree of autonomy exercised by the local churches ensures that they cannot be forcibly closed. While such tensions may express a problematic feature from the local perspective, they may also be said to testify to the effectiveness of the connexional principle which attempts to exclude the extremes of independency and autocracy within church governance, balancing the local and the universal, ministerial authority, and co-responsibility. However, first, the degree to which balance itself is the key to ensuring Methodist survival remains unclear, and the stronger hand Synod would like to exercise regionally – reflected in the interviewee's comments – was reflected in similar comments recording the state of governance at the local level (i.e. that sometimes a stronger hand is needed in the local church). Second, it appears that there are relatively few smaller circuits left requiring amalgamation.

Circuit strategy appeared to recognize the desire on the part of synod for amalgamating smaller circuits and sharing resources as part of a wider attempt to look to the future of the Methodist church. In some cases, extra circuit meetings had been established to implement this process.

Scores for strategy were above average and better than governance scores at all 3 levels.There is then a sense that strategic thinking is being driven in a concerted manner to consolidate circuits with a view to the better distribution of resources, financial or otherwise, even if it does create tensions.

Local churches articulated little sense of their mission or strategy being linked to Synod, although this seems appropriate within the connexion, with mission being informed by the local context (local church/circuit). Mission generally takes the shape of:

- Natural Church Development/Healthy Church Handbook.

- Fresh Expressions.

- Social Services such as parent and toddler groups.

- The development of buildings for wider community participation.

In these cases, strategy also appeared encouraged by particular individuals within the local churches. However, the link between synod and the circuit/local church is facilitated with the establishment of a District Evangelist Enabler, and a District Development Enabler. In this sense, the strategic drive of Synod can be said to be linked to the circuit and the local churches.

## Questions Arising

A possible scenario for the District of Newcastle is one of gradual decline, both in terms of numbers and finances as pensions increasingly draw upon reserves. Such an event might also be marked by an increased lay participation, but with presbyters becoming increasingly bogged down in the mundane work. Equally, the consolidation of churches into larger circuits might result in a loss of local fellowship. An alternative scenario is that as communities adjust to new circuits, better use of existing resources is cultivated, and the remaining lay take on an increased role in the creative visioning of the church.

## Strengths

The following can be identified as strengths which the District of Newcastle can offer to other traditions:

1. Governance and Strategy at the circuit level are well reported.

2. Increased lay involvement and development of older forms of ministry (e.g. increased diaconate).

3. Strong finances at synod and Circuit level.

## Open Questions

The following can be identified as open questions which the District of Newcastle might seek to address, and where learning from other traditions may be of assistance:

1. What becomes of the role of the priest as local churches increase lay involvement?

2. To what extent do larger circuits facilitate a sense of local fellowship?

3. How can lay male participation be encouraged?

# Phase II: The Empirical Investigation

## *Introduction*

The context of the Methodist District of Newcastle is a church in transition. Attendance statistics over a four year period (2006-2010) show that Newcastle District has decline 21% (although if the period is drawn back to 2001 the percentage drop remains 21%), with Darlington in decline at 13.70% (2006-2010), although if the period is drawn back to 2001 the percentage drop is -27%.[222] In general, decline in attendance is widely felt across churches in the UK, the result of a failure on the part of mainline institutional churches to adapt to the cultural expectations of post-War consumer Britain with its predilection for spirituality, and market driven sensibility of choice – one chooses the churches that provides the necessary services (e.g. educational; children friendly). The issue is compounded by the aging profile of lay and ordained alike. The existing majority of older presbyters and congregations alike will, upon passing, not find immediate replacement in their current form.

Further contributing factors include the human geographical shifts that have brought new strains on the existing structures of the church. Traditional boundaries drawn by church administration for the governance of the churches regionally and locally are becoming increasingly redundant. Meanwhile, the associated decline in finances impedes not only those local churches wishing to be self-supporting or initiate mission projects, but the future possibility of funding those individuals who do come forward to the order of presbyters.

With 'mission' driving the agenda, the pragmatic response of the district has been to rationalise existing circuits, with a view to consolidating the smaller into larger. The process of rationalising has been undertaken by the district coordinating group. This increased centralisation on the part of the circuits is accompanied with an increased mission emphasis on the role of the local church to consider forms of, a) fresh expression; b) diversified church (e.g. messy church); or c) amalgamation with local ecumenical partnerships. These three responses can be considered as variants on the political spectrum: radical (fresh expressions); liberal (messy church); and conservative (subsume within ecumenism as a means to sustain a community).

Financial decisions (initially the responsibility of the national property committee with the district merely approving applications to the committee) are now the responsibilities of the district, which both agrees to the scheme, and if an application is made for funding, agrees that funding. This gives greater autonomy to regional finances and its say in mission objectives. In terms of formation, rationalisation has been undertaken across the connexion as a whole. District formation was formally facilitated by the EDEV programme of local courses which was supplied by the Wesley Study Centre.

---

[222] The Methodist District of Newcastle: http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/stats-20-newcastleupontyne-5year-1011-0312.pdf

The impact of this can be felt in our case-study of North Road Methodist Church. With membership of 103 and average attendance at Sunday morning worship of around 60, North Road prides itself on being an 'ordinary church' in a city where other churches are perceived to take on a more particular ecclesiological or social identity, the church is small. The minister's role as Methodist Chaplain to Durham University facilitates its congregation: students and their families studying at the Wesley Study Centre at St. John's College have also found a home at North Road, and some have served on placement at the church. The likely closure of the Study Centre is regarded as a matter of some considerable regret by many members at North Road.

## Governance (Newcastle)

In our initial round of interviews, we asked a number of questions concerning the governance and strategy of the Church at its district, circuit, and local level. We spoke to 10 representatives overall, 5 ordained and five lay, (comprising of 6 men and 3 women), 5 locally based; 3 circuit based, and 2 district representatives.

Local level interviewees described their system as either: 'conciliar' or 'democratic' with the local minister nonetheless exercising 'a big say over what happens,' although he or she cannot make executive decisions as such, that is done by the church council. Overall, the system of governance was well reported with the chief impediment being, as one presbyter put it, the very democratic nature of governance itself,

> you see, obviously people are all different, so when you get together and there is one decision to be made everybody seems to have a different idea of what that decision should be, and sometimes it can be quite difficult, because as the minister, I can't say well this is the way to go, it has to be voted in.

From the perspective of that presbyter, a more authoritative and interventionist stance by the presbyter would not, at times, be unwelcome:

> In the Methodist church no one person or group of people have authority to do anything, to make… it is more a collection, which is good in some ways and in other ways is a total disaster, because sometimes you do need one person to say go this way.

In sum, the system was generally considered 'a sound system'.

Decision making power was perceived to reside 'with the church council'; i.e. representative of the 'people in the pews', and while councils could be dominated by a strong personality, informally speaking decision making power was diffuse across a number of loci (e.g. The Property and Finance Committee; the Chair; Ideas Groups; and individuals) depending on the decision in question. So while 'everything comes back to the church council' there are informal loci of power. As one interviewee put it, the Church council is an 'umbrella organisation, […] but it's very happy for people to work out their own Christian initiatives'.

We also asked whether those people in positions of authority saw their role as managing changes that occur in the organisation. While one lay interviewee agreed in its importance, the feeling was 'that the majority do not'. The issue was said to be compounded by the introduction of new ministers:

> most new ministers when they come in have the view that they will probably introduce changes, but believe that for the first 6-12 months the last thing that they should do is introduce change in case it rocks the boat, so they spend a year settling in; then in their second year try to introduce some changes that they think will improve the situation.

A similar view was expressed by another church council representative. 'The majority of church council members accept the fact that change will have to happen on occasion, but don't have the view that their task is to manage change, but rather try and incorporate it when it is thrust up upon them'.

It was however recognised by a lay interviewee that change management was not simply about reacting to a given situation, but a process of visionary discernment, 'I think this isn't easy. First you've got to recognise what changes are taking place to which you have to react, and what changes you want to introduce as a proactive change'.

Important within the responses was precisely the way in which they interpreted 'people in positions of authority' in regard to change management. Two interviewees, one lay, one ordained, saw the responsibility for change management lying with the Stewards:

> In the Methodist church it usually begins with the church stewards, and whoever wants that change to go forward, so everybody would be drawn into it, it would be just one or two people doing it.

And

> if we make a decision to change something in the local church then the stewards see it as their responsibility to implement those changes, because the minister is not there all the time, but they are. They are the executive officers for that decision.

Yet as the interviewee pointed out: Stewards are not so much authoritative, they are voted into those positions […] they are just facilitators to move it along'. In short they associated change management at the practical level of stewardship rather than the possibility of a visionary position (i.e. an 'Idea's group'). Thus, while one ordained interviewee highlighted the central role all played in the process, saying 'in the Methodist church no one person or group of people have authority to do anything, […] it's more a collection' this was seen to impede change management, 'sometimes you do need one person to say go this way.

Who then does decide the strategy for churches that have one? From the perspective of the ministers, strategy was seen to be decided by 'the groups instigation was deemed to be in 'the staff meeting and then it goes out into the church council and Circuits' with, 'on occasion', the minister or the church steward reminding the church council if some time has elapsed since one had been undertaken.

Putting strategy into effect can depend upon the strategy itself; small localised projects such as toddlers group require members of the laity. For longer term strategies it was reported that 'the church council' would call a meeting and 'put it in the hands of the church stewards in consultation with the minister. And they are perfectly free to develop those basic ideas and make it a more all-embracing meeting than the church council actually dictated'.

Most strategy was reported to be generated locally and hence not strongly linked with other levels, unless a grant application needed to be considered; i.e. finances served as the link between the local level and circuit/district. Moreover, while strategies were passed down, 'once it gets down to the church level, it is up to the churches themselves to decide whether they want to partake or not' so a degree of autonomy was reported. This basic attitude was reflected in another's comment:

> In terms of what happens in the life of the church, again the circuit is an irrelevance to many people in their own thoughts even though it's the circuit that enables things to happen. Many people who attend Methodist churches are congregational in their outlook. Strategy comes from the local church.

Another lay rep felt that there was not a strong link between circuit/district and the local church:

> The circuit doesn't really get involved unfortunately. I think because it feels it can't because each church within the circuit has strengths and weakness of its own. The circuit is not in a position really, it can give a bit of advice, occasionally call a circuit meeting to show the innovative work going on in churches to help to instigate ideas, but purely for implementation in local churches. So there is no policy from the circuit, I feel […] the district is slightly better placed than the circuit in that it has some kind of evangelist enabler, […] at least there is a recognition at district level that some local church need some help at some time.

However, it was also noted that 'at the moment the circuit is looking at joining with another circuit,' part of the district strategy. The interviewee took the view that circuit's strategic thinking was 'more about members not money,' and that 'to be church effectively, wasn't about finances as much as how to be an effective witness'.

In terms of purpose, 'Did church members (lay and ordained) sense that their churches had a clear sense of purpose?' One lay interviewee further highlighted the important role the minister can play in giving a sense of purpose to a church saying 'it […] obviously […] changes with ministers, but over the last 9 years our minister has definitely had a clear purpose in his mind, to where the church is going and where it needs to be led. For another ordained interviewee, the nature of the Church seemed to preclude a sense of overall purpose: 'obviously, certain individuals do but it is very difficult as a church to say anything, it is a group of people coming at it from different levels, different understandings'. A tension is thereby exhibited which can be put in terms of how one views mission; does one principally witness to others through outreach or simply by being a presence in the community.

At the intermediary level, the circuit, like the local church, was also described as 'collegial' and 'democratic, although some cynicism was expressed, particularly as it pertained to the district's strategy for larger circuits: As one interviewee put it: the process was 'a bit like EU membership, the European parliament's asks the same question of countries, and they get the answer that they want; I sometimes feel that that is how democracy is in Methodism'.

Nonetheless, governance arrangements were seen to 'work well' by the presbyter to the extent 'he/she delegates responsibilities to the leadership teams so they can take smaller decisions, in-between times'. The strength of the Chair was also seen as a determining factor in the success of Circuit meetings; a sentiment repeated by the other interviewee: 'I think

they do, I think, well, everything depends on the efficiency and the ability of the people leading them. 'Flexibility of decision making was recognised to be dependent upon the particular decision. For example, financial decisions were 'in house' and hence avoided recourse to external bodies such as Synod.[223] The devolving of decisions from Synod to Circuit, and the introduction of electronic media, were both seen to make the decision making process 'easier'. 'Delegation' was also seen as crucial to the success of decision. The task of the Circuit superintendent was understood by one minister: not to 'interfere in the day to day running of the Circuit' rather, 'making sure the right pemanage in their way and not tell them what to do […] our role is to support them'. The ordained interviewee located 'the Circuit' as the overall basis of decision-making power, well distributed through its church representatives; whilst the lay perspective understood the function of the Circuit meetings 'to take the accounts for the District through to receiving reports from the various Circuits, to appoint the various positions for the District, and the chair of the District' with 'fundamental changes of direction' coming from the Conference [i.e. Synod]. Although one lay interviewee described the church as 'tending to strive towards a more democratic situation,' this was not taken to necessarily imply an improvement. As he pointed out, 'the church thrived and mattered up to the 20$^{th}$ Century on a much more direct system than what is now. Another minister was also keen to add:

> Synod and Circuit meetings, and church councils fit in within a flow of decision making and information within an annual kind of cycle, of meetings, conference, which meets annually, passes on its decisions or information to District Synod which then pass on that information to Circuit meetings who make decisions and receive information, and then pass it on to the local churches, and then Christmas happens, and after Christmas church councils meet and then passes on concerns or things which are then passed back on to the Synod etc., so annually there is a cycle of flow of decisions and I think that works, I like that idea, it allows for distributed decision making. It takes a year to do it with this flow of stuff happening.

In terms of those people in positions of authority, did they see their role as managing changes that occur in the organisation? Managing change was seen by the ordained interviewee as a 'highly visible part of the role,' necessitated by the continuing change of Circuit life. In this sense, change management was taken to be initiated by the minister; his role was perceived in terms of 'leading change as I see change could happen in the church and Circuits'. From the perspective of the Circuit, managing change was 'less so' than at the local church level; or rather: 'it's a different kind of change,' management at Circuit level is 'corporate;' i.e. for all the churches (e.g. creating a new joint Circuit).

Deciding strategy was felt to be 'the ministry group, which was made up of the superintendent minister, and at least two other clergy,' or the 'Circuit leadership team which comprises of ministers, deacons, Circuit stewards, Circuit training officer and the treasurer, and putting it into effect the Superintendent along with the leadership team, who in turn delegates a person to go to each church council to try and keep these sorts of things on the agenda, so there is a team of people ultimately responsible'. As an example of the link between regional and Circuit strategy the roles of the newly established DDE and DEE were cited: 'its something that they have […] in place which is attempting to address the issue

---

[223] This is not true: permissions need to be sought for use of 'trust money'.

rather than let it slide'. There was a general consensus that the Circuit maintained a clear sense of purpose, 'a defined statement of what the Circuit is about,' although both agreed that this was not always grasped by 'everybody'.

The Regional expression of governance is the District Synod, made up of Circuit and local church representatives and district officers. In this sense the Synod is taken to function democratically such that 'when it comes to actual decisions, it is generally by ballot'. As one minister said of Synod: '[It has] little or no right to dictate to the local church, nor the Circuits, as to what they can and can't do, it can give strong guidance and support, the chair of the District has no right to go into a Circuit and act, unless he has been invited by the standing superintendent minister'. Synod was said to be chiefly aiding a ministerial synod, and more significantly, the coordinating group.[224]

The specialism and trust operative with the coordinating groups were taken as the central contributors to its flexibility or rather 'efficiency'. By consolidating decision making into the specialist coordinating groups, more of Synod's time was able to be directed towards fellowship such that Synod was described by one minister a 'a vision and encouraging kind of day, rather than laboriously going through every document'.

However, the generalised shift of decision making to the coordinating groups, brought with it a repeated concern expressed by both an ordained and lay interviewee: 'Synod was not encouraging wider discussion:' Synod says: 'who are we to be involved in that discussion, these are people who we've appointed to do it so let's let them get on with it and do it'. Hence as one interviewee commented: 'I've been going to Synod for probably 30 odd years and we rarely have debates now,' an issue further compounded because there are so many members'.

The question as to where decision-making power actually lies and how it is well-distributed was met with a variety of responses at regional level. On the one hand Synod was seen as the authoritative decision making body, although the structure itself was considered to 'pick up on the opinions of anyone who cares to contribute,' hence decision making power was seen to be well distributed. For another interviewee, it was not so much Synod which held the power, but more specifically the local church council, with Synod offering a more supportive role, as well as ensuring the 'checks and balances'. A third interviewee drew the distinction between the theoretical and practical role of decision-making authority. In theory, it is Synod that holds the power but in practice 'I would say the coordinating group is where decision making is made'. Of course, the coordinating group can only ever make recommendations, but as was pointed out, while 'somebody may say "No" […] and they do occasionally, […] it is quite rare now'.

Managing change was generally considered to be a big feature of people's thinking. Practical and evidential examples of this were to be found: a) at the managerial level through the recent appointment of the District Development Enabler and the District Evangelist Enabler; b) at the level of the local church through the rise/success of messy church.

---

[224] The coordinating group has a maximum of 24 people on it, and meets 4 times a year.

Where the distinction between 'managing' and 'coping' was recognised ('not all of Synod is managing change; its coping with change, but it's not managing change') it was felt on balance that the emphasis was on managing change: 'Obviously some are dug in, but a vast majority are: 'we've got to go out to them'.

In deciding strategy, while it was recognised by one interviewee that the principles for strategy were of themselves generalised, it was part of the task of the District coordinating group to develop those general priorities into a more concrete strategy, asking for example, 'what does that mean for the next 5 years, what are we going to be actually setting as our targets?' and ensuring those targets are 'owned by the whole church'. One clear and specific aim of the strategy listed was the creation of 'larger Circuits'.

Putting the priorities into effect was seen as the task of 'Everybody'. The District considered it applied the priorities with a 'fairly light touch' because the imposition of strategy in a heavy handed manner might simply invoke the defences of a local church, over whom the District has no authority (i.e. a church can say, we've got the money and we shall keep our doors open and not want to work in that way, thank you). In short, strategy was perceived to be linked with other levels, largely through finance; for example, for a local church to benefit from grant applications they need to own it; i.e. show how their vision corresponds to the Priorities.

## *Summary*

Overall, the system appears well-developed and reasonably effective. The scores for development are better than for effectiveness at all three levels, although all governance was scored above average. Power was generally understood to be suitably diffuse; however, local churches articulated little sense of their mission or strategy being linked to Synod, rather mission is informed by the local context (local church/circuit) with Mission priorities taking forms such as Natural Church Development/Healthy Church Handbook; Fresh Expressions; provision of Social Services; development of buildings for wider community participation. And while District Synod formally frames its strategy in mission terms – a reflection of their adoption of the Calling of the Methodist Church and the Priorities of the Methodist Church (affirming God's love; God-centred worship; community development, evangelism; fresh ways of being church, nurturing a people centred culture within the church)., strategic aims support the initiatives articulated at local level (i.e., Fresh Expressions, Social Services, etc.) whilst pursuing its reviewing of Circuit boundaries.

However, the emphasis on local initiative within an overarching strategy for consolidation and rationalisation meant, as one local interviewee put it, the local churches are put into a position of having to justify practically and financially their continuing existence. Arguably, tensions between levels exist in all institution. On the one hand, they can result from a lack of understanding. For example, one interviewee, when asked directly about tensions, took the view that Circuit's strategic thinking was 'more about money' but that 'to be church effectively, wasn't about finances as much as how to be an effective witness'. Yet this was to overlook the obvious link between regional and Circuit strategy being fostered through the roles of the newly established DDE and DEE. On the other hand, inter-level organisational tension can belie more fundamental intra-level conflicts, such as intra-congregational tensions.

Nonetheless, the above accounts suggest that here remains a significant split within the connexional principle. To take the example from the perspective of the local church, one Minister explained:

> In terms of what happens in the life of the church, again the Circuit is an irrelevance to many people in their own thoughts even though it's the Circuit that enables things to happen. Many people who attend Methodist churches are congregational in their outlook. Strategy comes from the local church.

Arguably this is a genuine reflection of where strategy should take place, in localised pockets which reflect local needs. However, in response to questions about Synod governance from the perspective of the local church, further comments ranged from a 'complete mystery' and 'un-democratic' to a centre for 'resource'. Identification was naturally stronger with the circuit, which was recorded as helping to 'enable local churches to exercise their mission'. Yet the District and Circuit were also spoken of simultaneously in terms which highlighted their remoteness and principally reactive stance.

From a circuit perspective, (i.e. the circuit superintendent) the following statement underlies the lack of a strong link between Circuit/District and the local church:

> The Circuit doesn't really get involved unfortunately. I think because it feels it can't because each church within the Circuit has strengths and weakness of its own. The Circuit is not in a position really, it can give a bit of advice, occasionally call a Circuit meeting to show the innovative work going on in churches to help to instigate ideas, but purely for implementation in local churches. So there is no policy from the Circuit'.

Where the relationship does come into focus it is often finances that serves as the link between the local level and Circuit/District, because as one Minister reported, 'we don't have to ask permission from such as the District for I'd say 95% of initiatives'. And in terms of the actual life of the Synod, a repeated concern expressed by both an ordained and lay interviewee was that: 'Synod was not encouraging wider discussion: ' Synod says: 'who are we to be involved in that discussion, these are people who we've appointed to do it so let's let them get on with it and do it,' hence as one interviewee commented: 'I've been going to Synod for probably 30 odd years and we rarely have debates now.

## *Leadership and Ministry (Newcastle)*

Another way to assess the situation is to ask more directly, what kind of churches are local churches? Are they fit for the mission task? To evaluate these questions, we can draw upon our leadership questionnaire. The questionnaire sample was taken from 281 Church members who had been members of the Methodist Church for an average of 48 years; member of their specific church for 30 years, been in their church position for approximately 12 years, known their church leaders for 4 years, and spent 6.4 hours per week on church duties. In 33.1%, the member was male; 66.9% female. In 54% of cases the church leader was male; in 46% female. Our questionnaire concerns two main questions. First, does ministerial leadership matter? Second, how does ministerial leadership work and through what processes does it transmit its effects? In the process, we can build up a pretty good picture of the local churches and their members attitudes on the basis of findings.

In regards to leadership, our initial findings from the data suggest that ministerial leadership matters for the attitudes and behaviours of church members, and that the predominant style of leadership identified (servant leadership) is typically positively associated with important variables such as spiritual wellbeing, life and role satisfaction, and willingness to engage in extra effort on the church's behalf. Analysis of how leadership style is translated into active well-being (mediation analysis) on the part of the congregation as a whole show that ministerial leadership transmits its effect through some important mediators, for example, psychological empowerment and trust. Empowerment (table 5) is seen as providing organizational members with a sense of meaning and challenge in their church work, which can improve motivation and performance. There appears to be an empowered church membership particularly in terms of meaning in their work with 93% agreeing that their church role was personally meaningful for them.

Leaders often develop differentiated relationships with each member of the group that they lead, and leader–member exchange theory (LMX) explains how those relationships with various members can develop in unique ways. Organisational success is aided by creating positive relations between the leader and group members. Often leaders usually have special relationships with an 'inner-circle' of group members, who often get high levels of responsibility and access to resources. This is often termed the 'in-group,' but their position can come with a price. These organizational members will usually have to work harder, be more committed and loyal to the leader, and share the leader's administrative duties. Conversely, members in the 'out-group' are given low levels of choice or influence and put constraints on the leader. There is evidence in the Methodist District of Newcastle data for both in-group -e.g. 49% of respondents say their minister understands their problems and needs either quite a bit/a great deal and an out-group with 20% (likely to be the ministers 'out-group' – see loyalty) respondents reporting that their minister recognizes their potential not at all/a little.

We use a subjective measure of church productivity (table 13) in the members' survey (a more substantial version of church outcomes is developed for the church leader survey). In essence this taps collective efforts of church members. The findings suggest that the levels of church effort are good with 73% respondents reporting that everyone gives their best efforts in the church. Further analysis finds productivity is predicted positively by servant leadership but not cultic leadership (ß = 0.27; p < 0.001).

Perceptions of organizational support (table 11) is a way of measuring organizational members' perceptions of a favourable social exchange with their employer: essentially it asks questions about the extent to which the organisation values their members, looks out for their interests and well-being, and provides help when members need it. Respondents generally feel very positive about the amount of support they receive from the organization. For example, 80% feel their church cares about their opinions.

Group Potency and Cohesion (table 6) measures a church group's belief that it can be effective in its tasks and duties. In general, the data shows good levels of group potency with for example 65% of members agree that the church group has confidence in itself to a considerable/great extent. In general terms, a group is said to be in a state of cohesion when its members possess bonds linking them to one another and to the group as a whole. Thus group cohesion is believed to develop from a field of binding social forces that act on church

members to stay in the group. Groups that possess strong unifying forces typically stick together over time whereas groups that lack such bonds between members usually disintegrate. The results show strong evidence of high level of group cohesion, with 95% agrees that working in the church was like working with friends.

We included spiritual wellbeing (table 15), defined as a sense of peace and contentment stemming from an individual's relationship with the spiritual aspects of life, in the study. The measure of spiritual wellbeing used in this study was developed in the 1970s because it was deemed important to develop a measure that looked at subjective aspects of people's lives. The full scale consists of two dimensions. The first is a vertical dimension, assessing one's relationship with God. The second dimension represents a more horizontal relationship with others and one's sense of personal satisfaction and meaning in life. Given the nature of the study context we concentrated our selection of items on the vertical dimension, including just one item from the horizontal dimension. The scale was developed for use with religious populations and employed a widely ecumenical definition of spirituality; the majority of studies which use it to measure perceived spiritual well-being have found evangelical and Protestant populations scoring the highest on the scale. The respondents here score highly with, for example, 93% agreeing that their relationship with God contributes to their sense of wellbeing. The analysis finds that members spiritual wellbeing is predicted by servant leadership ($ß = 0.15$; $p < 0.05$) but not cultic leadership. Spiritual wellbeing is a strong predictor of respondents' overall life satisfaction ($ß = 0.31$; $p < 0.001$).

Life satisfaction (table 16) is a measure of overall wellbeing - and is often used in 'happiness studies' and indexes. It taps a construct space of how satisfied people feel with their life generally, as contrasted with positive affect -see below (sometimes called just 'happiness'), which represents how they feel at a single point in time. That is, life satisfaction involves people thinking about their life as a whole, including factors such as whether they are achieving their goals, are doing as well as other people around them, and are happy generally rather than just right now. Life satisfaction is thus a longer-term measure than affect. Life satisfaction is often measured by single item coarse scales but in this study we used a summated scale of 4 items. From Table 16, the evidence here suggests members are generally satisfied with their lives and, church roles and have high levels of positive affect. For example, 89% of respondents agree that they are satisfied with their role in the church and 87% their life as a whole. Further analyses find that first, as we note above, spiritual wellbeing predicts life satisfaction. We ran some additional analyses on predictors of life satisfaction and members' satisfaction with their church role is strongly predictive of overall life satisfaction ($ß = 0.38$; $p < 0.001$). In terms of members' overall satisfaction with their roles ($ß = 0.37$; $p < 0.001$), servant leadership predict role satisfaction positively and cultic leadership negatively ($ß = -.13$; $p < 0.05$).

Mediating this generalised sense of empowerment and well-being were several important 'mediatory states'. For example, mediating a sense of well-being may be aspects such as 'trust'. Indeed, trust is an increasingly vital organizational resource that influences both organizational performance and member wellbeing. Organizational members can trust one foci, such as their peers, and distrust another, such as the leaders. The analysis of what predicts trust in minister provides some interesting findings (servant leadership positively predicts members trust in the minister ($ß = 0.75$; $p < 0.001$) whilst cultic leadership ($ß = 0.35$; $p < 0.001$) negatively predicts trust in the minister). The survey showed high levels of trust

with 6.26 (mean score out of 7), or 92% agreeing with the statement 'I believe my minister has high integrity'

We also included a loyalty (table 3), defined as being faithful and adherent to the minister, to the leader measure. The responses showed high levels of leader loyalty but with a small minority of respondents reporting low levels. For example, 9% of respondents disagree they have a sense of loyalty to their minister. There is a long-standing view in organizational behaviour research that a person's self-esteem in the organization, formed around organizational experiences, plays a significant role in determining their motivation and effecting related attitudes and behaviours (table 8). We asked respondents about the messages they picked up about their standing in the church from the attitudes and behaviours of others towards them. In general church members report high levels of OBSE with for example 91% reporting that that they felt helpful in the church. These scorings are consistently high. However, they need to be balanced by several other key findings.

First, in terms of self-determination, and impact the responses are largely less favourable with 47% disagreeing that they had any control over what happens in their church. Second, we explored church-group citizenship behaviour (table 9). We were interested in how members behave in church work, and what they do for the church and others. Members exhibit different types of behaviour which goes 'above beyond the call of duty' for everyday church members and contributes positively to overall organizational effectiveness. In this study there are behaviours focused on helping the church as a whole – which we label 'organizational citizenship behaviour – organization' (or 'OCB-O') and those directed at individual members– which we label 'organizational citizenship behaviour – individual' (or 'OCB-I'). In addition, we identify two other categories of church member behaviour. Firstly, behaviours targeted at community in general helping behaviours - OCB-COM and in role behaviours - IRB. The latter behaviours are those we would expect to see being practiced by all regular church members. In our analysis, it seems that the most common OCBs are targeted at helping other individuals in the church and the least common ones are the community based activities. Value Congruence (table 14) sheds further light on this problematic. Research in organizational psychology suggests that people and their organizational environments become intertwined through successive stages of attraction-selection-attrition (ASA).

The ASA framework is grounded in the person perspective on organizational behaviour, in which people within an organization largely determine an organization's practice, structure, and culture. Consistent with the organizational culture literature, in which culture reflects a set of beliefs, expectations, and shared values that guides the behaviour of an organization a central notion of the ASA framework is that people are attracted to organizations whose general core or dominant values they share. This seems to be the case here in that table 14 shows a high level of value congruence the church with, for example, 88% agreeing that the church has the same values as them in concern for others. The level of also shared values with the minister is also high with 83% agreeing that their minister represents values that are important to them. The ASA view suggest that the church attract and retain people who have values consistent with the church goals and that the church will function most effectively when populated by members who share the organization's values. As such, we define shared values as the congruence of general core or dominant values between members and their church. This conceptualization is consistent with shared values as a global construct in which values are viewed as fundamental, relatively enduring, and guiding member behaviour. We

include these variables in the study to examine the relationship between shared values and extra-role behaviours. We expect those members with a close value alignment will have higher OCBs targeted at helping the church and individuals in the church. Thus the question we are attempting to answer is to what extent does the congruence between members' values and the values held by the organization and leader (i.e., shared values) affect the employee's propensity to engage in church-directed extra-role behaviours? Our analysis demonstrates a strong relationship for OCB-I and IRB but not OCB-O or OCB-COM, i.e. community volunteering behaviours for value congruence with church, OCB-I (ß = 0.25; $p < 0.01$) and IRB (ß = 0.23; $p < 0.001$). Value congruence with leader is stronger in that it predicts all four church member behaviours OCB-0 (ß = 0.19; $p < 0.01$); OCB-I (ß = 0.27; $p < 0.001$); and IRB (ß = 0.17; $p < 0.01$) and OCB-COM (ß = 0.19; $p < 0.01$). One way to put this is in the context of the strategy is that where strong value congruence is found, it is focused precisely on the types of identification which render problematic the thinking around new ventures because the behaviours identified with are those which are inward facing. Hence and strategic problem must take as its focus not a shift in attention to new forms as such, but changing the very value system of the church away from its domestic model.

Third, identification bears on commitment. When we look then at commitment to the organisation (table 10), it can have three bases, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Firstly members may have 'affective' commitment in the sense that they personally identify with the church and choose to be associated with it. For example 69% of our respondents saying they feel the church's problems are their own, and 12% that they do not feel part of the family in the church. Overall, it appears from these responses that the level of affective commitment to the Church is strong. There is also evidence of 'normative' commitment, which involves the individual feeling a sense of duty or obligation to the church. The basis of commitment here is rather different, involving a feeling that one ought to remain in the Church. Here levels of commitment appear to be good but 23% would not feel guilty if they left the church.

Finally, there may be a sense of commitment simply because individuals feel that the costs of leaving the church would be too great, the so-called 'continuance commitment'. The results here suggest that continuance commitment levels are relatively high with 63% of respondents saying it would be very hard for them to leave the church if they wanted to. Affective commitment to the church is positively associated with the closely related concept of identification with the church (ß = 0.43 $p < 0.001$). Normative commitment to the church is negatively associated (ß = -0.38; $p < 0.001$) and continuance commitment positively associated (ß = 0.13; $p < 0.05$) with quitting the church. How then does this reflect on members' desire to quit or switch church? (table 13) Generally the level of quit and switching intent is low. For example, only 7% are thinking of quitting the church. Normative commitment, a sense of duty and obligation, to the church, and affective commitment to the church is negatively associated (ß = -0.32; $p < 0.01$) with quitting the church. We note the direct impacts of leadership on quitting above.

## *Learning and Formation*

Overall, the picture emerges of strong local churches, where members gain a sense of empowerment: church is personally meaningful to them; members report collectively good

levels of people putting their best effort in, and feel valued by their church, which imparts a sense of organisational based self-esteem. Churches are generally cohesive and facilitate the spiritual wellbeing of its members which contributes to their overall life satisfaction. However, those same churches can feel a lack of confidence in their own self-determination, and they identify in ways which compound the inward turn of their actions, which are directed more often towards church members than out to the local community. This picture is further compounded by the results of our study of learning and formation.

The method and aim of our Learning and Formation research was to listen to what went on in small-group adult-formation across the denominations, to describe their character, activities and concerns and to begin to draw attention to some of the educational, theological, and ecclesial issues that arise from these. Our researcher attended six small groups in the Methodist Districts of Darlington and Newcastle, and one Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Educational Partnership.

House-groups in the Methodist context find precedence in the system of classes, which have evolved to become house-groups. Methodists historically have a discipline laid upon them to learn, but the system of classes appears all but a memory in the North East. Arguably they are now little different from those of other denominations.

What then of the experience? The overwhelming evidence from our 'Learning and Formation' study, what may be better called in Methodist terms 'Discipleship' shows that the purpose and outcomes of Christian learning and formation (across the six denominations) is conceived in terms of developing personal discipleship and to enable church communities to develop deeper relationships among themselves.

For example, no evidence was found that this learning seeks to address structural ecclesial concerns such as changing patterns of ministry and the reduction in the number of clergy. Those ordinary Christians who join these learning groups also express little or no interest in those thorny issues of gender and sexuality that so exercise church leaders.

Hence in our own study the major focus of small groups responses to the outcomes of the group-work included predominantly statements to the effect of these: 'It adds to my understanding of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecost experience; ' 'One of God's wonders is changed lives; ' ' My understanding of God has changed in some ways over the years;' 'bells were ringing a light was being turned on: suddenly knew who Jesus was'.

Such work confirms the thesis initially set out by Robert Wuthnow in 1996, and recently confirmed and developed by Roger Walton[225] in regard of small church groups. Walton's work is of particular relevance as the research was carried out in the North-East of England combining qualitative and quantitative data from 56 church communities. As Walton puts it

> small groups are highly valued by participants as the means of spiritual growth but
> tend to be oriented towards the concerns and problems of members, acting primarily
> as a form of mutual support. Furthermore, the conceptualization of mature Christian

---

[225] Roger Walton, 'Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation,' Journal of Adult Theological Education, Volume 8, Number 2 / 2012.

discipleship identified by participants prioritizes personal qualities over action and thus reveals a notion of formation which is removed from encounter with the divine in the midst of the life of the world.

In particular, Walton argues that

> the cultural form on which church sponsored small groups are (often unknowingly) based is that of the self-help group, a form of small group significantly different from previous periods. In view of the increasing practice of belonging to small groups among churchgoers and the growing discourse on the relationship between small groups, discipleship and mission, it is necessary to recognize the weaknesses in the current cultural form and address these by relocating small groups with broader kingdom values and resourcing them in new ways.

Typical actives thus included formal meetings like steward's meeting; the use of formal programs such as the York courses, fellowships groups, and plenty of Bible study.

It is not that these are problematic in themselves, but that discipleship becomes markedly cut off from its practical expression in mission. This would, for example, sense of the lower scoring in the questionnaire when members were asked about the types of citizenship behaviour, in regard of actions directed outside of the community as opposed to those within.

Part of the issue may be the way small-groups are given direction. For example, when posed the question 'Who decides what to do?' in regard of learning, in four out of seven responses, the responses cited the minister, or, as one minister put it: 'I try to persuade them'.

The point then is that the link between discipleship and mission is not articulated through the programs of study in such a way as to open such groups outwards (in the same way when we encounter God in our human depths it opens us to appreciate God in all around us).

## *Case-Studies*

### Richmond Methodist Church: A Case-Study of a Local Church

Richmond Methodist Church is seeking how to embrace new expressions of worship and witness, while staying true to its Methodist identity and traditions, and to its calling to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is seeking a new meaning of its role as the 'middle ground' of Christian experience in the town, a place where diversity is valued and all are welcome.[226]

---

[226] I visited Richmond on nine occasions. I had initial meetings with Keith on 13 March and 21 May and a further meeting on 17 July. I attended the Sunday Morning Worship on 24 June, visited three nurture/Bible study groups: 'Time Out' on 27 June (a group that now no longer meets), 'Search' on 28 June and 'Onwards,' during a violent thunderstorm, on 5 July. I came to Richmond to talk with individual members of the congregation on 14 July and 12 October and had a further conversation by telephone on 19 October. Those members that I interviewed were Gillian Ash, Christine Cooper, Sheila Pedley, Bob Forbes and William and Anne Gladstone. My visits to the Bible study groups and to Sunday worship also enabled me to listen to and talk with a wider group of church members.

## A Church and its Setting

Richmond is a beautiful and historic market town, the gateway to the Yorkshire Dales and a popular tourist destination. Tourism contributes strongly to the local economy. Richmond also serves as a dormitory town, especially for people working in Teesside, and a significant concentration of population and of employment in Richmondshire is the Army's Catterick Garrison. The town is politically conservative: the large and mostly rural Richmond parliamentary constituency is currently the safest Conservative seat in the U.K. The town itself, with a population of just over 8,000 is evidently affluent, as all the church members I spoke with bore witness. There may be pockets of relative deprivation, but they are not immediately apparent, though there is a lower level of child poverty than the county average at Catterick Garrison. Property prices are relatively high. There are no large supermarkets in the town - the nearest is three miles way at Catterick Garrison, but there are also no pawnbrokers/cheque cashers and only two charity shops.

Richmond Methodist Church opened in its present building in 1939. This replaced two church buildings in the town centre, one Primitive and the other Wesleyan. The church, simple in style and well-maintained, is complemented by a fine set of meeting rooms and a large kitchen. These are used not just by the church itself but by a range of community groups. Several people remarked that the buildings and their position have helped to attract people, especially younger families who welcome the comfortable space and the very generous crèche provisions, and older people who find the site easy to access. The church is by far the largest of twenty-three churches in the North Yorkshire Dales Circuit, itself part of the Darlington District of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The North Yorkshire Dales Circuit was formed in 2010 when the Swaledale and Wensleydale Circuits united.

The current membership of Richmond Methodist Church is approximately 155. Attendance at Sunday is typically between 100 and 120, including up to 40 children. Although there is a wide age spread in the congregation, the relatively high proportion of families with young children is striking. Even so, membership is slowly declining. In particular, as older members die they are no longer being replaced.

Some members are concerned that the older and younger groups in the church are too distinct and that there is a lack of teenagers and young adults in their twenties. Nevertheless, the variety of church backgrounds and expectations of its members is a real strength of Richmond Methodist Church, notwithstanding the fact that it has also been a cause of some tensions.

While the ethos of the church is unashamedly evangelical, with a strong affirmation of personal salvation in and through Jesus Christ, Richmond Methodist Church is sometimes described by its members as occupying the theological middle ground in the town, a broad church, between Roman Catholic and Anglican parish churches on one side and two Pentecostal congregations on the other. However, Richmond Methodist Church has also proven broad enough to straddle a range of backgrounds, welcoming former members of one of the Pentecostal churches and a smaller number of mostly elderly Anglicans who find it difficult to get to the Parish Church. The number of members who are Richmond born and bred is small. Young people move away to find work and seldom return. They are replaced

by people associated with Catterick Garrison, by younger people who are attracted by the town's excellent schools, and by older people who retire to Richmond.

## A Church in Partnership

Richmond Methodist Church is an active partner in Christians Together in Richmond. Partnership involves a shared Alpha Course, Lenten activities, a Pentecost Picnic, lunchtime prayers, cards advertising Christmas and Easter services and social, quiz nights. In addition, the Methodist Church hosts and jointly runs a parent and toddler group with the Anglicans. Not all the churches in the town participate in Christians Together and there is some sadness at Richmond Methodist Church that divisions led to the change of name from 'Churches Together' to 'Christians Together'. Keith himself enjoys warm relations with other church leaders in the town.

## Ministry and Leadership

The pattern of ministry is distinctively Methodist, with pastoral care shared between the minister, pastoral visitors and the network of house groups, and with worship shared by the minister with lay and ordained colleagues in the circuit, through the preaching plan. Oversight and leadership is shared between the minister and stewards, with policy agreed by the church meeting and church council. In practice the minister may exercise considerable influence in shaping the worshipping style, formation and pastoral care within the church, but this is almost entirely dependent on the goodwill of the congregation and other worship leaders. At Richmond, where there have been strongly divergent opinions about the style of worship and the theology underpinning it, that consensus has sometimes been very difficult to achieve.

Leadership is quite dispersed, with lay preachers, accredited worship leaders and house group leaders as well as stewards, but everyone I spoke with also articulated a need for the Minister to provide clear leadership, to hold these disparate strands together. Keith himself describes himself as an 'encourager rather than a dictator,' a peace-maker, bridge-builder and pastor. This accords entirely with others' views of him. He is perceived to be 'thoughtful, caring and quiet,' sensitive and pastorally gifted. There is general sadness in the church that he has felt it necessary to look to move before his full term of five years at Richmond was complete. Some members hope that his successor might provide a more directive style of leadership to impel the different groups within the church to work together and create a new unity, but there is no guarantee that such a leadership style would prove to be the most effective way of achieving this goal.

There is an Annual Church Meeting, and a church council that normally meets every two or three months. It is supported by a finance and property committee, a church life and mission committee and a worship team.

The pattern of ordained ministry in the circuit will change when the superintendent minister retires in 2014 and will not be replaced. There will thus then be just two presbyters to service around twenty churches, assisted by lay preachers, plus a deacon doing pioneer work in the Catterick Garrison area.

A Worshipping Church

Worship matters deeply at Richmond Methodist Church. On the (excellent) church website a discussion of the significance of worship introduces the section about beliefs under the heading, 'About Us'.

Both the strength and the weakness of the church is the wealth of experience and understandings that manifest themselves in sometimes conflicting expectations about the style, if not the place, of worship in the life of the Christian community. Some younger members, including, but by no means exclusively those whose roots lie in the Pentecostal tradition, yearn for an interpretation of relatively informal, 'contemporary' worship that involves singing led by a worship band, with a style of music broadly influenced by contemporary popular culture. Some older members, for whom worship has its roots deep in Wesleyan hymnody, find it very difficult to relate to the lively loudness and passion of this kind of religious expression. They prefer order and the kind of restrained dignity in worship with which they were nurtured. Other people simply wish their worship, in whatever style that it may be, to be done with care, sensitivity, and as well as possible. And everyone would agree that it should be to the greater glory of God. The church has an excellent organist, a faithful but increasingly elderly choir, and worship band, whose members play a range of instruments.

In addition to Sunday 10.30am morning and 6.30pm evening worship, there is a Monday morning prayer meeting in church, a time of quite prayer every Wednesday evening, a monthly Healing Service and an informal praise service on the first Sunday evening of every month, 'Oxygen,' which combines contemporary popular musical styles with teaching and is led by the church's worship group and visiting speakers.

Children's worship includes 'Wacky Worship' for four to eleven-year-olds on those Sundays when the main congregation celebrates Holy Communion at 10.30am, normally monthly. The website describes it as, 'a fantastically fun and fabby way to worship God - dancing, singing, puppets, video, we've got the lot'.

An important aspect of the debate about worship is a concern about sustaining and increasing membership and what kind of worship best lends itself to attracting new members. The less happy consequence of the debate is that people vote with their feet, even to the extent, on some occasions, of walking out of services.

After much discussion, and a congregational survey, the decision of the church council on the advice of the Worship Team, has been to attempt to accommodate both strands of religious expression in the worship of Richmond Methodist Church, but to maintain opportunities for both wings to give fuller expression to their preferred style of worship, such as the monthly 'Oxygen' praise services. There was a strong feeling that this is a better, more healing alternative to separate services each Sunday morning to cater for different tastes. One member summed up the mood of the majority: 'We have to move on graciously'. The pattern will be reviewed again in February 2013.

There is regret on all sides that the intensity of discussion about worship has distracted the church from mission and outreach.

## Money Matters

Money has become a cause for concern. As the largest church in the Circuit, Richmond pays £50,000 of the total £153,000 of the Circuit Assessment, the fund which covers the cost of ministry. In a pastoral letter sent in July, Keith pointed out that weekly revenue over the previous ten weeks had fallen to £820.62, which is well short of the target of £1,000 needed to maintain payments and that a Gift Day would be held in September to try and redress the balance. A stewardship campaign will be held in the spring of 2013. However, this will focus primarily on the use of gifts and talents rather than financial giving.

## A Learning and Nurturing Church

The Methodist tradition of commitment to learning remains impressive at Richmond. There are currently six nurture groups for adults and another group for teenagers/young adults. Three of the nurture groups are traditional Bible studies and the other three all include elements of Bible study and teaching in a variety of forms and styles. They are lay-led, self-determining, and well-attended and meet either weekly, fortnightly or monthly and at various times of the day. As well as providing an opportunity for learning, each group also has a pastoral function.

There are few churches that can point to such a high degree of participation in house groups/learning groups. In the three groups I visited it was very clear that the members value their time together as a place where they could deepen relationships and speak openly and freely. The encouragement of very different groups, with no common agenda other than to provide care, friendship and an opportunity for learning to no fixed agenda, in many different styles, is testament to the character of Christian commitment at Richmond Methodist Church. By far the highest approval rates revealed by the recent survey were for 'friendship, support and care,' with 88% of respondents said that it is done well and that friendship is a major factor in binding them to the church. Other groups support this: walking, a book club, the Methodist Guild and 'Cameo,' an informal meeting for women. Social events include an annual pantomime. Over sixty people took part in the 2012 production.

There is a strong and effective system of pastoral care within the church. Pastoral visitors, coordinated by a pastoral secretary, look after groups of members and adherents

The provision for children and young people at Richmond Methodist Church is strong. In addition to the Thursday evening nurture group for teenagers, 'The Scraftons,' a parent and toddler group, a crèche, 'Wacky Worship' and four classes during Sunday worship cater for learners aged from three to sixteen. Some parents with teenage families, however, believe that Richmond Methodist Church might do more to nurture and reach out to young people and young adults and point to the far larger number of that age group attracted to The Influence Church, one of the two Pentecostal churches in the town.

## A Serving Church

The relative lack of outreach is a matter of concern to many members, some of whom feel that the debate about worship has distracted them from mission and evangelism. One

problem, however, for Richmond is that there are relatively few other, obvious, social needs in the town that it might seek to address.

There is, however, a ministry to tourists in the form of 'Dales Slides' offered weekly during the holiday season. A group of church members also lead hymn singing for the patients at the town's hospital, every Sunday morning.

The Richmond Methodist Primary School has historic links with the church. Keith, along with three church members, is a foundation governor and together with other church leaders takes part regularly in Wednesday assemblies. The school, for its part, visits the church on Education Sunday and Wesley Day, though the last Church School Report observes that the distance between the school and the church is such as to make the school's use of the church for major festivals more difficult.

## The Key Questions

Christian learning is based largely on Bible study and is a deeply impressive and integral part of the life of Richmond Methodist Church and closely integrated with the church's pastoral care of all its members. There must be few other churches of the size of Richmond Methodist in the region that can point to such a high level of participation in adult learning and formation. Members are free to choose which group to join and the groups then agree their own pattern of meeting and style and content of the meeting. In practise there is a quite wide range of expressions of theology mirroring both the 'central' position of the church in the Christian life of the town and its essential inclusiveness, but perhaps also something of the divisions that have beset its life in recent years.

Bible study as the fundamental activity of adult learning at Richmond Methodist Church certainly guides and shapes the members' understanding of the church's nature, purpose and practice. However, because groups are self-selecting, it is inevitable that the range of attitudes, theologies and life-experiences of any one group cannot reflect the diversity present in the church as a whole. The effect of this may be to reinforce somewhat divergent understandings of what God is calling the church to be.

Nonetheless, people come together to pray and study God's word. The nurture groups, in the strong tradition of Methodist classes, are an essential element in shaping a common way of holding faith, even if different members then perceive a different understanding of God's will for the Christian community. Indeed, the nurture groups are an essential element in enabling members to discern God's will for themselves and for their church. It is from the groups that, to a large extent at Richmond, different understandings of ministry and shared responsibility have emerged, or have been re-enforced. Richmond's problem is not that the adult learning and formation has failed to prepare the church for the future, but that differing visions have emerged and continue to be formed.

In terms of its ecumenical relationships, a particularly marked question for Richmond, the change of name from 'Churches Together in Richmond' to 'Christians Together' was raised as a matter of regret by some of members of Richmond Methodist Church with whom I talked, and is perhaps seen as a sign of a slight weakening of institutional links. Richmond Methodist Church's main ecumenical partners are the Anglican and Roman Catholic

churches and one of the two Pentecostal churches in the town. The other Pentecostal congregation, the Influence Church, plays no part in Christians Together. Existing ecumenical activities include a Good Friday Walk of Witness, Lent groups, a picnic at Pentecost and regular lunchtime ecumenical prayers. There has also been a joint Alpha course, on 'neutral ground,' and occasional social events, such as quizzes. Joint Christmas and Easter cards are distributed in the town. The Parent and Toddler group is a joint initiative with the Anglican Church and some Methodist families join in the Anglican 'Funky Church' for children.

The life of Richmond Methodist Church has also been shaped to some extent by the arrival of families in the church when the original Pentecostal congregation split, and perhaps to a lesser extent, by elderly Anglicans who now find it easier to get to access the Methodist Church for worship.

Indeed, one of the biggest changes reported was the division among the Pentecostals, described to me by one person as 'a scar on the Christian community. ' There has also been a slight lessening of involvement with the Roman Catholic Church perhaps, in part, as the priest there approaches retirement.

Yet the other big change, seen over the last ten to fifty years has been a slow decline as older members have died, offset by the arrival of some younger families, including some from a Pentecostal background, albeit sometimes with Methodist roots. Richmond Methodist Church, especially since its move to the present site, has been literally and ecclesially the middle ground of Christian expression in the town. In more recent years this ground, once broad and confident, has seemed less sure. The strength of the church lay and lies in its variety and diversity, but some are concerned that this is becoming less true. Links with the establishment of the town and even the Methodist Primary School seem less secure. The church, perhaps, has less influence on the life of the town, and within the church, some members feel less 'at home' than they did. Other changes simply reflect the wider social changes in Britain over the last fifty years, with greater mobility and the changing nature of Sundays. Church is no longer able to provide the social as well as religious focus that it did fifty years ago.

Arguably the welcome extended by the Methodist Church and its openness inevitably means that it is open to change as new people move in. Although the town of Richmond presents such an air of sturdy changelessness, the number of members of the Methodist Church who were born and raised in the town is surprisingly few.

There is a common feeling in the church that it is at a crossroads. Older members, who find the style of worship with amplified music loud and unsympathetic, are voting with their feet. Younger members are equally frustrating and argue that 'something has got to change' or they too will move on; and although the vast majority of members are anxious that neither of these things should come to pass, they have become tired by the atmosphere of uncertainty and sometimes of unhappiness. There is a conflict (and inherent paradox) between those who yearn for strong, or rather directive, leadership and yet wish their own preferences to prevail.

Some members fear that the tensions in the church will tear it apart, others are much more hopeful that, with God's guidance, it will find a new way of maintaining its historic role as

the 'middle ground' in Richmond, whatever that may become, welcoming all, embracing diversity with generosity, and remaining faithful to its calling to bring people to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As one member said, 'if we are able to come to an understanding, we'll grow and grow'. It will however, have to adjust to new patterns of ministry, with less input from ordained ministers. This is will present a challenge if people are less reluctant to take up traditional roles, such as that of serving as Stewards. All its members will have to be ready to talk and, even more so, to continue to listen to one another. But the will to 'make things work' seems strong.

## North Road Methodist Church, Durham: A Case-study of a Local Church

North Road Methodist Church[227] is a warm, accepting community, and is deeply committed to outreach. It is unusually open to God's call to worship and to serve in new ways. Although with falling numbers it faces an uncertain future, it does so with considerable courage and hope. North Road is the smaller of two Methodist churches in Durham city centre. It was founded after a group broke away from the Wesleyan Chapel in 1830 to join the Methodist New Connexion. It was originally named, 'Bethel Chapel' and was renamed after its union with Jubilee Primitive Methodist Chapel which once also stood in North Road. North Road is part of the Durham and Deerness Valley Circuit and of the Darlington District of the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

The Church is easy to find, at the end of what was once Durham's main shopping street, beside the bus station and a short walk from the railway station. It was built in 1853, a solid, but airy stone chapel with meeting rooms. It has been extensively renovated on at least two occasions. The most recent work was completed in September 2009. It is listed as Grade II by English Heritage. The worship space is bright, light and uncluttered, with a sensitive use of glass, modern liturgical furnishings and movable chairs. The large hall below, which is well-used by many church and community groups, now has a superb catering kitchen, equipped to conform to the latest food-hygiene regulations. There is a small private car-park. The church also owns two other properties: 27 North Road, the former manse, which is used by the Durham City Centre Youth Project and for other meetings and events, and 'The Cottage,' formerly the church caretaker's accommodation, which houses the Durham Christian Partnership's Durham Foodbank project.

---

[227] North Road is one of the two Methodist case studies, along with Richmond Methodist Church. It was undertaken in the autumn of 2012. We would like to record our gratitude to The Revd Julie Lunn and the Church Council of North Road Methodist Church who gave permission for the study to take place. Thank you all too who so graciously welcomed our researcher were willing to talk with her. It proved to be a great privilege to observe a little of the life of your church community. Our researcher visited Durham on ten occasions, with had an initial meeting with Julie on 13 July over a Mannas Lunch and then attended the Pastoral Committee on 11 September, the Worship and Family Development Group two days later, Sunday morning worship on 7 October, Craftworks on 9 October, a Messy Morning on 11 October and then Mannas again on the following day, when she was able to talk the newly-appointed Mission and Development Worker. She had a further meeting with Julie on 26 October and with a senior steward at Mannas on the same day. I then visited the stewardship coordinator and then a local preacher on 8 November and finally talked with two further parishioners on 12 November.

Although the church is close to rows of Victorian, terraced housing, it has very much the feel of a town centre church and draws its membership from many parts of the city and its surrounding villages. The surrounding streets have now become, almost exclusively student, rented accommodation. The close proximity of the bus station makes access to the church via public transport easy, though more especially on weekdays than on Sunday. The lack of a natural 'catchment,' particularly one in which young families live, is sometimes felt to be a problem for North Road, but its city centre location enables it to have other opportunities as an effective focus for mission, in which not only North Road members participate, but also members from churches surrounding Durham, together with other agencies, church and secular.

North Road itself is widely felt to be in need of a face-lift. The interim report published by Durham City Council, 'Durham City Vision,' in July 2009, lamented that it was becoming increasingly run down, with a high number of discount shops, and in the evenings had become a focus of heavy drinking and anti-social behaviour. 'It was,' the report said, 'an eyesore rather than an attractive gateway into the city'. Little has since happened to implement the recommendations of the report to address these problems, but members at North Road Methodist Church would welcome an injection of cash into the neighbourhood and believe that it could greatly enhance the potential of the church as a community resource.

The close proximity of the bus station makes access to the church via public transport relatively straightforward, though bus services are much more frequent on weekdays than on Sundays.

Membership stands at 103, a small fall from the previous year. Average attendance at Sunday morning worship is around 60. A small number of students worship at North Road, encouraged by Julie in her role as Methodist Chaplain to Durham University. Students and their families studying at the Wesley Study Centre at St. John's College have also found a home at North Road, and some have served on placement at the church. The withdrawal of connexional support for the Study Centre is regarded as a matter of some considerable regret by many members at North Road.

North Road has a special character. It prides itself on its inclusivity and acceptance, on being an 'ordinary church' in a city where others churches are perceived to take on a more particular ecclesiological or social identity and on being a place of healing. Many churches talk optimistically about being a 'family' and about the warmth of their welcome. At North Road, the welcome is real as I discovered every time I went there. At Sunday morning worship, for example, I was not only warmly greeted, but a lady sat beside me, asked if I was on my own, and if so, whether she might sit with me during the worship. It would be difficult to be anonymous at North Road.

A Church in Partnership

North Road Methodist Church is a committed member of Durham Churches Together. As a member of the Durham Christian Partnership, which operates a number of social action projects, North Road is one of the main distribution points for the Durham Foodbank. Church members also support the StreetLights, street pastor scheme. Another active ecumenical partnership is with Waddington Street United Reformed Church. This involves Lent groups

and lunches and joint worship, alternatively on each Sunday morning during August. Members of the United Reformed Church also form part of the Mannas team. North Road extends special hospitality to Durham Korean Church who use the building for worship every Sunday afternoon.

North Road's most significant other partnership is with Durham City Centre Youth Project, through its use of 'The Venue'. project is also strongly supported by the local Member of Parliament.

## A Worshipping Church

Sunday worship takes place every week at 10.30am. Evening services are shared with Elvet Methodist Church and take place at Elvet. Worship at North Road is firmly within the Methodist tradition with a particular emphasis on preaching and is supported by a very high standard of music-making. There is an able choir, a gospel choir, excellent instrumentalists and one member, a professional musician, occasionally writes material to be performed during worship. The emphasis on good preaching is one of Julie's special concerns and she seeks to reinforce her own preaching with special series of sermons, organised through the circuit plan, and sometimes designed to attract students. It is, of course, difficult to please everyone. Julie's immediate predecessor as minister, an actor/musician and highly skilled communicator, led worship in a more informal way and went out of his way to attract young families and children. In contrast, the more formal content and style of Julie's preaching is perceived by some members as 'a bit academic. ' Others clearly welcome this.

The restored chapel, with its clean, light, uncluttered feel is an impressive worship space. Contributions to worship are made by lay members, including on occasion, members of the University MethSoc, and more regularly, by students training at the Wesley Study Centre. Further variety is provided by experimental, termly, Café Church. Some of the students who attend North Road find this attractive, but some older members are les convinced. Some have expressed a lack of ease, in that context, in being invited to think about and discuss Biblical passages. Attendance for Café Church is accordingly lower than average – down to thirty worshippers.

The church is occasionally open for prayer throughout the week if other parts of the building are in use.

## Money Matters

Money is not perceived to be a significant worry at North Road. The renovation of the building was a major achievement, a challenge and an act of faith. Regular giving is supported by income from lettings (£15,000 per year from 27 North Road alone) and is healthy, even improving, but there are some worries that if the membership continues to decline and especially as older, generous members die, it will not be as easy to maintain the present level of giving.

At the moment the church is able to employ a caretaker. Stewardship is reviewed every two years. A proportion of the regular income is donated to charities chosen by the congregation. In 2012 these are St. Cuthbert's Hospice and Medical Aid for Palestine.

## A Learning and Nurturing Church

There is a regular, evening Bible study group at North Road, which is lay-led and organised. A 'Men's Breakfast' meets on the third Saturday of each month and a Women's Fellowship meets on the first Wednesday afternoon of each month. There is also a Book Group, which was 'between books' during the time of my visits to North Road. Over the last few years other, occasional groups have formed according to need, including an Eco Group and one for LGBT people.

Julie coordinates the Extending Discipleship Exploring Vocation (EDEV) programme for the District, a national Methodist initiative, which involves some members from North Road.

Other learning takes place, less formally, in and around the outreach activities undertaken by North Road, especially Mannas and Craftworks supported by a monthly Mannas Bible study.

At the moment, with no children in the congregation, there is no Sunday School/Junior Church at North Road, nor other regular groups for school-age children and young people.

Messy Mornings, every Thursday, introduced once the building renovations were complete, is an imaginatively-run, well-equipped parent and toddler group. It integrates play and activities with a simple Bible story and a snack. There are no chairs for the adults who come, forcing them to mix and talk and to interact with all the children.

Funding from the Shakespeare Temperance Trust, based in Durham, enables the church to work with local primary schools annually to present a Christmas Journey and a similar Easter event, in church, for children in Years 2 and 5. This is organised and run by the Circuit Children and Youth Development worker, with other helpers from North Road.

Oversight of nurture at North Road is the responsibility of the Worship and Family Development Group, a group open to all members of the congregation.

## A Serving Church

Service and outreach is at the heart of the life of North Road Methodist Church, manifested by the projects already mentioned. Of these, Mannas is particularly impressive. Every Friday lunchtime, meals are served to up to ninety paying customers, with a choice of menus. On all three occasions I attended the downstairs hall was packed with diners. It is mission through food. This is a considerable commitment and would not be possible unless staffing was boosted by members from other churches in the Circuit and city – true also of Craftworks and Messy Mornings. Craftworks too is immensely popular and offers, as does Mannas, an impressive locus of welcome and acceptance for many people who are need of a listening ear, love and attention.

North Road has enjoyed the services of a Mission and Development Worker for a number of years. The previous office holder was instrumental in maintaining these three outreach projects as well as carrying out a chaplaincy mission to the shops and businesses of North Road. Dr. Huiping Hu, who had begun work on a one-year contract shortly before I began my visits to North Road, is continuing this responsibility, and also is working to establish and

develop the 'North Road Fellowship' for Chinese people in the city, focused around a drop-in at the church every Thursday afternoon. An Anglican, her initial impression of North Road is that it embodies an orientation to service that is deeply impressive. Members sing carols in the local hospital on Christmas Eve before going on to Elvet Methodist Church for midnight communion.

## Questions Arising

Conversations with members at North Road quickly impress a common understanding and vision for the church, rooted not in a wistful longing for what may have once been, but in a realistic yet hopeful appreciation of the church's real strengths and weaknesses and by a faithful openness to God.

It is possible to perceived a common understanding that North Road should remain true to its role as a church in which service and outreach is a key element in its common life, and on behalf of the Circuit as a whole.

North Road is a place of compassion and care, underpinned by prayer. One could have the impression that it is genuinely a Christian community in which, as one member told me, 'Every initiative is welcomed and not seen as a threat'. The same person continued, 'People really seem to like each other and accept each other despite [sometimes holding] different opinions. We don't fight about things and we can worship together'.

There seems to be tacit understanding that the role of North Road is to maintain its role as a focus of service and outreach; and as long as it remains viable, as a vibrant worshipping, praying and learning community. One member expressed a concern that the church needs to think more strategically about its future and especially about, 'how we might attract new people in'. But there is also a potential danger that with ministerial redeployment, strategic decisions may be made without sufficient reference to the congregation of North Road.

The experience of church members is that the church is shaped to a large extent by the minister, not just by the style of worship each brings, but by their additional responsibilities. Thus, during Julie's time at North Road, there has been a new emphasis on caring for students, through her role as a University chaplain and part-time work at the Wesley Study Centre.

## Patterns of Ministry

General oversight and leadership is shared between the minister and stewards, with policy agreed by the church meeting and church council. The pattern of ministry is distinctively Methodist, with pastoral care shared between the minister and the pastoral group – a 'cascade system' derived from the old system of Methodist classes. Worship is shared by the minister with lay and ordained colleagues in the circuit, through the preaching plan.

Coordination and leadership for many of the projects sponsored by North Road, and especially Mannas, is provided by the Mission and Development Worker; though with experienced staff and the short-term appointment of the worker, the boundaries of this leadership involve, perhaps inevitably, a process in which mutual trust needs to grow.

Julie's own time is split in quite a complex pattern. She works three-quarter time for the Circuit, divided equally between her role as Minister of North Road and her role as Methodist Chaplain to the University of Durham. She works the remaining quarter of her time as a tutor at the Wesley Study Centre. The balance of her work tends to change according to competing demands at various times of the year. At least one person at North Road, while expressing genuine appreciation of Julie's ministry, was worried that she has too great a workload and is therefore, 'running here, there and everywhere'. The same person and others also went out of their way to pay tribute to the quality of her care and support. This chimes in with Julie's self-assessment of her ministry style as focusing on enabling and collaboration.

Julie comments that North Road tends to 'run itself'. In many ways it does seem like a well-oiled machine, but I suspect that this probably only because it has benefitted from high-quality, imaginative and professional leadership.

There are no evident tensions relating to changing patterns of ministry, although when Julie leaves, the move to a more integrated team ministry with Elvet and the proposed pastoral oversight of North Road by a deacon will undoubtedly bring a different 'feel' to life at North Road. The everyday implications of this are hard to predict. There are no apparent issues at North Road in relationship to leadership and gender.

## Adult Learning and Formation

Christian learning, as summarised above, takes many forms at North Road. It is contingent and varied, ranging from traditional Bible study to learning through doing at Craftworks. The one less positive note is the reluctance of some to engage with the Bible during Café Worship. However, such a feeling of a reluctance to engage with the Bible and of finding it difficult is certainly not unique to North Road, as our earlier study of a large number of groups undertaking a range of learning and formational activities in the churches of the region made very clear. The way in which adult learning is done is wholly consonant with the accepting, open, liberal theology of North Road. A church 'away day,' for example, was based around Robert Warren's Healthy Churches Handbook as a basis for discussion to plan the focus of the church's life and mission and its development.

It is clear that shared responsibility is second nature to the members of North Road. Learning and common action are almost seamlessly integrated from EDEV to the Mannas Bible Study. The people of North Road are better equipped than most to adjust to changing patterns of ministry because they have already lived through major change and coped well. Their openness and un-jaded willingness to try new things is testament to the way in which they have developed an understanding of church in which change is normal.

## A Changing Church

There have been a number of changes. The most obvious, outward one is the alteration to the buildings to enable them to be better equipped for service and beautiful for worship. And although there has long been a significant student presence in the streets near to the church, the gradual moves out of younger families unconnected with the university has changed the social setting in which North Road finds itself. Other changes have mirrored wider, changing,

social habits. As one person told me, 'In the past the church represented the focus of social life, but that's no longer the case'.

As in so many churches, the person, style and interests of the minister herself or himself has had a profound effect on the life of North Road. And one member said, 'Not all the changes have been good'. That said, the last two pastorates have had quite a significant and beneficial impact on the life of North Road, at least in the short term.

Everyone I spoke with commented that Paul Wood, Julie's immediate predecessor as minister, had a particular ability to relate to children and young people and went out of his way to construct worship that would be welcoming to young families. A former Butlin's Redcoat, he had worked professionally in musical theatre before becoming a teacher. As Minister of North Road, Paul also had pastoral charge of two other churches in the Circuit. While at North Road he became director of the Durham Musical Theatre Company. At first older members found his exuberance difficult to accept, but soon warmed to it and to him. As one person told me, 'He was very lively, but won people round, even though he was modern'. Another member told me, the church went through a period of grieving when he left in 2008. He was a difficult act to follow, and Julie's job description was very different.

As the young people who had been attracted to North Road during Paul's ministry grew up and moved away, they were not replaced. Instead, Julie brought a much closer link with university students and helped to strengthen links with the Wesley Study Centre. Her preferred style of worship places more emphasis on good preaching and she brought a gentler, collaborate leadership style.

Amongst other leaders who have had a strong impact of the life of the church in recent years, Norma Nevin, Sophia's predecessor as Mission and Development worker, worked hard to emphasise the Gospel imperative to exercise a ministry of hospitality, exercised particularly through Mannas. Sophia Huiping Hu's priorities, especially her outreach to the Chinese community, are rather different and may take North Road into new and exciting areas.

One of the problems now facing North Road, as many other churches, is that the number of people able or willing to undertake its impressive outreach work is not growing – and those that are involved are growing older. It is also proving more difficult to find people prepared to offer themselves for other roles in the church, such as serving as a steward. The number of members at North Road has fallen somewhat in recent years, especially as older members die and are have not been replaced.

The reasons for most changes are largely self-evident. The ministerial changes are a natural consequence of the Methodist way of choosing and appointing clergy – and for a fixed term of office and North Road will face another period of transition when Julie's term of office will come to an end in 2013. She will probably be followed by a deacon who will serve under the leadership of the minister at Elvet Methodist Church and who will divide time between the two churches.

There is a general feeling in the church that North Road needs to attract new members and to encourage both new and existing members to take up new roles, especially as those who maintain the various outreach projects get older.

Many members look back to the time when the church had a much greater number of children, young people and younger families, but are also realistic enough to realise that it takes very special skills to reach out to those groups. North Road is a church where people readily feel 'at home,' but as was pointed out to me, if there are no young families in a church, it takes courage for a one family with children to join. Another person commented that newcomers are attracted to a vibrant community and need to be able to imagine themselves as part of that.

There is a strong feeling that the church's open, accepting ethos should not change, and it should strongly maintain to its emphasis on outreach, and by making the most of its position and facilities, continue to be a focus for outreach in the whole Circuit and a support for some of the outlying village; churches.

If present trends continue, with fewer stipendiary leaders, some Methodist Churches in the Circuit will probably have to close. North Road, a church with the faith to take risks, may have to learn to risk still more to ensure a longer–term future.

## *Summary*

Our findings suggest an increased emphasis on the one hand, on localised forms of ministry, and on the other, an increasingly bureaucratic model of synod with the relevance of the circuit being hollowed out into wider administrative institutions. All of this leads to a sense of congregationalism which is at odds with the connexional principle. Nowhere is this more evident that in the withdrawal of connexional support for the Wesley Study Centre, and the tangible effects it is having on the life of a parish church.

In regard of local churches, they can be considered an example of what Penny Becker calls a 'family-model'.[228] Congregations tend to revolve around three core tasks: a) developing the church's sense of its own community; b) reproducing themselves through worship and or educative programs; and c) witnessing to others be it through outreach or simply by being a presence in the community – regardless of how engaged they are in that community.[229] These three categories overlap's concern is for the general pattern a congregation takes, and the how that shapes the direction given to these core tasks takes. In the case of a family-model, the community aimed at is precisely that: providing for close, family-like attachments for most members. Religious witness, according to this model, tends to be centred on being a presence in the community – their witness is simply the way a church lives its life within a given wider community.

We might briefly contrast this with what Becker calls, the 'community model,' which while incorporating elements of the family model (e.g. providing close, family-ties) differs to the extent that a greater emphasis falls on being a community of values so in terms of witness, it is marked by the desire to live its values as a witness, taking values out into the community through local enactments of mission orientation, and building towards new members and

---

[228] Penny Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Religious Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15.
[229] I have changed the initial order Becker put these in. p. 15

church growth. A community church is more likely to be a leader in the community rather than a witness to it by virtue of its presence.

The problem then arises because the mission strategy of the church as a whole does not quite match up to the kinds of local churches we find where the high levels of trust, and subjective inwardness mitigate against the very style of church Methodist strategy is pushing towards. The picture is compounded by modes of formation that are oriented towards the concerns and problems of members, acting primarily as a form of mutual support rather than mission faced. In other words, the link between discipleship and mission is not articulated through the programs of study in such a way as to open such groups outwards. Does the District need to refocus its mission on a representative demographic or reassess the place of formation locally?

The congregational outlook also finds itself at odds with the ecclesial structure of Methodism and it brings into question the identity of the circuit, which is already challenged by their increasing consolidation. Can oversight work adequately given the larger areas now covered? Arguably, this drive is nationally underpinned through documents such as 'Discipleship for Mission' which presuppose an increasingly congregational outlook, manifest in terms of Fresh Ways or Venture Fx. It explicitly brings the connexion into question primarily a descriptor of structures, processes and systems in favour of a commitment to connexionalism which is primarily a spiritual commitment. Hence the question may be less how to mend the existing system, as re-invent it?

However, because fresh expressions are ecumenical in nature, the very pockets of vitality in mission/discipleship are the very practices which undermine existing ecclesiological identity in the Methodist church. For example, if the future of the churches mission is in reaching the un-churched through fresh expressions, then those successful ventures are likely to replicate precisely the ecumenical church. Ecumenism is a kind of pharmakon, a simultaneous poison and cure for Methodist ecclesiology. This anxiety was expressed by Richmond, when members expressed discomfort regarding the change of name from 'Churches Together in Richmond' to 'Christians Together:' a sign of weakening institutional links. Do fresh expressions sit well within the traditional circuit structure, or where media is a strong element of the venture, do such ventures require their own virtual circuit?

The Conference working-party 'Larger than Circuit?' is currently exploring the possibility of amalgamating Districts. This being the case, how will the Local Church, Circuit and District continue to relate? Will this widen the gap between District and Local church? If there is sense that Synod is less deliberative, it can only become less so in the light of these coming developments. Or it will force a new strategic emphasis on the Circuit?

In terms of leadership, the Methodist Diaconal Order had received as of 2008 more applications for diaconal appointments than the number of deacons available. Most of those requests related to appointments in which 'innovative outreach and mission were primary elements'.[230] Whilst this highlights the creative impetus within Methodism to rethink its

---

[230] The Stationing Committee Report, conference 2008

identity and mission, this also brings into question the role of the Presbyter. In short it narrows the role of the presbyter in such a way as risk a rent between the orders.

Overall it might be argued that creative thinking is required around the place of the Circuit, and its Ministers, its administrative function, and the degree to which it can foster social mission. Arguably, the consolidation of Circuits and suggestions of wider regional Districts means that the emphasis between the three traditional layers, (Local Church, Circuit and District) needs to be transposed: Class, Local Church and Circuit). The suggestion here is that Circuits will play an increased rather than decreased role.

Arguably, the Circuit, as a connexional relation and not merely a structure, is one of the gifts of Methodism for many other churches and denominations to receive whilst navigating their own processes of rationalisation. Yet the changing nature of church life within Methodism also invites it reconsider its place and role. The question then is 'What can the Methodists learn from other denominations in this regard?'

# The Anglican Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle

*Marcus Pound, Geoff Moore, Helen Savage and Jeff Astley (learning and formation), Tom Redman (Leadership and Ministry)*

## Phase I: Mapping the Tradition

### *Ecclesiology*

Whilst Anglicans stress their continuity with the early Catholic and apostolic creeds, Anglican ecclesiology is the site where Anglicans articulate their difference. The Anglican Communion is not a global church in the sense that it has no central governing authority or unified canon law. Rather it is a family of churches that are self-governing. The primates of the respective churches that constitute the Communion (chief Archbishops, Presiding Bishops, Chief Pastors of the various Provinces) have no authority as a 'body' and their own national churches determine how their ministry is carried out in their own context. The Archbishop of Canterbury is akin to their spiritual leader. He is primus inter pares, first among equals of the others. The only formal exercise of primatial power that the Archbishop of Canterbury has is precisely as convener of the Lambeth Conference. He is devoid of juridical power, occupying a position more akin to a presidency. He has the power to convene the consultative instruments of the communion (he calls the once-a-decade Lambeth Conference, chairs the meeting of Primates, and is President of the Anglican Consultative Council). Hence, no single Anglican church can claim to be the definitive expression of Anglicanism.

At the same time it remains united, both through the instruments of communion as well as a common tradition expressed liturgically, spiritually, and theologically, which draws upon scripture, tradition, reason, and, more recently, experience as traditional Anglican sources (in case of first two) and resources (in case of latter two) for theological discernment.[231]

The defining statements of the Church of England are the thirty-nine articles, set out in relation/reaction to the Roman Catholic Church. The Articles were established in 1563, and finalised and made a legal requirement in 1571 (e.g. holding civil office) and propagated through the *Book of Common Prayer* – although they are not normative in all Anglican churches and interpretation varies. Drawing upon the statements, rendering the theology into institutional structures, is canon law, the law by which the *clergy* and, to some extent, the *laity* are governed. Canon law is approved by Parliament and the constituent parts of canon law are referred to as canons. Her Majesty the Queen remains as the Supreme Governor of the Church.

### *Governance*

---

[231] http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/index.cfm (last accessed 25/102010)

## Regional: Committees and Structure

The Church of England is often described as being 'episcopally led and synodically governed', a phrase which exhibits some tension. Arguably the phrase could occlude the role that bishops play as part of the synod; i.e. their leadership is in and to the whole synodical body'[232] and thereby implying that the Church of England is governed by synods. Moreover, as Colin Podmore points out, synods are parliaments (legislative and deliberative assemblies); they are not governments and at the diocesan level, bishops not only lead but also govern.

The diocese remains governmentally and canonically significant because: "The diocese is not an aggregation of parishes; rather, it is (in the technical sense) a 'local church', of which the diocesan bishop is the 'principal minister.'[233] It is not primarily a unit of administration but a portion of the people of God gathered around the diocesan see and its bishop." Hence the Church of England is an episcopal not a congregational church.

The diocesan bishop is 'the chief pastor of all that are within his diocese' including laity as well as clergy. Their principle responsibility is for apostolic teaching and doctrinal orthodoxy. They also have responsibility for worship. They are ministers of unity, charged 'to set forward and maintain quietness, love and peace among all men' and 'to promote peace and reconciliation in the Church and in the world and… [to] strive for the visible unity of Christ's Church'[234] Hence dioceses are governed by their bishops, although, as indicated, they do not exercise absolute power: they are subject to the ecclesiastical laws and in particular the Canons of the Church of England.

Synodical Governance reached the church in 1969.[235] Bishops are required to govern their dioceses synodically: 'It shall be the duty of the bishop to consult with the diocesan synod on matters of general concern and importance to the diocese', and at least two meetings of the synod must be held each year.[236] However, formally speaking, "the diocesan synod is primarily *advisory* and *consultative*, though it has a quasi-legislative power to 'make provision' and the power to approve or disapprove the diocesan budget."[237] Included in the Synodical Measures of 1969 is the need for a 'bishop's council and standing committee of the diocesan synod' with power to discharge the synod's advisory and consultative functions on its behalf.[238]

The *Bishop's Council* co-ordinates the life and work of the diocese in support of the mission of the church and in accordance with the priorities set by the bishop and the diocesan synod. The council develop policies and programmes and co-ordinates the wider work of boards,

---

[232] Colin Podmore , The Governance of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion GS Misc 910
[233] GS MISC 984 GENERAL SYNOD §1
[234] Canon C 18.1; *Common Worship: Ordination Services* (London, 2007), p. 62.
[235] Synodical Government Measure 1969
[236] Synodical Government Measure 1969, s. 4 (3); Church Representation Rules, rule 34 (1)(c).
[237] Colin Podmore , The Governance of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion GS Misc 910 §2.7
[238] Synodical Government Measure 1969, s. 4(4); Church Representation Rules, rule 34(1)(k).

councils and committees. It is the standing committee of the diocesan synod and the strategic heart of the diocese.[239]

There are also a number of boards or standing committees with specific responsibilities, in particular the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) and the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) upon which particular executive functions are conferred by statute. The DBF is an incorporated, charitable body which is the diocese's financial executive and the employer of its staff. Its directors are in the position of trustees, responsible for the proper management of its assets.[240] Laypeople alongside clergy play an important role in diocesan governance in this regard.

Durham and Newcastle run a number of further committees and task groups particular to their diocese, and attending to areas variously such mission and pastoral ministry, church buildings and their use, communications (Durham), clergy retirement, liturgy and a readers' council (Durham). Newcastle Diocese has historically a reduced number of standing committees in contrast to Durham although employs a greater number of task groups.

## Intermediate: Committees and Structure

The deaneries, each with its area dean, form the intermediate layer between diocese and parishes. Each deanery has a deanery synod, the functions of which are relative to the priories of the diocesan synod, albeit at deanery level. Deanery synods consist of a house of clergy and a house of laity to include all clergy beneficed or licensed to any parish in the deanery and in which all parishes have representatives.[241]

Given that diocese often have strong historic identities and remain governmentally, and canonically significant, and that in the life of church members, what matters is their local place of worship, the parish, it is little wonder deaneries remain problematic. Deaneries operate according to the synodical Government Measure 1969, which decrees the Deanery as empowered and required,

> To bring together the views of the parishes of the Deanery on common problems and discuss and formulate policies on those problems, to foster a sense of community and interdependence among those parishes, and generally to promote in the Deanery the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

The 1969 measures created a place for deanery synods in the synodical structure. Section 5(3) sets out the functions of a deanery synod, of which the first is "to consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision for such matters in relation to their deanery, and to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest". Hence their function is essentially deliberative.

---

[239] *Growing the Kingdom. Diocesan Structures for Mission and Ministry, Autumn 2006*, Durham Diocese, p. 2.
[240] The Governance of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion GS Misc 910 §2.8
[241] *Church Representation Rules, 2006*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), pp. 26-31.

The 1969 Measure further states that it is open to a diocesan synod to delegate to deanery synods "functions in relation to parishes in their deaneries". This has principally included the determination of the 'parish share'.[242] Yet the significance of the synod also lies in both its formative, and electoral role: lay membership of deanery synods became the electorate for choosing people to serve on the House of Laity of the General Synod.

In an attempt to enable greater involvement and confidence in the electoral system, as well as offer greater representation to the parishes, a recommendation was forward by the Bridge Commission for their abolition and alternate electoral paths. However, this recommendation was rejected. By way of a follow-up, a review document was produced in 2001 about deaneries more generally (*Good Practice in Deaneries* (GS Misc 639) which set out some basic working principles, and offered examples of good practice.

The challenge for any diocese in regard of deaneries is how best to facilitate and support he deaneries better with the decision been taken at diocesan level. Significant in this regard are the steps taken by both Durham and Newcastle toward the development thereof. Durham has introduced "Deanery Development Plans" (DDPs) to cover ministry, mission, finance and buildings. DDPs develop the strategic role of Deaneries, which were already involved in deployment planning, and since 2007 have had the responsibility of allocating the deanery total of parish share amongst their parishes.

In Newcastle 'A Framework for Deanery Development' has been agreed, a *Guide for Deaneries* issued, a task group of facilitators for deaneries development has been formed. Each deanery should now have a deanery development group.[243]

## Congregational: Committees and Structure

Parochial church councils (PCCs) are the local form of church government, sharing responsibility with the incumbent and churchwarden, including building, finance, worship and mission. All parishes have elected laypersons on the deanery synod.

Durham Diocesan Board of Finance is the custodian trustee in relation to PCC property, but has no control over PCCs, which are independent charities[244] (though apparently not separately registered). The key responsibilities include cooperating with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical; the consideration and discussion of matters concerning the church of England or any other matters of religious or public interest, but not the declaration of the doctrine of the church on any question. The PCC of each parish has powers, duties and liabilities with respect to: the financial affairs of the church including the collection and administration of all moneys raised for church purposes and the keeping of accounts in relation to such affairs and moneys; the care maintenance preservation and insurance of the fabric of the church and the power to acquire (whether by way of gift or otherwise) any property, real or personal – for any ecclesiastical purpose affecting the parish or any part thereof; for any purpose in

---

[242] Synodical Government Measure 1969, Section 5(4).
[243] See http://www.newcastle.anglican.org/people-and-places/developing-deaneries.aspx
[244] *Durham DBF Report and Financial Statements, 2007*, p. 4.

connection with schemes (hereinafter called 'educational schemes') for providing facilities for the spiritual moral and physical training of persons residing in or near the parish.

## Organisational Strategy (Durham)

Under Bishop Tom Wright, it was possible to identify four core strands which constituted the Diocese organisational strategy, in other words, this is not based on a written-down strategy but implicit in the views expressed during our initial round of interviews:

1) The reduction in full-time stipendiary posts. This is the clearest part of the strategy, with target numbers given to 2016.
2) The development of the deaneries through the implementation of "Deanery Development Plans" (DDPs), which will cover ministry, mission, finance and buildings. DDPs develop the strategic role of deaneries, which were already involved in deployment planning, and since 2007 have had the responsibility of allocating the deanery total of parish share amongst their parishes;
3) A restructuring of the diocesan 'centre' (officers, administrative staff and councils rather than the formal governance arrangements outlined above) to be more directly supportive of the deaneries and hence the parishes;
4) The encouragement of formal ministries other than full-time stipendiary clergy. Thus the diocese has seen an increase in numbers of part-time stipendiary clergy, non-stipendiary clergy, ordained local ministers, deacons, readers (although with a recent decline in admissions) and authorised pastoral assistants (APAs). The reduction in the cultural barriers to women's ministry has also been supportive in this growth in alternatives to full-time stipendiary clergy as the key resource for the local church;
5) The associated promotion of 'shared ministry' at the local church level. Shared ministry development teams sit alongside PCCs, focus on purpose and strategy (rather than on the governance function that PCCs largely serve), and draw together ordained and lay participation in ministry and mission. This initiative also reinforces the spiritual role of the laity, which is recognised explicitly in reader and APA ministries but is becoming more widespread.


Arguably this emerging organisational strategy is largely based around the preservation, in some form or other, of the existing parish structure. Nonetheless, as the diocesan secretary put it: "The strategy, frankly, is to get down the number of stipendiary clergy ... that's the bit that's clearest." What we're actually here to do as a diocese is less clear – we don't say anywhere "The Diocese of Durham exists so that ...".

With the induction of Bishop Justin Welby, the strategy was shifted with the short term objective to achieve parish share payment of over 99%; the medium term objective to increase revenue for the purposes of recruiting and retaining more people in front line ministry; the long term objective should be to achieve sustainability independent of such bodies as the church commissioners. This would be achieved by recalibrating the parish share system, with the parish share now being set by deaneries with parishes; for 2013 it is proposed that through deaneries parish share is set by what is offered. And because parishes, through deaneries, will have agreed their share, it will be clearly stated that, in the absence of

justifying emergency full payment will be expected. Past arrears will be forgotten, but future ones will form part of what is seen as a moral debt to the diocese.[245] Writing in 2012, Bishop Welby pointed out that Parish share collection of around 85%, with over 40% of parishes not paying in full. Strong finances are not built quickly. They are a sign of spiritual health, and improve when numbers grow.

Bishop Paul Butler has continued these dual emphasis. The current business plan (2016-2020) address the question 'what next?' 'Mission happens locally and all of us have a role in making it happen. Your parish has been asked to play a full part in developing a renewed Deanery Plan and you are encouraged to prayerfully engage with this. Your parish is also being asked to think and pray about your parish share pledge and discuss it with your Deanery finance representative.'[246] These are encouraged alongside working with wider church partnerships and with other churches and groups locally and globally, developing disciples, leaders, engaging young adults, and building varied expressions of congregations, community engagement, and prayer.

## Organisational Strategy (Newcastle)

Prior to 2010, the Diocese of Newcastle summarised its strategic priorities in six themes: priority development areas (for parishes to develop mission action plans – see further below under parishes); developing deaneries (see further below under deaneries); task groups (see above under committee structure); financial planning; working with partners; and developing and sharing ministry.[247] The last of these includes support for the development of the regional training partnership, development of provision of education for discipleship, support for the development of intermediate ministerial education for curates, a leadership programme including expansion to lay leadership development, and the fostering of vocations to accredited ministry. It also encourages the development of local ministry groups, which also provide the context for ordained local ministry.

More recently Newcastle Diocesan Synod has been developing priorities that respond the national Programme of Renewal & Reform, set out by the Archbishop and presented to the General Synod of the Church (2015). It identified three goals: growing the church, contributing to the common good, and re-imagining ministry, which it has addressed through 6 tasks groups.[248]

### *Leadership and Ministry*

The Anglican Communion maintains the historic threefold ordained ministry: bishops, priests, and deacons, in conformity with the practice of the early church. Anglicans also

---

[245] Memo to Bishop's Council and Board of Finance, April, 2012.
[246] Diocesan Business Plan 2016-2020. http://newsroom.durhamdiocese.net/plan-on-a-page-launched/ (last accessed 30.5.16)
[247] *The Diocesan Programme to 2010*, undated, Newcastle Diocese.
[248] *Reform and Renewal Programme in the Church of England: A message from the Strategic Development Group*. Leaflet. Diocese of Newcastle, 2016. http://www.newcastle.anglican.org/userfiles/file/Diocesan%20Office/20150430%20SDG%20Booklet%20FINAL.pdf (Last accessed 30.5.2016)

encourage representative ministers such as readers. Ordination is sequential and incremental; one is always ordained a deacon first, followed by a presbyter next. According to the canons of the Church of England (C1, 2), a person ordained can never lose the character of that order. The distinctive nature of each is carried over into the other. Anglicans strongly affirm the ministry of lay people on the basis of the royal priesthood of the baptism of all believers; although the latter is not understood in the democratic manner it is accorded in Baptist or Pentecostal denominations. Lay involvement varies across the Communion. Bishops maintain oversight of all accredited ministry, lay and ordained. Only priests may reside over the Eucharist, although Deacons and readers may assist.

## Ordained ministry

Ordained ministry covers a variety of posts within the Durham Diocese and the Newcastle Diocese:

**The Anglican Diocese of Durham:** operates traditional models of ordination (residential training at national colleges) ordained local ministry (OLM), ministers in secular employment (MSE), permanent non-stipendiary ministers (PNSM) and ordained pioneer ministry (OPM), although in practice people are sponsored as candidates for priesthood and are defined by whether they are stipendiary or not, and their position of responsibility; i.e. incumbency. The council for ministry reported in 2007 that increasingly, incumbency was not necessarily the normative.

**The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle:** Newcastle also operates traditional models of ordination, but classifies what Durham would call MSE and PNSM, simply as non-stipendiary ministry (NSM). In its programme of *Reform and Renewal*, it is addressing proposals for the most effective use of resources for ministerial education, Selection and training to be reimagined and reshaped, including: more collaborative leadership style, younger and more diverse ministers and the rapid development of lay ministries.

## Ordained Local Ministry

Until the 1950s ordained ministry was only open to those with university degrees.[249] This was coupled with the assumption that ministry was a professional choice: one trained in a college, to then took up a full-time paid post, starting a curacy in a parish for 5-7 years, with the aspiration to become in sole charge of a parish. During the 80s and 90s innovative training schemes were developed across the county, to reflect the growing concern of the previous decades that ministry was closed to the working classes, and failed to reflect the more itinerant preaching styles described in the New Testament. In the North East this was voiced in terms of an argument against a dependency culture. Old style ministry was authoritarian and monarchical, which both disempowered the laity, making them dependent upon the minister, and disempowered the minister by making him in turn dependent upon the diocese. In response, the drive was towards locally ordained ministers, part-time, stipendiary or non-stipendiary, facilitating different parts of ministry as whole; both in ways which reflected the

---

[249] M. Torry and J. Heskins, (Eds.), *Ordained Local Ministry*: *A new Shape for Ministry in the Church of England*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006), p. ix.

culture of the laity, bridging the gap in effect, and in partnership with other parishes: shared ministry. Moreover, these ministers would be trained locally, not simply for the practical concerns (to accommodate their prior job/children commitments) but so that the training would of itself reflect something about the area and its culture. In turn, it was hoped that their active involvement in the community would facilitate a more active laity. Ordained local ministry has been undertaken by both dioceses, even if the terminology differs.

## Shared Local Ministry

As distinct from ordained local ministry, shared local ministry (sometimes referred to more simply as local ministry) does not refer to a category of ordained ministry, but rather a movement which seeks to transform the very way ministry is operative. Like ordained local ministry, its concern is to break with the culture of priestly dependency in favour of capitalising of the variety of spiritual gifts operative within the laity; in other words it seeks to see ministry as a gift of the laity which does not necessarily lead to the establishment of an ordained local minister, although that may be one outcome amongst others. Its aim then, in short, is to promote a widespread sharing of responsibility for ministry by sharing that responsibility across the laity. The process begins with the establishment by the PCC, in consultation with parish, of what Durham Diocese calls a 'Shared Ministry Team', and Newcastle Diocese a 'Local Ministry Group' [Newcastle]. The team is made up of clergy and representatives of the congregation(s), although the PCC maintain executive power. In 2006, a review of the process was undertaken in Durham (by which point some 22% of parishes had adopted it). The report[250] highlighted how SLM was often at the heart of church renewal but difficult to roll out to the majority of parishes, lacking in long-term support, a slow process, and given a weight at the expense of cultivating other models of ministry. The panel recommended, amongst others, the appointment of a policy champion, more empirical research into the process, and a revised system of support. Since then a *Shared Minister Development officer* has recently been appointed to cover both diocese. Her task is to 'understand how shared ministry has been developed', reviewing existing work, renewing teams, exploring failures, training, establishing new teams, and developing liturgy for shared ministry parishes. An initial report in 2007 suggested that Durham operates with about 20 schemes apiece.

**The Anglican Diocese of Durham.** In Durham the process is more prescribed (hence Durham was the first to recommend a policy champion). However, while the PPC works as a consultative body, (like Newcastle), the incumbent maintains executive power (unlike Newcastle).

**The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle:** Like Durham, Newcastle operates with about 20 schemes. However, the process is more democratic: the PCC retain executive power. Moreover, each team is awarded a mentor.

## Anglican Authorised Lay Ministry

---

[250] *Council for Ministry,* Annual Report, 2007

Both dioceses operate forms of authorised lay ministry. The Anglican Diocese of Durham operates both readers and authorised pastoral assistants. Readers combine lay ministry with a vocation to preach, teach, intercede; distribute Holy Communion; lead non-eucharistic worship and parts of Holy Communion service and officiate at funerals. In 2007 there were 20 readers in training, and three licensed that year. Authorised pastoral assistants In 2007 there were 28 APAs in training, and 16 licensed Newcastle operates the former only.

## *Learning and Formation.*

### Theological Education and Initial Ministerial Training

Under the umbrella of the Durham Diocesan Council for Ministry and Newcastle Diocese's Theological Education and Initial Ministerial Training Task Group, a 'Developing Discipleship Officer' (DDO) was appointed to cover both Anglican dioceses. The DDO was charged with building on various local discipleship courses for lay adults, one-off study days, etc., that have taken place over many years in the two dioceses, and especially the current *Bishop's Faith and Life* and *Living Theology Today* courses in Durham Diocese, and the earlier experience of two diocese-wide courses, *Exploration in Faith* (see Wilcox and Astley, 1990) and *Living Faith*, in Newcastle Diocese.

Although the DDO work was intended to be developed ecumenically, most of these courses currently mainly attract members of the Church of England. Helen Savage reported on the adult education experiences of a sample of over twenty Newcastle parishes in her report, *Education for Discipleship in the Diocese of Newcastle: A Study* (2007). This study involved conversations ('appreciative inquiries') with 92 people (mainly adult learners, including churchwardens and clergy) in 26 representative parishes across the diocese. It sought answers to the following questions such what education for discipleship was taking place in the parishes, he articulated the need for it, how had it changes, along with what worked well, and what didn't.

The study found that 'there is both an impressive variety and depth of learning in the diocese', with many different sorts of group – some of them ecumenical – engaged in adult Christian learning both in formal and in less formal ways. There is also evidence that EFD 'is done quietly, often without any great song and dance, but with considerable commitment, imagination and sensitivity – and those involved deserve to be respected, affirmed and listened to' (p. 4). Helen Savage discerned ten main insights from the study[251] and concluded:

> However worthy 'Education for Discipleship' may sound to some, this study
> has shown that it is a most unhelpful description of both the process and

---

[251] 1) adults recognise their own learning needs; 2) learning that meets real needs is effective and ensures higher commitment; 3) bible study is best when it addresses real, recognised needs; 4) effective learning takes place in an atmosphere of trust and respect; 5) theology born out of faithful living, and tested by it, must be affirmed; 6) clergy who are genuinely prepared to be learners alongside lay people gain more respect and everyone's learning is more effective; 7) when groups meet, learning is not the only fruit; 8) groups are not the only place where people learn; 9) the value of internet resources; 10) the diocese has a rich resource of both adult learners and those who facilitate that learning. (pp. 5-8)

content of adult Christian learning in the diocese. 'Learning' is clearly a more acceptable term than 'education' (p. 12).

*Living Theology Today* is 'an introductory course in theological study' that has run in the Diocese of Durham for four years, attracting around 30 students a year. Pitched at HE level 0 this (non-validated) course comprises 22 two-hour weekly sessions, two study days (one on study skills and the other on discerning a personal vision for themselves), and a residential weekend on Christology. Jim Francis devised and helps to deliver the course, with a range of different tutors providing much of the input; there is also a course chaplain (Mary Barr). The course outcomes are envisaged as including both adult Christian learning and vocational discernment.

The *Faith and Life* course is now available in both dioceses. It is currently a 30 (two hour) session course based on group meetings convened locally in deaneries, together with two occasions 'led by the Bishop' and two Saturday study days that bring together all the groups. It is aimed at people who wish to know more about their faith or 'the parts of the Bible that are often used in church', are ready 'to grow spiritually', want to get to know more Christian people, and/or feel ill-equipped for getting more involved in their churches.

To meet the criticism that it is difficult for a number of people to travel to these sessions, and to allow for a wider variety of subjects and approaches, a number of 6 session (1.5 to 2 hour) short *Developing Discipleship* courses run in both dioceses. Some market research has been done on the sort of courses that people want, and this placed prayer and spirituality, 'Understanding the Bible in a world of many voices' and 'The uniqueness of Christ in world religions' as the three 'most popular' chosen from a range of options. Courses are co-led by two people wherever possible.

The DDO commended a number of local initiatives as well-prepared and successful, including education for discipleship programmes at Holy Trinity, Washington. Current courses available include: 'Lord teach us to pray.'

## *The 'Lindisfarne' Regional Training Partnership*

Background

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England established a working party on the structure and funding of ordination training. Their report, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* (the 'Hind Report', Archbishops' Council, 2003), proposed the creation of a number of new 'regional theological training partnerships'. Drawing on existing diocesan training establishments, theological colleges and courses, these 'RTPs' were intended, 'in collaboration both with other churches and with UK higher education', to meet a range of objectives:

> i) to provide initial ministerial education for the clergy from entry into training to the end of the first training post;

ii) to develop expertise in particular areas of mission and ministry [so as] to enhance training for ordination and other ministries and types of service;

iii) to contribute to the initial training of Readers and other lay ministers and to continuing ministerial education for all ministries;

iv) to contribute to the formal theological education of the laity through the provision of programmes of Education for Discipleship;

v) to provide capacity to do research for the benefit of the Church. (pp. 133–4)

It was argued in the Report that the foundations of the theological expertise of the clergy 'lie in the common faith of the people of God and should be developed as part of the Church's commitment to learning and being equipped for service' (p. 27). The phrase 'Education for Discipleship' was used in the report as a general title to denote opportunities for learning 'offered on a Church-wide basis for a range of students, which might include lay people seeking to deepen their Christian discipleship, trainee readers and other lay ministers and potential candidates for ordination' (p. 133; cf. pp. 49–50). In particular, the Report seems to encourage under this heading accredited 'formal theological education of the laity' that would *both* 'be of interest to lay people who wish to serve God in their ordinary lives', *and* 'at the same time . . . contribute to the initial training of lay ministers and prospective ordinands'. It envisages that – although tailored to the learners' needs – much of this would be at HE level l for the academically-able; nevertheless, the learning should not be 'confined to one type of theological or ministerial learning' and 'should be of real, continuing value, even if the learner does not proceed to any form of accredited ministry'. A key factor, however, is that the resources the Church has in institutions of ministerial education should now be employed in this way 'for the benefit of the Church as a whole' (pp. 61–2).

Arising within this 'Hind' process, *Shaping the Future* (Archbishop's Council, 2006) was published. This contains a report of 'the implementation task group' that uses the term *discipleship* 'to describe the whole life-response of Christians to Jesus Christ', with its primary focus as 'the service of God and his mission to the world'. 'One primary goal is that disciples should be more Christ-like human beings', and therefore more effective signs of the Kingdom (pp. 4–5). The report understands Education for Discipleship as a task 'undertaken to help people to be better disciples – not just better potential ministers' (i.e. it is not an access level on the pathway to authorized ministry); it also rejects the connotation that EFD is about a 'discipline' form of learning; i.e. the authoritarian conforming of beliefs and behaviour 'on the basis of authority'. Rather, 'we want to ensure that learning connects with life experience and ministry and mission on the ground' (p. 5).

Despite the wide-ranging implication, the Report suffers a certain narrowing of focus in terms of measurable learning outcomes, 'a high level of intentionality for those who participate', the structuring of courses and accreditation:

> While it would be unhelpful for regional partnerships to insist that
> programmes of EFD are only open to students registered as candidates for an

award, we propose that all the discipleship education of a regional partnership should, at least in principle, be susceptible of accreditation at HE level 1 or above.(p. 9)

The Report returns to this principle elsewhere, insisting that working for an academic qualification should be 'an option', rather than 'a necessary requirement', for students on EFD courses. (p. 11) While the official national documentation thus encourages the Church to develop Education for Discipleship as an activity that falls under the heading of accredited (and therefore largely formal) learning, many still prefer to see the term 'Education for Discipleship' construed much more widely, with non-accredited courses as the norm. The *Lindisfarne* proposals acknowledge this.

## Lindisfarne

The Regional Training Partnership for the North East of England is being developed under the title of 'Lindisfarne: A Partnership for Adult Christian Learning'. In its 2008 *Business Plan* its aims are specified as: 'to promote and deliver Education for Discipleship, Initial Ministerial Education [IME] and Continuing Ministerial Development [CMD] within and for the churches who participate in its foundation and funding'.[252] But the document later makes this explicit claim:

> At the moment there is far more effort and resource given to the preparation of individuals for authorised or ordained ministry than to 'Education for Discipleship' or 'Continuing Ministerial Development'. Lindisfarne will redress this imbalance. (p. 4)

Interestingly, Lindisfarne's strap-line mission statement is expressed very broadly: 'to grow the Church by encouraging and enabling Christian adults to learn' (p. 2). The document helpfully explores further the language of Education for Discipleship in terms of the 'ongoing education of Christian adults' in their intentional, post-baptismal, journey of faith. This is understood as equivalent in meaning to the 'enriching discipleship' language used earlier in the Diocese of Durham, as well as the Methodist Church's phrase, 'Extending Discipleship and Exploring Vocation' (EDEV, see below). The intention is to suggest that:

> participation in what Lindisfarne offers will add value, quality, depth and richness to Christian people who are on a pilgrimage of faith through life. Lindisfarne will offer people events, courses and other opportunities that will help them to grow in faith. While some provision will involve courses and books, there will be no premium on book-learning. . . . Rather the priorities for provision are expressed in terms of Lindisfarne's three 'R's: *Relevant, Realistic and Respectful*.

---

[252] As of ……….…. (date) these churches are the Anglican Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.  However, both of these other churches have national and regional commitments to major programmes of adult Christian education that either do not easily map on to the geography of the RTP, or cannot be modified without damaging their own church's work in other regions.

The implication of this is that 'not all Lindisfarne courses will be validated. Indeed not everything that Lindisfarne offers will be "a course"' (p. 6). The *Business Plan* articulates five 'guiding practical principles' (p. 7):

1. That practical theology grows best within the crucible of the lived experience of the local church in challenging environments, and while withdrawal for reflection, conversation and development is part of a theologically formative process, especially of transition to a new ministry, the reality of the church in the world is itself both educative and a window into the glory of God.

2. That Lindisfarne should facilitate an ongoing and mutually enriching conversation between the context of the North East and the academy.

3. That there are unique opportunities in the C21 both to appreciate the value of face-to-face communication and collegiality and to benefit from the advantages of e-technology and communications.

4. That the educational priorities for Lindisfarne should be to form 'reflective practitioners' and to enable participants to develop theologically in the interrogative mode whether as disciples or ministers. All participants in programmes should be helped to discover an imaginative, grounded and dynamic way of doing theology (one might almost say of 'being theological') which is habitual and intentional, implicit and conscious.

5. That as it evolves, Lindisfarne should be responsive not only to individual learning needs but also to the needs of the whole church as it adapts, changes and grows.

## Youth Work

Nick Rowark wants churches to think in terms of youth *ministry*, rather than to aim to be providers of youth activities. This involves some theological reflection on the part of congregations, which includes much heart-searching on the nature of church and of what the Christian gospel can offer *everyone*, whatever age they are. He encourages 'enveloping what you do with the young people within the [whole] ministry of the church'. (This is a matter of true *inclusion*, rather than the 'integration' of something alien.) Youth workers (and other Christian educators?) tend to feel undervalued 'second-class citizens' in the eyes of the Church.

'Relational evangelism' comes from a relationship of mutual respect with young people: a form of implicit Christian communication. But Nick Rowark also advocates some explicit 'spirituality slot' during meetings (the young people sign up to this) when a 'chill out' period may be used, for example, for reflecting on their own and others' needs, with church members committing themselves to pray about them.

The current 'Bishop's Certificate in Youth Work' includes an exercise in arranging 12 cards to express the priorities of each member's Christian journey. Students are in this way encouraged to recognize that young people are not satisfied with leaders answering the question, 'What do you believe?' without also answering the question, 'Why?'

## Newcastle Cathedral

In 2004–5 *Newcastle Cathedral* reflected on the work of the Cathedral as a place of learning. Building on its work with schools and colleges and the wider ministry of the chapter, it sought to offer 'further opportunities for theological reflection and life-long learning' (*Cathedral Development Strategy Group: A Vision Statement*, 2004). A working party reported in January 2005, identifying five distinct areas of educational work which the Cathedral was currently undertaking, including:

- providing a place for Christian education – including Lent/Advent groups, 'occasional lectures, Bishop's study mornings and short courses';
- community education through seminars, study tours and exhibitions;
- informal education, with the 40,000 or so visitors the Cathedral welcomed each year.

The Report noted a range of ideas presented at an evening event exploring this aspect of the Cathedral's work. It was hoped that a few of these might be developed out of existing strengths, and that one or two carefully targeted new areas of work begun. In addition, it noted, 'we could better staff this area of our mission' (p. 4).

Robert Gage was appointed to the Chapter in 2006 circa as a residentiary canon with a particular responsibility for education. He describes himself as 'liturgically conservative and theologically liberal', and sees his ministry in part as a traditional teaching ministry, with the sermon playing an important role in this. He has commented on the way that the traditional 'cathedral ethos' of rather anonymous worshippers and a wide variety of visitors allows for a certain sort of indirect communication of both theological and spiritual ideas and attitudes.

Newcastle Cathedral was an important partner in the bid for funding for the *Heart of the City Project* which would link the Cathedral's educational work with a wider historical, political and communal foci for the adult education of Newcastle residents and visitors.

*Godly Play* is the name adopted by of the American Episcopalian Jerome Berryman's imaginative method of presenting scripture stories to children using artefacts, with the learning experiences structured so that children are actively involved in their own spiritual reflection. This has been developed in the North East from a base in Newcastle Cathedral for a number of years, under the leadership of Michelle Dalliston. As elsewhere, some attempts have also been made to use this method with adults, and in all age contexts. The Cathedral is seeking funding, with other partners, to create a charity called 'Godly Play North' to develop the work across the region.

## Durham Cathedral

The Canon Professor is seen as the person responsible for the *academic* dimension of Christian education (including the Cathedral library). Canon Rosalind Brown deals with many of the other areas of adult Christian education.

The Cathedral is careful not to duplicate or compete with other things happening in the Diocese, or in Durham's churches and colleges. It has run an annual Lent course since 1993 which is now advertised ecumenically, as well as in the Diocese of Durham, and has about 90 takers spread over two time-slots (a lunchtime and an evening). It is seen as a cross between education and spiritual nurture, as are a number of other one-off events such as the Benedictine days and weekends (at St Chad's College), the 'One Day Lent' and various study days. A range of publications with an EFD dimension (e.g. a simple guide to prayer) is planned.

The Cathedral is regarded as a natural venue for a range of explicit adult Christian education events, including the apologetics lectures organized by the College Chaplains. Rosalind Brown stressed that Cathedral clergy would rather respond to initiatives, facilitating what people want to do, rather than putting on a range of events that have not been particularly requested. The style of teaching in the Cathedral is thoughtful (no 'pat answers'), but is not perceived as particularly 'liberal'.

More recently, the report by Canon John Holmes and Ben Kautzer on *Cathedrals, Greater Churches and the Growth of the Church*[253] has highlighted how 'In the midst of several decades of declining church attendance, there is good news for the Church of England: cathedrals are growing! The headline cathedral statistics for 2012 reported that the rising number of cathedral worshippers is 'continuing the growing trend seen since the Millennium.' The findings are further substantiated by the report on Cathedral Statistics (2014).[254] It points that while many regions are seeing signs of growth in attendance at their cathedrals, trends are not evenly distributed across England, and cathedrals situated at the heart of lively, growing cities or those located along a tourists' throughway have greater opportunities for growth than those situated away from flourishing centres of population and economic development. However, the key aspects of growth identified were cultivating a sense of community, quality of worship, service, preaching and music; exploring new patterns of services; exploring spiritual openness and emphasis on families and young people.

## Phase II: The Empirical Investigation

## Governance

## The Diocese

---

[253] Holmes, J. and Kautzer, B. *Cathedrals, Greater Churches and the Growth of the Church*, Church Growth Research Programme, Strand 3a, Cranmer Hall, St Johns College, Durham, 2013
[254] Cathedral Statistics 2014, August 2015 by Archbishops' Council, Research and Statistics, Central Secretariat. http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/facts-stats/research-statistics.aspx

In terms of the central issues, the initial problem can be put in turns of participation. For example, as Bishop Richardson put it:

> I think the problem we have is a similar problem to political parties – it's getting people to participate. If you look at what's happening now, we're having this great debate about constitutional change, and the argument is being put forward that we ought to have primaries because small groups of activists are selecting our MPs, we're not getting good calibre. Well I think you can look at the church – generally speaking its small groups of activists who are represented and getting involved in synod and church practice. I think a lot of people are pretty passive unless something happens that they don't like.

The significance of lay participation was underlined by the diocesan secretary (Newcastle)

> It's the lay people who tend to come along and say actually the church is in an urgent situation here. Numbers – we can play with statistics till the cows come home – but attendances are declining, finances are pressured, the number of clergy is declining. This is an organisation in a state of huge change, not to say decline. That's something else you're not allowed to say

## Tension in Governance

Governmentally, both diocese operate differently. In both cases the diocesan synod is statutory governing body and both have company status, operative through their respective DBF However, recalling the central problematic that the CofE is episcopally led and synodically, Newcastle felt a split was developing between strategy considered in Bishops Council, and finance considered in the Diocesan Board of Finance. In response they have shaped their synod into a DBF, with the Council acting as Directors; i.e. the synod is the Company meeting. However, Newcastle has also traditionally operated with a larger number of 'task groups'. This awards a considerable degree of autonomy it was argued by the diocesan secretary. As the diocesan secretary put it: "A diocese is different from board of directors of company", there are a wider set of 'stakeholders' including PCCs, mission to whole community; hence the need for wide representation remains in their eyes paramount.

In Durham by contrast, power is understood to be diffuse. First, the bishop gives leadership, sets direction; second the diocesan synod, the overall collective group which includes the bishop or the bishop in council which governs the diocese in actuality; C) the bishop's council which undertakes strategy; and the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) which has legal responsibility for the finances. So while the diocesan secretary considered Durham's governance 'more messy' he also argued that the struggle for Durham in the delivery of governance is that, as the diocesan secretary put it: "They're not going to respond to governance but to leadership, inspiration, vision and support. So governance relates to are we doing the right things that will support them best. Providing the context in which they can flourish."

In recent years the two DBF have operated joint-working and sharing of posts although have no trustees in common (2012).

Internal tension within the dioceses turned principally for the diocesan secretary (N/C) on the relation between spirituality and management. As he put it

> Those on the Diocesan Board of Finance are used to thinking in terms of a strategy having very specific outcomes or outputs. That's language – particularly outputs – which is in the church quite difficult vocabulary to get your head round. Clergy tend to have a very theological view of the world, naturally enough, and business people tend to have a very product orientated view of the world that might or might not be theological. The diocese of Newcastle was struggling quite hard to agree a strategy for the future because the clergy wanted to make it a theological document and the business people wanted specific outputs around that. It was a very difficult job which to some extent failed.

## What then of the Deanery?

In Durham, the fact that the organisation of the diocese was considered central to how the deaneries are addressed; i.e. how can the Diocese be organised to facilitate and support he deaneries, evidences the growing importance of this tier of governance. In turn, deaneries would be tooled through the use of Deanery Development Plans (DDPs). With deaneries implementing DDPs and providing representation to the Pastoral Committee, the aim was to produce a more inclusive structure.

Nonetheless, as was pointed out by one Bishop, "where the deanery is really working well the area dean is a very key person. In a dream world area deans would be more and more the key people – almost mini-bishops in that they have a ministry of oversight, so it is an episcopal ministry.'

Newcastle too has implemented deanery development plans and published a *Deaneries Development Guide* (2009).[255] As it points out parishes are increasingly recognising the role that deaneries play in the life of the church as a whole, with Diocese often too remote to respond effectively to the variety of local contexts and needs. Deaneries need to be seen as an important part of the church rather than a mere administrative unit. The task then is to strengthen the deanery such that parishes value their role, and work mutually helping to shape the future life of the whole church in the Deanery.

## Ecclesial Identity

The central problematic surrounding the deaneries lie in the tension that exists between their administrative function and the grounds for developing an ecclesial identity. As one area dean (N/C) put it:

---

[255] *Deaneries Development: A Guide*. Published by the Strategic Development Group, Diocese of Newcastle Advent, 2009.

I personally think there is a problem with the deanery, ecclesiologically. I can see a parish as the people of God, the body of Christ in a particular place gathering priest and people together to offer worship and to be the church there. I can see the diocese being the people of God in an area gathering round the Bishop. But I don't think the deanery has that ecclesial identity. I'm not a mini bishop.

And where deaneries do have a greater sense of identity, geography and demographics play a key role according to the above Dean (N/C): 'we're a small deanery, so I think that there is in one sense some cohesiveness between the parishes and people, particularly the clergy in the chapter'

One parish priest's (D) response to the question of deanery governance offered a rather damming assessment:

Deanery – deanery is very difficult – vacancies or people on the sick or not participating. The present area dean has very difficult task and feeling that everything is bearing down on him. deanery synod is not doing a very good job at all. Parishes are not participating in deanery plan / development process. All deaneries run on the same governance system, but the system is not being implemented, and ineffective.

His comments reflect the words of another parish priest from Newcastle (N/C)

I don't know what deaneries are for. Don't know whether pastoral or management entities. Don't know whether the rural dean is an under archdeacon or pastor to the clergy in his patch. Doesn't think the rural deans know. Depends on the inclination of the rural dean whether he is going to be a manager or a pastor.

These in turn were reflected in those of a lay chair of a diocesan synod (D): "I think deaneries are a method whereby people can get together. I've no idea why they were set up in the first place, and I've never really bothered to find out quite frankly." In thinking through to cause he posited the idea that they arose as means of consolidating the power of the parishes *against* the reach of Bishop; i.e. the deanery could have been a site of resistance to diocesan polity. This type of political tension is typical in between governmental layers in which ways which betray the genuine initiatives put forward. Nonetheless a lay deanery synod representative reported how when a Durham deanery introduced a strategy to foster inter-dependence and make deanery operate more like one church is was met at the Deanery Synod with "the laity saying to clergy about the strategy 'that's all very well but can you clergy work together well enough to deliver it? Go away and sort yourselves out and come back and tell us that you can'".

## Deanery Synods

What then of the deanery synod? For an Anglian lay diocesan chair (D), reflecting on the overall scoring, the evaluation was "moderately developed" if not "particularly effective" One reason suggested by an area dean (D) was that PCs "know they have to elect deanery synod members but they are hard to persuade and you sometimes get the people either they don't want to do anything else, they're not really the people who want to play a key part in parish life, so they say we'll put them on the deanery they won't cause any, you know."

Moreover,

> The synod itself really doesn't have a lot to do. I mean we're supposed to have four meetings a year, but in terms of what authority, influence, clout it has – very limited. I'd say I suppose its allocating parish share, but it does that on the recommendations of its standing committee. So you're sometimes having meetings for the sake of meeting, and they become matters of interest meetings, which can be very useful."

However, and perhaps in anticipation of the current financial shift which allows parishes to set their own parish share, another area dean (D) suggested that increasingly that picture is changing and

> In contrast with previous ways of doing things, diocese has simply asked a lot of questions and asked deaneries to come up with solutions in a much more bottom up way, and that has given deanery synods much more to chew on. This is a constructive thing to do and not an abdication of responsibility. Diocese has set parameters, e.g. what the level of stipendiary ministry will be and that gives a framework. So not being given a completely blank slate. Alongside that putting in place an ongoing dialogue between deaneries and diocesan officers – ministry and mission and education – so deaneries will be able to review on regular basis with diocesan officers how those officers might resource the decisions and developments that need to take place in deaneries. This is a way of allowing deaneries a bit of space since they know what life is like on the ground – they're best placed to make decisions on mission and ministry in the deanery, and diocese is coming in as best it can to resource it.

The hope is that "deanery synods will feel less like meetings in search of an agenda," becoming more of an active body with real decision-making powers – financially because of the way Diocese allocates parish share, with each deanery having to decide how to apportion the deanery figure between themselves. That gives more responsibility to the deanery and helps to engender a sense of shared responsibility. Quite a bit culture shift."

## Strategic Development

In Newcastle the lay chair of a parish council (N) was able to report on the plan to enhancing the role of the Deanery: 'Developing Deaneries' , one of the six strands of its diocesan development Programme (see above), with a view to 'an agreed definition between bishop, deaneries and parishes of the role of the deanery and protocols in place to agree how decisions are made.' The initiative was welcomed also by the lay chair of the diocesan synod (N/C):

> "We are trying to get parishes to cooperate and collaborate rather than seeing themselves as little islands on their own – historically what parishes have tended to consider themselves. You can't expect parishes any longer to do everything themselves, they have to collaborate with each other. Deaneries could coordinate the knowledge. Bringing people together to share knowledge and experiences. And if the man or woman over there is prepared why can't he go over there and help them do it."

Yet as one area dean (D) pointed out, "Not everything we do at Deanery level is to do with management. So e.g. a Deanery day in November for clergy and laity, and got 50 or 60 people. One on prayer, one on film and faith, next is on aspects of the recession. Part of that is managerial in terms of how the church responds in stewardship. But part is about people's engagement with the world – a means of helping to resource people. DDP is about worshipping together, exchanging ideas about commissioning, reaching out to children and young people. Deployment of stipendiary clergy is only section d. A majority of planning is about positive agendas, not trying to take the legitimate place of parishes, but resource that. Deanery youth worker is an example of that."

## *Learning and Formation*

Anglican groups span a huge theological and ecclesial spectrum and diversity of approaches including involvement with Faith and Life – a diocesan program aimed at developing discipleship; Film and Faith nights, Bible study groups (weekly), Prayer courses, Lent course on Carravaggio, Book clubs (not religiously centred) York Courses, confirmation classes as a refresher, Exploring our Faith' in an informal relaxed setting (meal, discussions and a talk), Women's Breakfast – twice yearly on Saturday morning: idea is to get a woman with some special experience to share and there's always a singer, Men's Group – meets in the pub, Mothers Union, house groups and many participated in the 'Big Read' during Lent 2010.

But Anglicans are also more aware than most of the divisions within their own communion. The subject of learning is very occasionally linked to a denominational issue, such as at (Anglican High Church) St George's, Cullercoats where the group has chosen to investigate their liturgy to explore its ritual and what relevance it might have for today. Liturgy is, of course, one area where divergence is most clearly visible.

Although Anglicans have invested a great deal at a regional level in educational initiatives, those people were not represented in this study. Those who have taken part in this study expressed gratitude for what has been offered and it has clearly been a highly significant experience for them. One outcome of participation is an empowerment of people to take new responsibilities in the local church as, for example someone at Ryton testified: "Most people who've done Faith and Life have 'taken a step up in responsibility in church life – some quite significant."

For Anglicans, the degree to which regional or national initiatives and resources are taken up is left in the hands of local leaders, usually the clergy. They value their independence. The overwhelming evidence from this study shows that the purpose and outcomes of Christian learning and formation is to develop personal discipleship and to enable church communities to develop deeper relationships among themselves. As one Anglican participant said "a small group is more personal [even than] than when there's ten or twelve - or I might feel frightened if my question was a bit silly. If he group is too big, I think, 'Nah, I might be laughed at.' If a group is too big no-one can have their say."

This was born out in our case studies. In St Mary's Monksheaton (STMM) adult learning is firmly linked to church membership and discipleship development, but it also took place in many other contexts, including bible study and the conversations of other groups. St. Mary's is unusual in linking the purpose of adult learning so strongly and clearly to its mission

statement, to make Christ known by building his church. The Year of Pilgrimage, to mark the parish's centenary might thus also be regarded as an exercise in adult learning and formation.

Likewise, in St Mary's the Virgin (STMV) most adult learning took place in small groups, though some people use daily Bible study notes and a few people read theological or religious books. Sermons are also important. The purpose of this learning, in the words of the Parish Development Group in 2009 was to "encourage and enable growth in discipleship for all," by offering "an appropriate range of opportunities for learning and growth to cater for people at differing stages of engagement with the Christian faith and with differing needs … it is important to foster a culture of life-long learning and discipleship."

The problem arises then because small group formation, while developing and consolidating the relationships within the groups, creates bonds which are disposed towards an introspective church. To put the matter simply, the last thing a small group might wish for is new members threatening the developing bonds of trust. This is not to say that either STMM or STMV are not engaged in external mission (e.g. street pastors) but that this poses a site of structural tension between the expectations of mission and the body which undertakes it as such.

Second, no evidence was found that this learning sought to address structural ecclesial concerns such as changing patterns of ministry and the reduction in the number of clergy. Arguably STMM understood the main purpose of learning and formation to develop, interdependent, articulate, faithful discipleship as the foundation for shared ministry and leadership in the parish. However, in STMV adult learning concentrated on individual Christian discipleship rather than structural issues associated with the governance of the church.

When we asked: 'What evidence is there of the existence of a strategic understanding (explicit or implicit) linked to this, and if such exists, how does it accord with the strategies of the denomination expressed at a regional level?' STMM was able to offer the Mission Agenda is clear proof of a strategic understanding. The Diocese of Newcastle encourages parishes to develop mission action plans, but there is some sadness at St. Mary's that their experiment in pursuing a shared pattern of *episkope* is not fully appreciated or affirmed either within the local deanery or even, perhaps, by the diocesan bishop. Nevertheless, "we are," says Robin, "wanting to light a beacon by what we've learned, and want to practise, which is that the corporate practise of the Gospel contributes to the healing of society."

SSMV understood its mission statement to be in accord with the deanery plan to promote mission and ministry while planning for a (modest) reduction in the number of stipendiary clergy. The current discussions about the pattern of worship from summer 2011 at St. Mary's and St. Chad's are one example of the formation of such an appropriate strategy. Significantly both churches evidenced the centrality of the Deanery to their development.

From the point of view of Receptive Ecumenism however, I believe there is a great deal of encouragement to be drawn from this survey. The study reveals quite clearly that there is already a powerful ecumenical dimension to the learning and formation that takes place in local churches and congregations. This is where ecumenism really happens and makes a difference. As one Anglican participant put it: "Twenty years ago groups were ecumenical

and seemed more challenging", one Anglican in Prudhoe told me rather wistfully. "Things don't challenge me as much" (now in an all-Anglican group)."

Consequently, this also means that few church groups seem much concerned about handing on any particular denominational ethos. They are concerned to be Christian disciples first and then Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, members of the Salvation Army or URC second. This raises a further issue. If learning and formation is subjectively based and non-denomination, what type of church is likely to be reproduced? Or, to what extent should learning and formation become a site of reinvigorating Anglican identity.

In terms of challenges for the future STMM spoke of the challenge to grow and to continue to attract younger families, appoint a much younger generation of lay leaders, and develop the church as a hospitable place for music, art and drama.

For STMV there was a general recognition that older members of the community need to be given time and to feel cared for; and that church members express their commitment more strongly in the light of decreasing stipendiary ministers. As the priest put it: "The future of St. Mary's is lay." Hence there is also a perceived need for more youth workers and the hope that the church will continue to be outward looking in service and witness to the community; a prayerful, learning community, God-centred, inclusive, hopeful, loving and attractive to the community is serves.

## *Leadership and Ministry*

Insufficient data collected

## *Summary*

In sum, the key drivers within the Dioceses strategy can be said to be first, an increased participation of the laity; second, the reduction of stipendiary ministry. The two are obviously related in a co-extensive manner. This has led to a renewed focus on the deanery as an increasing administrative centre in the develop of resources and staffing. But a question hangs over it in regard of its ecclesial identity and leadership. At best, deaneries can become a site of shared Anglican identity in the diminishing landscape, at worst an irrelevant body to the life of a parish, which they ignore at their own peril. Arguably Anglican parishes already by contrast have a wide range of learning and formation programs and events, which are central to the creation of community life share in the Gospel. But questions remains as to the need to develop formation and discipleship in a way which says something specific about Anglican identity, respect the way ordinary Anglicans seek Christian learning, and the structural changes besetting it, as opposed to merely preparing in discipleship for it. In a world where the signs are increasingly of post-denominational Christianity, the future of the church rests within this tension.

# SECTION TWO:

# LIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BENEFICIAL RECEPTIVE LEARNING

## The United Reformed Church – Northern Synod

### Introduction

Our study shows that the primary threat that the United Reformed Church faces today is one of sustaining a coherent identity amid a changing context. On the face of it, the United Reformed Church is organized congregationally with limited structural oversight by a representative synod and financial trust. This organizational structure stems from a Calvinist theology of ministry, which locates organizational 'authority' not in an episcopal hierarchy but rather in the proclamation of the Word and distribution of the sacraments. In practice, the United Reformed Church negotiates its own organization at a local level through a minister, group of elders, and congregation. From an institutional perspective, the United Reformed Church is rapidly losing members and financial resources, which has resulted in some radical austerity measures. From the perspective of the local church, the United Reformed Church struggles to equip and mobilize its local leaders (whether they are stipendiary or not) to enact any framework or strategy handed down from the institutional level. In fact, some local leaders view institutional recommendations as burdens or being at cross-purposes with the core United Reformed Church identity.

This leads us to ask the obvious question: what does it mean to the United Reformed Church to be united, reformed, and a church? From our perspective, the URC struggles to hold these key identity markers together in a coherent fashion from the congregational level, all the way up to the institutional level. Effectively, the initial district level (intermediary level) served as the vital organizational link between the URCs regional and institutional level and the local congregation. The United Reformed Church must re-invest in congregational churches or it will become a charitable trust—like British Heart Association. Our research shows that there is an overall threat to the URC's claim to 'unity' and 'church' insofar as it sacrifices the needs of the local congregation and leaves it to reconstruct its own authority within partnerships. Moreover, the United Reformed Church's claim to be 'reform' is also under threat insofar as it continues to neglect the formation of its ministers and elders.

The United Reformed Church identity crisis leads researchers to ask another obvious question: what is the regional mission of the URC? From our research, it appears that the regional mission of the URC is to provide a mutually beneficial framework for local church ministry in an ecumenical context. Indeed, the structural flexibility of the URC is a strength that can help it adapt in this new context. The functional, task-oriented approach to ordination and commissioning leaders in the local church is a good platform for building a volunteer base in the absence of stipendiary ministers and necessary financial resources. Hence, just as Calvin was able to shift from 3-fold ministry, so the URC must shift to new phase of supporting and recruiting non-stipendiary ministers.

## Recommendations

In light of our research, the United Reformed Church must invest in and develop the role of elders, lay preachers, university and hospital chaplains, and community workers. The United Reformed Church 'ministry and training committee' needs to develop training courses for all of these roles to mobilize these volunteers for the mission of the local United Reformed Church. Among local eldership, one representative should be designated to serve on 'The Ecumenical Group' to reinforce the importance of LEPs for stabilizing the flow of synod-regional-local communication and support. Moreover, the United Reformed Church (perhaps in conjunction with 'Pastoral Group' should host area ministers meeting that gathers non-stipendiary and stipendiary ministers from all denominations once a month for prayer, scripture, meal, and to raise local concerns that can be reported through proper channels. The Trust might wish to evaluate its charitable activities and focus funds on building local support. Otherwise, the URC will need to become a charitable para-church trust that funds appropriate projects.

Another question that the URC must answer is: what becomes of unity without authority? How will the United Reformed Church negotiate virtual unity/authority? Theologically, the United Reformed Church teaches that the church is united non-temporally or non-spatially— the invisible church. But if we think about the vanishing organisational structures of the United Reformed Church (motivated by financial decisions) and the pressure that is put on the local level to reconstruct these regional structures on their own, then every local congregation must fend for itself. Why are stipendiary ministers burnt out? The United Reformed Church must re-invest in minister's formation.

In light of the need for minister formation, the United Reformed Church must ask: what becomes of reform without pedagogical and financial resources? How will the United Reformed Church negotiate the meaning of membership? Theologically, to be a member of the universal church, the United Reformed Church says that we are elected by Christ (perhaps there are good, ecumenical reasons for endorsing this); but to belong to the local church, to make it visible as a community of Christians, what resources are needed to facilitate local concerns and institutional? If the United Reformed Church emphasises the invisible church too much, then the risk is that it will vanish. So what does it mean to become a member of the United Reformed Church? Are they accepting new members? Why are local United Reformed Church events poorly attended? Perhaps the notion of 'dual membership' is problematic, and these participants are participating elsewhere that seemingly has more to offer. To what extent is the United Reformed Church a visible church? It seems that the United Reformed Church is visible insofar as it is ecumenical—that is, the United Reformed Church synod functions as an institutional umbrella for several UK-based congregational churches, and the local United Reformed Church congregation/event appears to have participants from ecclesially-mixed backgrounds.

In sum, our study began by mapping and contextualising the strategic, governmental, and financial shifts undertaken by the United Reformed Church. In particular, we paid attention to the ideological emphasis upon a shift from an ecumenical to a mission-shaped church. The introduction of Mission Partnerships (MPs) provided a lens to explore the issues more

concretely. The evidence suggests that greater institutional support is required if MPs are to be successful. Drawing on the overall analysis, one can approach this in a number of ways:

1.  specific programmes of education to foster outreach among congregations need to be introduced;

2.  the role and understanding of eldership should be developed – or indeed a new class of lay leader to treat specifically the context of mission partnerships.

3.  Christian learning and formation must be employed in such a way as to better inform the overall strategic decision-making of the church, especially in regard of elders meetings.

4.  There needs to be a renewed understanding of eldership that informs the URCs identity and thus further contributes to a culture of support for mission partnerships.

Part of the drive of the Northern Synod is toward church growth. Given the lack of initiation courses, these recommendations might be introduced. However, the question remains, should mission strategy be targeted towards the young? Given the aging profile of congregations in the URC, coupled with the relative levels of well-being recorded by the questionnaire, is not the future of the URC with the senior members of our society?

The development of institutional support, especially in regard of external goods may also be aided ecumenically. Stockton's 'messy-church' is held in tandem with the Salvation Army in the local corps. Similarly, the evidence of Barnard Castle's ecumenical support is immediate and considerable from the size of the notice boards: from the sharing of plant with Barnard Castle Christian fellowship to the strong commitment of Barnard Castle United Reformed Church to Churches Together in Barnard Castle and Startforth. And as well as formal ties, informal links are strong as evidenced by the way in which members of the different churches in the town readily support each other's events. In other words, while the key to the URCs future may well lie in a mission-orientated and community church – as opposed to its initial ecumenical mandate ('born to die'), ecumenism may nonetheless be the key to community-mission.

## Moving Forward

### *Recommendations for Shared Ecclesial Learning:*

1.  The United Reformed Church may want to learn from Anglicans how to hold various reformed traditions together institutionally and locally.

2.  The United Reformed Church may want to learn from the team-ministry model used by both Anglicans and Methodists.

3.  The United Reformed Church may want to adapt an entry-membership course like Alpha (Anglicans) or RCIA (Roman Catholics).

4. The United Reformed Church may want to adapt a Methodist and Baptist Christian leadership and discipleship course for more mature members to boost lay participation.

5. The United Reformed Church may want to compare its mother and toddler group with Salvation Army's.

6. The United Reformed Church should compare the Norther Synod's four-year plan with Salvation Army's three-year review of mission in the local church

7. The United Reformed Church may want to explore the mission and development of social programs with Assemblies of God/Methodists and Salvation Army.

8. The United Reformed Church may want to explore how to structure mission partnerships with a comparative study of the Roman Catholic clustering of parishes.

9. The United Reformed Church may want to explore with all denominations which programs of learning best address issues raised by new structures.

## *Chief Recommendations presented at Synod*

1. Over the past five years the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, has been spearheading an ecumenical venture: Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church. The research takes into account three key shifts. First, a general shift in ecumenical sensibilities away from the assumption that church union would lead to the unity of the whole church with the immediacy its ministers and congregations once hoped for. Recognising that while we have much we can offer one another, in all humility, there is much that we need to and can receive from one another;[256] Second, the shift in United Reformed Church sensibilities from an ecumenical to a mission-shaped church. Third the growing need for forms of shared ministry across congregations and churches in response to the decline of numbers. Many in the Northern Synod have already assisted the research by participating with our researchers at various learning and discipleship events, assisting in interviews, or completing a questionnaire on leadership. What follows represents only one strand of the ecumenical project.[257]

2. Our research painted an interesting picture of the United Reformed Church in the Northern Synod. In particular, it highlighted the strong levels of identification on the part of its members with the United Reformed Church. Half of those who responded exhibited patterns of working harder, and being more committed and loyal to church; members agree that their individual congregations have confidence in themselves and there is a high level of cohesion within its congregations, all mediated by trust between its members and ministers. The church remains somewhere people gain a sense of spiritual well-being which contributes to their lives a whole, although the level of those thinking about quitting and/or switching churches stands at 7%. In short

---

[256] http://www.urc.org.uk/mission/ecumenical-relations.html (Last accessed 22.08.13)
[257] The results of the questionnaire can be obtained from Dr Marcus Pound, m.j.p.pound@durham.ac.uk

the basis is there to take the church forward in its congregations and the region as a whole. The question remains how?

3.  The picture also presents a model of church which may be characterized as a 'family-model'[258] which shapes how congregations attend to their core tasks: 1) developing the church's sense of its own community; 2) reproducing themselves through worship and or educative programs; and 3) witnessing to others be it through outreach or simply by being a presence in the community. In the congregations of the Northern Synod the community aimed at is one of close, family-like attachments for most members; religious witness according to this model tends to be centred on being a presence in the community; and witness is simply the way a church lives its life within a given wider community. Hence the data suggests that members are much better at helping those already in the church, than outside. And while the congregations undertake adult Christian learning, that learning is principally directed toward developing personal discipleship and sharing stories to help deepen relationships.

4.  It might be argued that some of the problems aired within mission partnerships resulted in part from the type of conflict which arises when a given model of church is asked to become another; e.g. from a 'family' church to one engaged in mission outreach. The data also suggests the field to which the United Reformed Church is best suited in regard of mission: an older church that is deeply pastoral to its members.

5.  Coming out of our on-going discussions was a sentiment also expressed by the General Assembly: a clear sense of the role of eldership in addressing the culture and practice of the United Reformed Church. At their best, elders are a potent body, moving churches forward, but they can become a management group which while providing good coordination entrenches congregations in routine rather than taking the church forward. Within the current climate eldership has the potential to come into its own. Eldership has to function more solidly within groupings of churches. Moreover, because the URC can no longer operate in terms of 'one minister/one church,' any existing dependency of elders upon a minister will inevitably break. And in it's a continued role of representative ministry among its local ecumenical partners eldership continues to say something distinctive about the identity of the URC.[259]

6.  Much of the current literature and debate focuses on the need for more flexible and diverse ministry and training; empowering ministers in an outward looking way rather than sucking them in. Following David Peel's recommendations to the Northern Synod, outlined in *Eldership: An Education and Training Strategy* (2008), an electronic database was established and the hope was to develop a more informal network of elders with a view to raising their profile, tapping back into their spiritual

---

[258] Penny Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Religious Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15.

[259] 'Changing Ministry For The Challenge Of Mission, ' *A Report From The Future Patterns Of Ministries Working Party* (§5.3.4)  http://www.urc.org.uk/ministry.html?id=571:equipping-the-saints&catid=21:ministry

and cultural role. Yet arguably both the network and training for elders remains undernourished. Discipleship training must balance its commitment to develop spirituality and pray through reading and studying the Bible, whilst recognizing that its principal field of mission is an un-churched nation.

7. In the light of the above the following proposals are made:

   a. The re-development of the elder's network within the context of the groupings of churches. Initial drives to re-establish eldership took place in the context of mission partnership, but with mission partnerships developing into joint or group pastorates the context of eldership, in both its pastoral and governance role needs to be readdressed. And because church groupings offer a clearer constitution and include a treasurer, they provide a clearer structure for debate including finance. Such an eldership network developed around groupings of churches should in its initial stages be employed to formally raise the following questions: does the idea of locality need to be renegotiated in regard of eldership? How does eldership function when congregations move to being one church in different buildings? How will elders learn to identify within groups of churches?

   b. Elders' meetings should foster a vision of what it means to be a community of God's people in that place, which requires they play a central role in identifying and delegating with the specific needs of a congregation in mind. Hence, the role of individuals who emerge with gifts of leadership (e.g. worship groups) needs also to be reassessed in the context of groupings of churches; i.e. within a collaborative context which is as much a practice of spiritual discernment and pastoral care as practical management.

   c. Adequate provision for training must be established in support of the above. One could re-begin through an event, aimed at both developing models of good practice and offering support. Strong representation from individuals with gifts working in the congregations should be encouraged, as should ministers; the network would thereby serve as a platform to clarify their role within the eldership.

   d. Such training should extend the call to explore new ways of gathering by establishing discipleship and training within an ecumenical context. This should be conceived in terms of a regional day on diaconal ministry (i.e. ministry which does not include presidency yet which is charged with building bridges between church and society).[260] In practice this ministry includes eldership alongside other roles (e.g. commissioned roles – CRCWs and ministry in general) and should be inclusive. The point is not to propose the establishment of a separate diaconate order, but develop diaconal themes more broadly within the context of eldership governance within the Northern Synod and the increased interdependency of local congregations. By rendering this an ecumenical gesture, the URC Church could

---

[260] 'Changing Ministry for The Challenge Of Mission,' A Report From The Future Patterns Of Ministries Working Party (§5.6.3). http://www.urc.org.uk/ministry.html?id=571:equipping-the-saints&catid=21:ministry

not only draw on the diaconal practices already established within ecumenical partners to help reflect on, refine, and understand their own contrasting thinking on the issues, it would also serve as a platform to offer something of the gift of eldership back to those churches where encouraging lay involvement remains a priority.

# The Salvation Army – Northern Division

## Introduction

The Salvation Army has much to offer the other denominations including a vibrant culture of music as a carrier for vitality; an effective use of hierarchy in which authority is very much invested in a leader which makes it distinct within the governances within the non-profit sector and distinct also within strongly congregational patterns of church. However, a number of issues and recommendations are posed.

## *Identifying Denominational-Specific Areas in Need of Ecumenical Learning*

For the Salvation Army Northern Division, our empirical research has identified that with the decline of weekly attendance and the annual recruitment of soldiers and officers, the Salvation Army must recover the missional ecclesiology of its Wesleyan heritage in order to foster innovative expressions of ministry.[261] By missional ecclesiology, we intend the dual historical emphasis upon both worship (which fosters charismatic vocations) and a theologically pragmatic method of evangelism. For instance, speaking of the two arms (evangelism and social service) and one task (redemption of humanity) of the Salvation Army, Phil Needham channels William Booth's image of social service as 'the sacrament of the Good Samaritan' when he says that 'the mission of the Church is authentic only where the poor and oppressed are being ministered to'.[262]

Currently, corps tend either to gravitate toward a mission focus that emphasizes diversity of expression, or a worship focus that pulls them into the direction of reinforcing a traditionalist formality of expression. By selecting one or the other focus, individual corps tend to restrict their forms of outreach to solely the youth and the elderly, social welfare in the local community, or a brass band in uniform (traditional behavioural and identity markers that can inculcate an inward looking stance that alienates potential adherents). Depending upon the traditionalist or innovative mission-strategy of the corps, the process of behaviour change tends to be framed in one of two ways: i) everything we do for outreach hangs on a behavioural change as a prerequisite for ministry; or ii) in order to bring about behavioural change, our understanding and approach to ministry must be recalibrated to reach those people on the margins. The traditionalist corps makes the former its focus, whereas the innovative corps adopts the latter as its focus. However, from a leadership perspective, the singular focus on either evangelism or worship has contributed to a growing tension between officers and soldiers in relation to the way in which their status, function, and 'authority' are expressed in practice. The matter is made more complex when the local corps is

---

[261] Although the theology of the Salvation Army has been traditionally framed in terms of the spirituality of the American holiness movement of the 19th century, there have been more recent attempts to situate the theological heritage of the Salvation Army more firmly in the British Wesleyan tradition. For more, see Earl Robinson, 'Wesleyan Distinctives in Salvation Army Theology' in *Word & Deed: A Journal of Salvation Army Theology and Ministry* (6:2) 2004 <https://www.salvationist.org/extranet_main.nsf/vw_sublinks/8E93913570C2699B80256F16006D3C6F?openDocument>.  See also, *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, pp. xviii, xix.

[262] Phil Needham, 'Toward a Reintegration of the Salvationist Mission' in *Creed and Deed*, ed. John D. Waldron, (Oakville: Triumph Press, 1986) p. 127; pp. 123-158.

generationally segregated and the institutional authority wants to continue to draw upon its own volunteer resources.

Our research shows that there is strong evidence that both ministerial leadership and example matters for the attitudes and behaviours of corps members. In particular, 96% of corps members agreed that their officer represents values that are important to them. This reinforces the fact that servant leadership is typically positively associated, especially the mentality of 'working oneself out of a job' when it comes to training others for ministry. However, our research also showed that 22% said they would not feel guilty if they left the corps. For our researchers, this statistic raises an important question about the level of officer leadership in relationship to the level of commitment from adherents.

From a ministry perspective, more and more adherents are 'belonging' without 'behaving'. Although the missional task is to help people feel at home, there is a disconnect when coming to grips with behavioural principles (e.g., no alcohol), which can prevent young adults from becoming solider recruits. This may indicate that there is a communicative confusion between the behavioural principles (however beneficial) and the actual beliefs, doctrines, and theology of holiness in the Salvation Army. In light of this, a problem arises regarding the alienating language and culture of the Salvation Army as it is perceived by new-comers, which may actively turn them into outsiders. For instance, the adoption-language of self-identifying as a first, second, or third generation Salvation Army member can work at cross-purposes with the desired outcome of soldier recruitment. This suggests a need for a cultural shift towards a new direction of discipleship as a journey of ongoing development.[263]

From our findings, the current situation in the Northern Division highlights the need for further reassessment of leadership development and member training. We suggest that this can be fostered through: i) translocal, intra corps relatedness (like that found in the Northern Baptist Association); and ii) by fostering interdependence, ownership, and integration of corps identity in a way that does not segregate one generation from another. The good news is that the Salvation Army already has significant leadership models of a missional ecclesiology available in both Crook and at Sanctuary 21 in Durham.

## Recommendations

1. Develop the basis for localised networks for congregations to think together about the rationalisation of their corps? Regional strategy has been to rationalise in favour of social services rather than worship. This had led to a congregational outlook, impeded by the existing system of governance. Authority runs down, but not across. Moreover, the reliance on this two tier-model complicates the types of expectations Officers may have about authority and decision-making when understood horizontally. However, increasing local networks will facilitate conversation between Corps Officers and

---

[263] For instance, see *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (London 2010) on article of faith #9, 'Our conversion inaugurates a journey during which we are being transformed into Christ's likeness. Thus salvation is neither a state to be preserved nor an insurance policy which requires no further investment. It is the beginning of a pilgrimage with Christ,'181.

provide the basis for sharing resources. Resources may be pragmatic, such as offering member support, but crucially the aim is to foster collective attempts to:

    a. Curb the congregational outlook in favour of an ecclesiology more fitting with the Army's stance of working together.

    b. Rethink the strategy for social mission collaboratively across the local corps. For example, Mission Development Plans currently pertain to individual corps, and the responsibility of the Corps Officer. However, could the mechanism be developed to allow two of more Corps to develop such plans collaboratively, and hence develop mission collectively?

    c. Strengthen the ecclesiological link between mission and worship where the two find them unbalanced through rationalisation of resources.

    d. Help consolidate member's efforts, whilst offering varied expressions of Army identity in mission and worship. For example, formal relations would help to navigate the relation between traditional and contemporary forms of worship, offering various expressions of corps identity. Worship emerges best as a response to the context in which it is developing, and the people who join it. Arguably new expressions of Army Corps will be characterised by ambiguity, and defy traditional attempts at categorisation. In such cases a 'permissive' approach should be encouraged. However, these diverse expressions need to be underpinned by a collective sense of mission and outreach, and the deployment of resources.

    Arguably there are already ecumenical ventures which already model such collaboration. The task is to transpose ecumenical relations (i.e. the relation between denominations) within an intra-corps context (i.e. the relation between corps).

2. Develop new leadership roles with a view to collaborative corps partnership. There already exists an international call for a greater measure of flexibility in the service of officers such as short-term officer service or alternatively 'tent-makers'. But how might more standard forms of ordained ministry with the Salvation Army be developed at an intra-corps level? And how might one develop the role of solider in a similar light? For example, to take the former; does the rationalisation of churches require oversight from an Officer at an intermediary layer? Is this 'cluttering up the governance system', or does increased operative management at this level enable greater flexibility on the part of Corps within the context of decline? To take the latter, could one establish a role in Corps Council for a 'rotating member' to be operative at a more localised level (working horizontally for example) to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and resources within the Salvation Army.

3. Develop formation in ways which are responsive to the need for changing patterns of corps life and strategic direction. As this report has highlighted, formation tends towards groups that are highly valued by participants as the means of spiritual growth, but that are oriented towards the concerns and problems of members. Formation acts

primarily as a form of mutual support rather than an encouragement to explore the practical mission of the church. Developing formation within perhaps an intra-corps context or Mission Plan in mind would encourage members to think strategically and creatively about the types of mission their corps should or could engage in, or what alternative forms of worship might they adopt within the context of shared resources?

## *Reconciling our Recommendations with the Operative Juridical Framework*

For the sake of brevity, we made three recommendations in the integrated report: First, the need to develop an emphasis upon Translocal Ministry across corps in the region. Second, the need to develop new leadership roles to allow for translocal ministry to take place. This might involve, increasing authority to a tentmaker soldier to relieve pressure on an officer, adopting the Joint Pastorate model from the United Reformed Church or the clustering model from the Roman Catholics, or even a form of circuit ministry from the Methodists. Third, the need to develop opportunities for ongoing Adult Christian Formation to help adherents transition to soldiers, by drawing upon ecumenical models of discipleship and expressions of worship. In response, Major Montgomery said that our recommendations are 'encouraging' and they should be 'graciously received as a potential vehicle for development' in the Salvation Army.

In light of such a positive evaluation of our integrated report, it seems that our recommendations are not out of bounds but rather that translocal ministry is achievable in the near future. However, the obstacles that our researchers were able to identify were both practical and theological in nature. For instance, there is a real problem of coordinating diaries among corps leaders with differing strategies for mission. This reflects the more general divide among the networks of officers within a given region. And yet, some officers may not have any non-Army friends in their social circle. It is worth noting that our researchers met with two officers in one location, and this turned out to be an historic occasion since neither officer even had visited the other corps before. At first glance, this problem might be resolved with developing better time-management and communication skills, or perhaps by the DHQ General calling a meeting. However, this practical issue highlights a deeper theological problem: without a stronger emphasis upon diaconal ministry the burden upon individual officers (and splitting up spousal ministry teams to attend a meeting or engage in translocal ministry) is impossible since the social centre cannot be shut down without someone overseeing it. We suggest that with a specific change of structure over time, the missional aims and objectives of the Salvation Army could be communicated in ways that allow for new expressions of ministry to flourish. This might take the form of a regional event twice a year, or a regional three-day retreat once a year.

However, this issue lights up another obstacle: Although the hierarchy of the Salvation Army is viewed generally as supportive and effective, the procedure of enacting a regional (and therefore local) Mission Development Plan and the Divisional Director of Evangelism are both seen as administrative burdens rather than a measure of fidelity to mission. This stems from several factors: i) the Director performs a more advisory rather than line manager role. Yet, this problem again highlights the need for rotating corps officers (perhaps in a council format like that of the Anglicans) to obtain a better picture of what goes on regionally; ii) the horizon of a local mission strategy is often limited to local expertise, motivation, and level of training; iii) intra-relatedness among corps is viewed culturally as a threat to corps stats. This

fear (genuine or perceived) of colonizing corps runs contrary to the ecclesiology of Salvation Army.

The obstacles identified above point to two undergirding theological principles that need to be reassessed and renewed for enabling translocal ministry: diaconal ministry and a theology of grace. For instance, appointing deacons (tent-makers) can help corps officers step away from the social centre and build interdependence among a cluster of corps in a region. Historically, brigades (groups of soldiers) were organized for specific tasks and were flexibly governed for mission. Regionally, corps officers need to foster deacon training as a call for 'back-up' to release pressure on existing corps officers. By renewing the Salvationist emphasis upon the priesthood of all believers,[264] a task-based ministry is required as well as a view of leadership development according to gifts—especially, within an ecumenical context.[265] Here it is important to remember a crucial tenet of Phil Needham's description of a Salvationist Ecclesiology:

> A Church that is called to do battle must be ready to move out to the new battlefield, to survey the new terrain and to adapt its fighting methods accordingly. A Church, on the other hand, which is committed to ritual battles on outdated battlefields and to the preservation of its own historical structures and methods for the sake of institutional survival, is a Church that has lost its capacity to do battle—and hence its missionary purpose. An inflexible and immobile Church is no Church at all; it is a religious relic.[266]

In light of the growing pressure (real and perceived) on officers to view their role passively—as primarily to crunch numbers, administrative statistics—and actively, in terms of relationally meeting needs in the community, we recommend that the Northern Division recruit second-career tent-maker soldiers who could help relax and model a transitional form of behavioural identity in the shift from adherent to soldier. Drawing upon a shared Wesleyan heritage, the Salvation Army could turn to the Methodist understanding of the role of a deacon as an invaluable resource.[267] Needham argues that for the Salvation Army, structures must serve mission and that 'ecclesiastical tradition exists in order to facilitate the Church's pilgrimage. When it impedes pilgrimage, then it must be altered or discarded'.[268] Needham goes on to say that 'As the Church receives the gospel and is transformed by it, it becomes the missionary people of God: the mission of the Church is inextricably tied to the life of the

---

[264] *Salvation Army Handbook*, p. 252: 'In Christ, all Christians share in the priestly ministry. All vocations are important opportunities for expressing discipleship (Ephesians 4:1-24). In that sense there is no separated ministry. Within that common calling, some are called by Christ to be full-time office-holders within the Church'.

[265] *Salvation Army Handbook*, p. 273: 'A deeper understanding of our calling and our life together, with other churches, as the Body of Christ, would enhance witness and mission by the Salvationist community to the world. It would encourage understanding of our need to work as partners, supporting one another and sharing our gifts and resources'. Also, consider, 'in humility we learn from others, also we come to the ecumenical table ready to share whatever God in his wisdom has graciously bestowed upon the Army' (317).

[266] Phil Needham, *Community in Mission: A Salvationist Ecclesiology* (Atlanta: TSA, 1987), p. 55.

[267] http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/879666/dev-perwhat-is-a-deacon-2004-15062012.pdf

[268] Needham, Community in Mission p. 57.

fellowship'. Indeed, Needham argues that 'fellowship without mission dies of spiritual suffocation. Mission without fellowship dies of spiritual starvation'.[269]

It is crucial that a theology of diaconal ministry is motivated by a Salvationist theology of grace. In Salvationist theology, grace is viewed as universally accessible, and sacraments (in the forms of ecclesial rituals) are viewed as obstructing the pragmatic emphasis on social welfare.[270] For instance, Needham says that it is 'a disservice to the gospel to insist that grace must be received through the mediation of a particular ritual or procedure, and there is no evidence in the New Testament from which a case can be argued for such a view. Grace is immediate and accessible'.[271] Moreover, Robert Street says:

> If Christ already indwells, we need no ceremony to 'receive' him. There are forms of worship which help us appreciate more deeply the presence of God in our lives, or which assist us in being more aware of his working within us, but the presence of the indwelling Christ is already established and it is this which matters above all else. Whatever forms of worship are employed to assist us, they should never be seen as essential in themselves.[272]

Street argues that 'The New Testament does not offer a mediation of grace through things, but through persons' and that 'Christ in you' speaks of a 'radical immediacy of grace, mediated through the persons of the Son of God and the Spirit of God to the Church and to the believer'.[273] This theology of grace motivates the distinction between divisive rituals and a more general 'sacramentalism,' that is the view that 'God can and does reach to us, and through us to others, by means of all kinds of avenues, some formal and some informal'.[274] However, it is also important to note, as Street does, how William Booth said in 1883 that although sacraments cannot be made a condition of salvation, we cannot prohibit our own people from taking the sacraments.[275] Nevertheless, this view of sacraments has led to local expression of table fellowship[276] as a genuine mode of evangelism (e.g., Lunch club, coffee hour, and drop in parent toddler group, Home League, etc.). This is reflected in what Henry Gariepy says about the Salvationist conviction that holiness is a privilege of all believers (1 Thess 5:23) and how the Salvation Army understands sacrament as 'a holy happening' which is not limited to the Church or any ritual but occurs individually moment by moment. Gariepy says that 'the truly sacramental interpenetrates all of life. It can occur in an encounter with God's majesty in nature, a moment in worship, a passage in a book, a stirring melody, an

---

[269] Needham, pp. 75-76.

[270] *SA Handbook*, p. 311-313: 'WE DO NOT BELIEVE that the Church Universal depends for its existence or validity upon any particular ecclesiastical structure, any particular form of worship, or any particular observance of ritual' … [indeed] 'receiving of inward spiritual grace is not dependent upon any particular outward observance'.

[271] Needham, p. 8.

[272] Robert Street, *Called to be God's People* (London: IHQ, 1999), p. 27.

[273] Ibid, 93.

[274] Ibid, 98.

[275] Ibid, 113-114.

[276] For more on a sacramental understanding of table fellowship, see Joshua Furnal, 'A Theology of the Table,' *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1040 (2011), 409-414. See also, *Salvation Army Handbook*, pp. 295-296: 'Recognising the freedom to celebrate Christ's real presence at all meals and in all meetings, the Commission's statement on Holy Communion encourages Salvationists to use the opportunity to explore together the significance of the simple meals shared by Jesus and his friends, and by the first Christians'.

anointed preachment, an epiphany in the Word or in prayer'. Gariepy points to the lyrics of a famous Salvationist devotional song: 'My life must be Christ's broken bread, / My love his outpoured wine'.[277] Seen in this light, there is a deep connection waiting to be made between worship and evangelism latent within the practices of the Salvation Army—and yet, it is only through ecumenical engagement that a deepening of this connection will be made.

There remains a very real question regarding the ability of the Salvation Army to renew William Booth's 'theological pragmatism' by itself in order to accommodate and adapt to the needs of the poor today.[278] David Rightmire observes that since Booth had 'a functional ecclesiology, conceiving the church as 'act' rather than 'substance'. The soteriological task of the church is stressed over concerns for polity or organization. The structures of the church are important only as they serve to advance the mission of salvation warfare.[279] However since Booth's time, a traditionalist tendency has become entrenched that attempts to freeze-frame the 19th century evangelistic methods of a brass band and uniform as constitutive identity markers; whereas, the original emphasis was upon a non-professional music ministry using 'simple songs with tunes that could be easily learned and remembered' rather than hymns because of 'the stigma of ecclesiastical associations'.[280] Paradoxically, the uniform has taken on a sacramental/ritualistic dimension as an outward expression of an inward holiness—something that the Salvation Army has sworn to combat because of its divisive nature.[281] In the end for the Salvation Army, 'any shift in its theology of holiness necessitates a corresponding re-evaluation of its sacramental theology'.[282]

This report set out to test the ecclesiological and juridical obstacles that prevent ecumenical learning from taking place within the Salvation Army Northern Division. In the first section, this report identified three areas of concern: i) the need to develop an emphasis upon Translocal Ministry across corps in the region; ii) the need to develop new leadership roles to allow for translocal ministry to take place; iii) the need to develop opportunities for ongoing Adult Christian Formation to help adherents transition to soldiers. In the second section, this report attempted to reconcile our recommendations for negotiating these areas of concern with the current juridical framework. By way of conclusion, we want to make the following practical suggestions for leadership development and encouraging translocal ministry:

1.    At the regional level there is the need to foster intra-relatedness between officers of corps to boost expertise and achieve strategy. Engaging in ecumenism can be a rationale and resource for taking this recommendation seriously.

2.    At the regional level there is the need to develop women's ministry cohort to share ideas and foster mutual support and interaction (intra-relatedness) amid corps.

---

[277] Henry Gariepy, *Christianity in Action: The International History of the Salvation Army* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 74-75.
[278] For more, see R. David Rightmire, *Sacraments and the Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1990) pp. 69ff.
[279] Ibid, 79.
[280] Ibid, 74-75.
[281] For more, see Rightmire's penultimate chapter 'Salvation Army Sacramental Self-Understanding' pp. 205-256.
[282] Rightmire, p. 272.

3. Use annual regional event/retreat as opportunity for officers to commit to translocal ministry, deacon training, and Mission Development Plan.

4. Use social media for 'instant feedback' and virtual 'testimony time' between local corps and regional and institutional levels.

We would also like to make the following practical suggestions regarding Young Adult Formation:[283]

1. Aim to foster meaningful relationships of genuine care, interest, dialogue, and transparency that provide young adults with opportunities to serve according to their gifts and passions.

2. Strengthen the teaching ministry of officers and gifted lay leaders by making theological education a priority for personal development.

3. Relieve burdens on officers through lay volunteers in community service providing mission opportunities for young adults.

4. Re-frame soldiership not in terms of a one-time rite of passage, but in terms of ongoing pilgrimage or discipleship that allows for shame-free opt-out before signing covenant.

5. Hosting informal events that empower smaller corps to see the value of a smaller setting for young adults in the community searching for attentive and relational mentors.

6. Experiment with new ways of expressing traditional aspects of 'Being Army' without necessarily 'Looking Army' by focusing on a common mission to a new generation.

## Moving Forward

What might the Salvation Army fruitfully learn in regard of the recommendations within an ecumenical context?

1. As churches decline they become more dependent upon each other in more localised sense. For example, the dismantling of the District level within the United Reform Church with a view to partnerships created around mission provides an excellent case-study in the challenges which may present themselves in intra-Corps relations. How is the authority of the minister exercised in cross-church negotiations? And how might the eventual outcome of the United Reformed Church, with churches forming pastorates inform models for relations that balance need of diverse congregational styles with the rationalisation of mission?

---

[283] For more, see 'Practical Suggestions for Discipleship for Young Adults' <http://jamespedlar.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/sa-young-adult-research-recommendations.pdf>.

2. Similarly, what can the Salvation Army learn from the Catholic experience of clusters – a direct response to decline in Priests and the need to rationalise worship. This has been felt very strongly at parish level. Arguably the sacramental dimension to worship is a challenge to the Salvation Army, yet as worship centres becomes rationalised within the Salvation Army, worship may also become more charged with ritual significance.

3. While William Booth had his roots in Methodism, does the structure of circuit ministry now offer something back to the Salvation Army as a model for oversight within intra-corps relations at this historical juncture within our churches?

4. In linking mission with a worship base, the Assembly of God, a Pentecostal grouping, has some highly motivated social mission projects linked to worship centres. For example, the regeneration of an old school in the North East into a social centre with a mixed economy of practices (Osteopaths, Sure start), linked through the building to charismatic forms of music and worship. How might the Salvation Army assess the place of worship, music, and social mission in regard of the Pentecostal experience?

5. In thinking about mission much of the emphasis on innovative expressions of church life is centred on mission to the young. Such a move rightfully counters an increasingly ageing church population. Yet arguably old-age is the growing part of the population. How much mission focus is centred on the old? And if not, what could the Salvation Army learn from the programs found in other denominations in relation to this mission field?

6. In thinking about diverse ministries, does the seven years training of ordination preclude older members becoming Officers, and can this be negotiated through the development of auxiliary offers? In thinking about auxiliary officers, what can be learned from the rise of deaconship within the ecumenical context?

7. The Anglican Church has found success with Fresh Expressions? How can innovative Anglican expressions of church inform the continued questioning of a Corps Identity?

# The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

## Introduction

Recalling Vatican II's affirmation of the participation of the baptised in the threefold ministry of Christ, the ongoing task is, first to develop or ensure the necessary structures to facilitate this, asking 'what are the legislative implications of the documents?' Second, one should recall the Apostolic Constitution, *Sacre Disciplinae Leges*, where Pope John Paul II highlighted amongst the elements that characterise the genuine image of the church:

> the doctrine in which the Church is presented as the People of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium* § 2), and authority as a service *(cf. ibid.*, § 3); the doctrine in which the Church is seen as a 'communion,' and which, therefore, determines the relations which should exist between the particular churches and the universal Church, and between collegiality and the primacy; the doctrine, moreover, according to which all the members of the People of God, in the way suited to each of them, participate in the threefold office of Christ: priestly, prophetic and kingly. With this teaching there is also linked that which concerns the duties and rights of the faithful, and particularly of the laity; and finally, the Church's commitment to ecumenism.[284]

If John Paul II's first point asks us to continue reflection on the reception of Vatican II in the light of lay and priests working together, the second asks that the task be accompanied by ecumenical reflection. Therefore, we make the following recommendations concerning potential ecumenical learning points.

The realisation or practical implementation of these goals relies on Canon Law: the internal ecclesiastical law which the Catholic Church and its ecclesiastical authorities adopt to provide governance and organise its members. As Myriam Wijlens has observed, laws are 'norms of action for the community, set by the legitimate authority, for the appropriation of values, and intelligently and freely received by the members'.[285] So where theology is indicative in its mode, narrating God's revelation and bringing our reflections to bear upon it, canon law is undertaken in the mode of the imperative, translating doctrine into both recommended and required structures for the Church.[286] Or, to paraphrase Wijlens, 'If theology is faith seeking understanding, then canon law is faith seeking action'.[287]

Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI called on canon lawyers to adopt the *habitus mentis*, or 'new attitude of mind' and apply it to legislative renewal in the light of the

---

[284] Apostolic Constitution, *Sacre Disciplinae Leges*, Pope John Paul II, 1983.

[285] Wijlens, 'The Church Knowing and Acting: The Relationship between Theology and Canon Law,' henceforth 'The Church Knowing and Acting,' *Louvain Studies*, 20 (1995), 21-40, p. 28.

[286] Myriam Wijlens, 'The Church Knowing and Acting, p. 23.

[287] Wijlens borrows this phrase from Ladislas Örsy, see Myriam Wijlens, 'For You I Am a Bishop, With You I Am a Christian:' The Bishop as Legislator,' henceforth 'For You I Am a Bishop, With You I Am a Christian,' *The Jurist* 56 (1996), 68-87, pp. 80-81.

wider liturgical renewal underway. [288] So where the 1917 Code of Canon Law treated the church by starting from the perspective of clerics and office holders, the 1983 Code begins with the community and situates the hierarchy within the community. For example, the second book of the 1983 Code starts with the 'People of God,' and treats what is in common through baptism.

In other words, the church is no longer seen primarily as a juridical authority, rather juridical authority flows from sacramental consecration which means (from the perspective of canon law) that legislation does not proceed from the perspective of juridical power: the code is complementary to the Council, which remains the central point of reference, as opposed to being the means for an authentic interpretation of the Council. [289]

## Recommendations

### *Recommendation 1: Restore the Diocesan Pastoral Council which builds priest and lay consultation into a single constitutional body.*

Our research suggests that the Council of Laity does not facilitate a wider reception of conciliar documents to the extent that while it was designed to give wider representative voice to the laity, it has not assisted in mutual relations between clergy and laity in practice. Moreover, the explicit relation between the dissolution of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the subsequent establishment of a Strategy Group (composed of priests) arguably precludes wider lay contribution to strategic thinking. The Council of Laity is now given-over principally to aspects of formation (e.g. the sacraments and shaped spiritual conversation in communion with the Bishop) rather than governance which introduces a problematic separation of politics and spirituality (arguably repeating the secular split: the laity can deal in spiritual matters, while political structures are given over to a specialist group).

Canon law states that the Diocesan Pastoral Council is not obligatory but left to the discretion of the bishop when circumstances suggest the need for such, and a pastoral council, like the Council of Laity, only possesses a consultative vote. But there are different models of what consultation can involve and the force it can have. Unlike the Council of Priests, it does not even have to be heard: 'It belongs to the diocesan bishop alone to convoke it according to the needs of the apostolate and to preside over it; it also belongs to him alone to make public what has been done in the council'. [290] However, as Myriam Wijlens's points out, 'while the code states that the council only has a consultative voice, it is entirely possible for the bishop to bind himself to hear or obtain consent by determining this within the determining statutes

---

[288] As the introduction to the revised code of canon law states: careful attention was to be paid to all the decrees and acts of the Second Vatican Council since they contain the main lines of legislative renewal either because norms were issued which directly affected new institutes and ecclesiastical discipline, or because it was necessary that the doctrinal riches of the Council, which contributed so much to pastoral life, have their consequences and necessary impact on canonical legislation'. For a critical appreciation of this point, see Myriam Wijlenss, 'The Doctrine of the People of God and Hierarchal Authority as Service in Latin Church Legislation on the Local Church,' *The Jurist*, 68 (2008), 328-349.

[289] Wijlens, 'The Doctrine of the People of God and Hierarchical Authority as Service in Latin Church Legislation on the Local Church,' 330.

[290] Code of Canon Law 514 §1

of council at local level; i.e. one can, with theological consideration, implement doctrine beyond the explicit provision of law'.[291]

Moreover, recalling the sensus fidelium the bishop could use a model of obligatory consultation for either council before making a decision, as provided for in canon 127, n. 2, which finds its doctrinal basis in the claim that the Holy Spirit is active in all baptized:

> the participation of all the faithful would give an expression to the doctrine of the common priesthood of all. Each would activate the one priesthood of Christ in a particular way.[292]

The doctrine express well the intention of reform: the church is no longer seen primarily as a juridical authority, rather juridical authority flows from sacramental consecration. From the perspective of canon law, this means that legislation does proceed from the perspective of juridical power, rather it proceeds from what the faithful can do in virtue of the sacraments they have received and in which they participate. In other words, legislation proceeds not from what the lay cannot do through lack of orders, but what they can do on the basis of their participation.[293] Hence one notes in *Lumen Gentium*, that it only focuses on the hierarchy in detail in the third chapter, the first two chapters focus instead on our commonality in baptism which proceeds all distinction (i.e. it does not as in the 1917 code start from the perspective of office-holders). As Wijlens's has suggested, the community finds its origins in Christ, and leadership exercised is thus a service to Christ, so there should not be a struggle between hierarchy and laity, because all faithful should be orientated to Christ. Thus the church must point beyond itself and lives its mission according to these criteria. Power and authority cannot be anything other than the authority of Christ.

## *Recommendation II: All parishes should have Parish Pastoral Councils.*

Parish councils should be deemed a requisite and the chair a statutory member of the Council of Laity or, preferably, of a DPC. The formal structure they provide in existing churches provides an administrative and governmental bridge in the inevitable – if current models of ministry are maintained – process of clustering. However, such measures also require the relevant training for lay leadership to be provided at cluster/deanery level for parish level governance. Vatican II suggests the possibility of parish councils serving in conjunction with the Diocesan Pastoral Council:

> In dioceses, insofar as possible, there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the charitable, social, or other spheres, and here it is fitting that the clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity. While preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will be able to promote the mutual coordination

---

[291] Myriam Wijlens, 'The Doctrine of the People of God and Hierarchal Authority as Service in Latin Church Legislation on the Local Church,' *The Jurist*, 68 (2008) 328-349, 335. See Canon 536 §2. 'A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop'.
[292] *Lumen Gentium* §10
[293] Myriam Wijlens, 'The Doctrine of the People of God, ' p. 339.

of various lay associations and enterprises'. (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity).[294]

This insight from Vatican II was given legislative status in canon law:

> If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.[295]

However, there remains some contention around the code's interpretation of Vatican II on this matter. The issue pertains to the level of administrative governance facilitated by such councils on the part of the laity. Canon 537 states that in each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop. One way to interpret this is to say that the requirement of a finance committee – and not a parish council – is a means to limit the laity in their administrative dealings of the parish, and thereby ensuring the major part of their input is the consultative voice in pastoral matters. However as Wijlens points out, whereas the code places the onus on the bishop to judge whether PPCs are needed, the 2004 Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, *Apostolorum Successore,* inverts the sentiment: parish councils are desirable unless the parishioners suggest otherwise.[296] Moreover, when we read the above in the light of communion ecclesiology, the parish can be said to exist for the parish, and not simply for the priest. That is to say, it is a place to reflect under the guidance of the priest who maintains the point of decision-making in consultation.[297] And while canon law gives only a consultative voice to the Council, it does not, as Wijlens puts it, 'prevent him [the priest] from not listening'.[298]

## *Recommendation III: Pastoral Area Councils need to overlap with cluster meetings.*

There are currently eighteen deaneries compared to eleven clusters.[299] Yet because clusters are concerned with the sharing of resources and have a greater impact on the laity (deaneries remain largely administrative) the shift to a more coherent and concerted structure of clusters remains imperative. In the provision of clusters, formal streams of finance need to be considered.

## *Recommendation IV: Develop governance roles for the laity in the life of their Local Church and Parish Church. In particular, as more and more parishes*

---

[294] *Apostolicam* Actuositatem, Pope John Paul VI, Nov. 18, 1965. §26.
[295] Code of Canon Law 536 §1.
[296] *Apostolorum Successore*, §210.
[297] Code of Canon Law 536.
[298] Wijlens, 'Parish Pastoral Councils: From a Theological Vision to a Lived Reality,' 145. This finds its basis in Canon 127 §1: 'When it is established by law that in order to act a superior needs the consent or counsel of some college or group of persons, the college or group must be convoked according to the norm of ⇒ Can. 166 unless, when it concerns seeking counsel only, particular or proper law provides otherwise. For such acts to be valid, however, it is required that the consent of an absolute majority of those present is obtained or that the counsel of all is sought'.
[299] See http://www.rcdhn.org.uk/index.php (last accessed August 19, 2013).

*are clustered or amalgamated in the absence of a priest, deaconship becomes an increasingly valued leadership role for communities. Married men should continue to be encouraged into the role, along with women?*

Controversy still reigns as to whether the pressing needs of today's Church warrant the restoration of the permanent diaconate for women, as they do regarding the place of deaconesses in the early Church. St. Paul refers to Phoebe as a deacon of the Church (Ro 16:1), listing her qualities in a parallel way to male deacons (1 Tim 3:11). The *Didasclaia Apostolorum* (circa 230 AD) – attests to the existence of deaconess (Chapter II, ii26). The *Constitutiones Apostolorum* (375 to 380 AD) witnesses their rite of ordination through the imposition of hands, and the Council of Chalcedon states 'No woman under forty years of age is to be ordained [*cheirotonian*] a deacon'[300]

While deaconesses flourished in the Eastern Church, the Western Church prohibited their institution. Although as Blyskal points out, there is evidence of a Latin Pontifical which contains a prayer for instituting a deaconess to govern a group of pious women, and the Pontifical of St. Alban of Mainz included a Mass for instituting a deaconess complete with the bestowal of the diaconal stole in the seventh century.[301] From the fifteenth century onwards one also finds the Roman Pontifical reproducing allusions to the deaconesses of earlier pontifical and a special prayer of institution, albeit followed only in Benedictine houses.[302]

However, while history attests to their existence, the question remains: what was the nature of their consecration? Broadly speaking there are two schools. The first argues that ancient church practice in the West forbade the laying on of hands for women, their duties were limited, and they had no liturgical function in contrast to deacons. The second school argues that the laying on of hands described in the *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, and the decree from the Council of Chalcedon which in stating 'No woman under forty years of age is to be ordained a deacon'[303] employs the Greek verb *cheirotonian*, makes a strong case that women were indeed ordained.

Through analysis of the consecratory prayer contained in the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* Blyskal highlights the values of communion and mission which underlined the role of the deaconess, continuing a line of holy women called to fulfil God's plan by 'witnessing to the hierarchical communion within the Church, and by ministering particularity to the needs of women within the church'.[304] In this way Blyskal is able to link the role of the deaconess to the contemporary value of communion ecclesiology affirmed by *Lumen Gentium*.

---

[300] Council of Chalcedon, Canon 15.

[301] Lucy Blyskal, 'The Relevance of the Deaconess to the Values of the Communion and Mission in the Church' *The Jurist*, 56 (1996) 241-266, 246.

[302] Blyskal, 'The Relevance of the Deaconess to the Values of the Communion and Mission in the Church'. See also Aimé Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, p. 234.

[303] Council of Chalcedon, Can 15.

[304] Blyskal, 'The Relevance of the Deaconess to the Values of the Communion and Mission in the Church', p. 252.

Moreover, Blyska recalls the Second Vatican Council's closing statement on women: *Aux Femmes* (1965) which recognised the moment as the 'hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved'[305] As Blyskal puts it: 'the life and ministry of a deaconess would demonstrate that the Church is a communion where all enjoy a fundamental equality, the power of the Holy Spirit functions in different ways by the individual members' and just as they were necessary to promote the Value of communion in the early church, so too they might foster those values today.[306]

While Pope John Paul II explicitly declared that the Church has no authority to confer priestly ordination on women, the Vatican's commentary on the 1977 declaration on 'Women in the Ministerial Priesthood' stated that that the declaration did not deal with deaconesses because 'in any case, it is a question that must be taken up fully by direct study of the texts, without preconceived ideas'. Hence the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has judged that it should be kept for the future and not touched upon in the present document.[307]

Given the continuing shortage of priests and decline in numbers of women religious in the global north (and with that their contribution to education, social care, and the likes) might women potentially be being called to sacramental diaconal service in the life and ministry of the Church? As our own study indicates, lay women currently represent two thirds of the church. Can we continue to ignore the specialist ministry they bring to all lay, but especially women?

Reflecting the long-standing practices of the church, canon 1024 restricts sacramental ordination to baptized men, yet as Blyskal points out, given the historical development of deaconesses, and that the limitation of diaconal ordination to men is 'merely ecclesiastical law' its modification is within the competence of the church.[308] Moreover, canon 447 affords particular churches the appropriate means for pastoral accommodation to local circumstances by encouraging 'forms and programs of the apostolate fittingly adapted to the circumstances of time and place'. The restoration of the permanent diaconate is one such example of the attempt to make good on the need for pastoral accommodation, as well as making good on the principles of subsidiarity and diversity.

Many women are already undertaking forms of service which amount to doing diakonia. Ordained as such they would be endowed with sacramental grace, given greater ministerial effectiveness and help address what the diocese calls the 'diminished' church. The Diocese is already leading a push to encourage married men to the permanent deaconate as a means of giving concrete expression to *Lumen Gentium*. Would not the Diocese find greater success in considering the place of deaconesses?

---

[305] 'Mais l'heure vient, l'heure est venue, où la vocation de la femme s'accomplit en plénitude, l'heure où la femme acquiert dans la cité une influence, un rayonnement, un pouvoir jamais atteints jusqu'ici' Aux Femmes (1965).
[306] Blyskal, 'The Relevance of the Deaconess to the Values of the Communion and Mission in the Church,' 254.
[307] 'Commentary on the Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood,' (1976)
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html.
[308] 1983 Code of Canon Law 11.

*Recommendation IV: The Diocese explores the possibility of other models of ordained ministry.*

The Diocese should explore as a further recommendation that it learn (as a whole) about married ordained ministry and alternate models of ordained ministry like non-stipendiary and part-time ministry from other traditions. Indeed, the Council of Priests has already requested Bishop Seamus to take this issue to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

## Moving Forward

1. The above recommendations imply first of all a theological question: What does it mean to share as laity in the threefold ministry through baptism? Baptism is something we all share, yet what is it specifically about the interpretation of baptism within other denominations that facilitates lay participation. Here the Catholic diocese has much to learn from the Methodists or United Reformed Church: what is it about the theological understanding of baptism that Methodists and United Reformed Church carry that facilitates this participation? To take Methodism as an example, both Methodists and Catholics share baptismal practices, in particular baptizing with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and believe that 'God's saving love in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ precedes our articulation of belief, and therefore baptize infants as well as adults'. However, despite the similarities differences comes to light when baptism is understood in terms of their respective approaches to the relation of faith to church. For example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that 'It is the Church that believes first, and so bears, nourishes and sustains my faith.... It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism'.[309] In contrast, while Methodists nonetheless professes the faith of the universal church the emphasis is primarily on the personal decision of the believer in Jesus Christ. Again, the point is not that the Catholic Church repudiates the emphasis on the individual's faith, but to note the difference of emphasis placed by Methodism and the way that such an emphasis is reflected in the high levels of engaged membership.

2. Recommendations two and three pose the questions: what practically can other denominations teach us about structures to implement lay participation at both regional level and the level of the parish? To take the former, why not address the implementation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council within the existing Council of Laity and learn from the Methodist Church synod which allows for a routine process of memorials which invokes concise discussion and voting, thereby providing the raw data for informed consultation, making good on what Pope Francis calls 'synodality,'[310] which cannot only apply to episcopal collegiality, but to the whole people at all levels: parish, local church, universal church. In other words, in developing both a Diocesan Pastoral Council or the existing Council of Laity, how might a greater sense of synodality be developed within their statutes? To take the

---

[309] Catechism of the Catholic Church.
[310] Address of His Holiness Pope Francsis on the occasion of the Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall, 17 Oct. 2015.

latter, the Church of England has a long tradition of pastoral parish councils. One could imagine a cross-fertilisation of practice by inviting Anglicans or vice versa to such councils giving an entirely novel twist to shared local ministry – rather, shared practice for governance.

3. The Anglican experience of Team Ministry (i.e. a formal collaborative ministry established to serve a particular benefice which may include more than one parish) offers an example of the type of ministry which is suited to clusters. Team ministry should extend to the role of the laity and their active contribution in the sharing of worship resources etc. in a bid to win back the sense of spiritual creativity in the life of the community. It is noted that training provisions are already offered through the Diocese although the channels continue to function primarily at deanery/diocesan level.

4. One feature of Methodist and Anglican ecclesiology shared by the Roman Catholic Church is the role of the permanent diaconate. The differences pertain to the ordination of women to the role of deaconess. What can the Diocese learn from the experiences of both men and women in these positions with a view to the further development of the permanent diaconate within the Diocese?

   *Lumen Gentium* states:

   If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God. And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ. For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need.[311]

The above recommendations have the reception of *Lumen Gentium* in their sights. They aim to facilitate a working and meaningful relation between lay and ordained, in particular through the development of a DPC. Yet this relation must carried through at deanery/cluster level and parish level, the three levels intertwined and mutually informing, facilitating the necessary changes within the diocese as a whole. The proposals would require a new impetus for lay training in areas of governance, as well as opening up a meaningful role for women in the church in a way which gives explicit recognition to their existing participation, crucially encouraging women into roles for a future church. Arguably such lay participation would challenge the very direction of the current strategy by rendering smaller parishes more viable in terms of supporting a community of Christian worship.

---

[311] *Lumen Gentium* §32

# The Northern Baptist Association

## Introduction

Our initial recommendations recognised that while congregational in outlook, Baptist churches would benefit from fostering greater interdependency through the cultivation of translocal ministry. This could help balance out the dangers of isolationism which congregational ecclesiology can foster. This recommendation is not simply a matter of expediency in the light of church attendance and provisions—although, the need to finance mission or ministers remains a challenge to an isolated church. Rather, the aim is to foster the effective collaboration that many individual Baptists aspire (and to which The Nature of Assembly recognises), whilst affirming the 'interdependence of congregations'.[312]

## Recommendations

### *Recommendation I: Interdependence of congregations'*

1. In the first instance the interdependency of Methodism lends itself to thinking through Baptist issues to the extent that presbyters and ministers undertake roles beyond the confines of their local congregation: the connexional principle, such that churches are grouped into circuits with Circuit Superintendents who in principle exercise oversight, fostering vision and encouraging collaboration. Baptist ministers could receive the practice of this ministry driven by the requirements of the local church. Arguably, the structure of Methodism and its financial underpinnings do not commend themselves to Baptist structures and ecclesiology. However, in this regard the Baptists could receive from the experience of the United Reform Church; the Northern Synod has dismantled its middle tier, formally called 'the district,' first in favour of informal partnerships with a view to resourcing mission (Mission Partnerships), some of which have subsequently evolved into Pastorates, groups of churches – usually two (Joint Pastorates). Pastorates are predicated on a formal 'statement of intent governing the way in which they relate to one another in relation to the sharing of ordained ministry'.[313] In contrast to Methodist Circuits, which are standardised across the connexion, pastorates may be drawn up between churches. Churches in pastorates thereby retain their own identity, along with Elders and the Local Church Meeting, although decisions relating to calling a minister are undertaken jointly.

2. Joint Pastorates would also enable a shared strategic platform for mission and discipleship which while remaining sensitive to the inward bonds of trust found in local churches, provide the opportunity to widen the mission understanding.

3. A joint ecumenical day on 'Shared Churches' could be organised with a view to the differing denominational experiences of shared ministry to facilitate the cultural shift and provide tools to develop local programs of discipleship with that in mind.

---

[312] See, B.U.G.B., *The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain*, 1994), 6. http://www.baptist.org.uk/search.html?searchword=nature&searchphrase=all&start=20  (accessed #)
[313] http://www.urc.org.uk/62-general/the-manual/597-the-structure-of-the-urc.html

4. Where Regional Assembly is perceived to operate according to a consultative model, as identified by our interviewees, a more deliberative model would encourage participation in Assembly with a view to the independent churches. The various practices of the United Reformed Church and Methodist Synod commend themselves in this regard.

First, 'interdependence of congregations'. There must be an understanding of Baptist ecclesiology driving such considerations, which flows from the gathered local church. There are no intermediate bodies or national structures which are awarded ecclesiological status. One cannot speak of the Baptist Church in the way one does the Church of England, rather as David Carter puts it, it is a:

> voluntary association of many local churches, all of which retain the sovereign right, under the lordship of the risen Christ with whom they are directly in covenant in response to His gathering of them, to order all their affairs including the calling of a pastor.[314]

In other words, God does not impose a Covenant on people, rather it flows from God's gratuitous nature, and it is constituted on the basis of a voluntary and mutual agreement; God enters freely into the covenant with his people. Hence, the church is the result of the free activity of God. Indeed as Kevin Dare suggests, 'God's people, as individuals and as the gathered community, seek to follow God's ways, fulfilling his requirements and receiving his blessings'.[315] Moreover, the theology of covenant underpins the act of regeneration of believers moved by the Spirit to unite together as a corporate church. Therefore, an association by covenant runs contrary to the formal constitution of church through coercive governmental means—e.g., the Charity Commission. In short, a covenant community is local by nature, the result of a particular, visible group of believers united in confession.

It is precisely a Baptist ecclesiology that calls for the need for greater inter-dependency between churches. In fact, the covenant that exists between the members of a Baptist church, reiterates the gathering of people by Christ, as well as the fellowship God elects within himself in Christ, and hence all humanity. Or as 'What We Believe' puts it, the local church and its meeting is the place where members:

> come together to discern the mind of Christ and to make decisions that have authority … there is by extension the need for churches to work together to discern the mind of Christ. Just as no individual Christian lives out their faith in isolation, so no Christian community should do so either. Baptists belong together, in relationships of interdependence, with responsibilities to walk together and watch over one another.[316]

David Neil, a past secretary of the Northern Baptist Association and minister, also records in The Baptists of the North East of England (Durham 2006) that the independency of the local

---

[314] Carter, D. and Fiddes, P. 'Baptist Ecclesiology: Article Review and Response' in *Ecclesiology* 1.3 (2005) 87–100], 87.

[315] Kevin Dare, 'Ways of Belonging: The Baptist way of being a church in the light of current sociological and cultural trends' (2003). http://www.beestonbaptists.org.uk/docstore/76.pdf .

[316] 'Knowing What We Believe: Theological Authority amongst Baptists,' The Baptist Union of Great Britain, Faith and Unity Executive, 2009.

church is 'a distinctive feature of Baptist churchmanship from the beginning'[317] Although Neil notes that the question of interdependency had been raised a number of times, he argues that the fundamental issue here is discerning the right pattern of governance that enables congregations to serve the Kingdom, rather than emphasizing independence as sacred.

It can be argued from a Baptist understanding of the universal church, that just as individual Baptist churches need the resources of other local churches—both directly (practical sharing) and indirectly (through contributions to the home mission grant)—to discern the mind of Christ in its provision of wider mission, so does the Assembly as a whole (ecumenically, despite their alternate structures, episcopacy or otherwise). Does not the theological and ecclesiological heritage of the current Union—rooted in the Calvinism for Particular Baptists and Arminianism for General Baptists—testify to this ecumenical imperative?

## *Recommendation 2: Translocal Ministry*

1. Translocal ministry should be developed regionally, in the light of the Methodist connexion. The general Secretary of the Methodist Conference, Martyn Atkins has argued that 'It is crucial to realise afresh that our commitment to connexionalism is primarily a spiritual commitment before it is a descriptor of our structures'.[318] In other words, one way to understand the spiritual connexion is through a wider appreciation of precisely what it means to be a covenant church and vice-a-versa.

2. By way of incentivising translocal ministry, churches in receipt of a Home Mission Grant could be formally asked to consider shared ministry as condition of receipt.

3. The cultural shift from a church and its minister to shared ministry and church grouping has also been marked in the Catholic tradition: clustering. Reflection on the experience of Catholic clustering from the perspective of the laity could facilitate the cultural shift within the Northern Baptist Association.

Initial suggestions regarding translocal ministry as a means to foster interdependency grew out of reflection on the Methodist connexion—to the extent that presbyters and ministers undertake roles beyond the confines of their local congregation. And while the structure of Methodism and its financial underpinnings do not commend themselves to Baptist structures or ecclesiology, there are possible lessons to be learnt from the United Reform Church. The United Reformed Church-Northern Synod has dismantled its middle tier–formally called 'the district–in favour of more informal partnerships with a view to resourcing mission through 'Mission Partnerships'. Subsequently, this evolved into Pastorates, or groups of churches– usually two 'Joint Pastorates'. Pastorates are predicated on a formal statement of intent that governs the way in which independent churches relate to one another, with special reference to the sharing of ordained ministry. In contrast to Methodist Circuits (which are standardised across the connexion), pastorates may be drawn up between churches. Thus, churches can retain their own identity along with Elders and the Local Church Meeting, although decisions

---

[317] See pg. 153.
[318] 'Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission 'The General Secretary's Report' (2011).

relating to calling a minister are undertaken jointly. In short, pastorates enable a shared strategic platform for mission and discipleship, while remaining sensitive to the inward bonds of trust found in local churches and structure of congregation decision making.

David Neil's research points out that Joint Pastorates have already been featured within the Northern Baptist Association . However, Neil suggests that joint pastorates were unsuccessful and created a series of issues such as the location of the minister's residence and allocation of time. Moreover, the need for a minister is by no means necessary or an incentive. Neil cites the case of Esh Winning which survived for 65 years without the need to seek a pastor from outside the community. The key to understanding this dynamic within the church was the emphasis awarded to a Preacher Training class, which was a part of the church's weekly programme that fostered a serious study of the Bible with a view to preaching.

However, Neil suggests, Joint Pastorates are still worth addressing, but not as a measure driven by the survival of a church. For example, where individual churches need, but cannot meet the expense, of a full-time pastor then Joint Pastorates should arise out of the call to mission. Although financial resources, for a minister may provide an incentive for joint pastorates, these initiatives can only be received authoritatively as they arise from the church's desire to gather for mission. This reflects the ecclesiological shape of Baptist churches: joint pastorates cannot be imposed but must organically arise. If this is the case, then the question of translocal ministry can be best approached from 'below' so to speak; i.e., through a consideration of the roles that Elders and Deacons may have in this regard. In other words, the key to fostering translocal ministry lies within a cultural shift in the perception of the tasks of Elders and Deacons as a covenanted community.

## *Recommendation 3: Elders and Deacons*

1. Eldership: A number of questions should be posed regarding the role of elders, answering them in tandem with ecumenical partners (formal or otherwise), such as:

- How do elders think about 'locality' or 'place'? Especially within a postmodern context?

- Do elders think of their congregations or wider contexts?

- How does eldership function when congregations move to being one church in different buildings?

- How would elders learn to identify within groups of churches?

- What does a 'culture' of eldership suggest to you?

    When posed ecumenically, the question can be asked: ecclesiologically, what can the Northern Baptist Association learn from the other traditions in regard to their theology of elders and deacons? For example, what can the Baptist tradition learn from the Presbyterian element of the URC, which gives theological consideration to the place of eldership? These questions may best be posed in terms of an ecumenical study day.

2. Deacons: A number of similar questions should be posed regarding the role of deacons. The aim is to increase the importance of deaconship within a translocal economy, rooted in a covenant ecclesiology.

   a. For example, notwithstanding any legal status afforded to a minister by statute, the church recognises that the minister and the church are in a relationship based on Christian love and trust and mutual accountability.

   b. A minister shall be in the first instance in a relationship of mutual accountability with deacons, elders (if any), and also with the church meeting.

   c. If a theology of covenant is to be developed translocally, then one should readdress the provisions for understanding the above.

Elders are lay leaders recognised in and appointed by a local church. The actual definition varies: with some churches regarding elders as sharing in the spiritual oversight with the minister; and others as helping with pastoral support of church members. Deacons are lay leaders recognised in, and appointed by a local church and they are expected to oversee the business of the church and to share in the spiritual oversight with the minister and others.[319] For example, the BUC guideline leaflet *Help I'm a Deacon* states, 'Good relationships among church leaders are essential. The Deacons and any other members of leadership groups should be committed to one another as well as to the whole church. Deacons meetings and church members meetings must be a priority.[320] But how might this literature be rewritten for a regional level, with a view to translocal ministry? Developing diaconal themes should be more broadly developed and set in terms of the context of eldership governance, focused in each case upon the increased interdependency of local congregations. Again, these are best explored through an ecumenical appreciation of other modes of diaconal ministry. For example, what can the Northern Baptist Association gain from an appreciation of the permanent diaconate in Catholicism or Anglicanism?

Baptist churches are also charities and as such, subject to the general requirements of charity law—the main provisions are found in the Charities Act 2011. The law regards the people who actually have the general control and management of the administration of a charity as the charity trustees. In the case of a Baptist church, these charity trustees are usually the minister and deacons. If the church has elders, then they are included as well. If the church has a leadership team (instead of Deacons and/or elders), then this group would be regarded as the charity trustees. In a Baptist church, the church meeting has ultimate authority with regard to any decisions taken by the church. However, when it comes to the law, the church′s leaders are held responsible for the church′s decisions. Therefore, in speaking about elders or deacons one must recognise their principal commitment as trustees to their congregation. The implications of this for translocal ministry are twofold: 1) elders and deacons can become a management group that entrenches congregations in routine ways, rather than a potent body that moves their church forward. 2) ecclesiology can be eclipsed through the imposition of

---

[319] Claydon, J. Bound Together n the Liberty of Christ: Renewing Baptist collaboration in mission. Durham E-Thesis. 2013.
[320] BUC Guideline Leaflet C16, *Help I'm a Deacon*.

charity law, such that the church becomes modelled on voluntary societies and voluntary agencies (rather than recognising the way voluntary societies and agencies are already a parody of church mission). How then can elders and deacons function more solidly within a translocal ministry to foster interdependency? And what can they receive within an ecumenical economy?

### *Recommendation 4: Training*

1. Training: adequate provision for training must be established in support of the above, and more generally in terms of discipleship. Many churches operate small groups, with Bible study at their heart, approached through a range of other issues such as a discussion about prayer, symbols and sacraments, or about other faiths. In some instances, groups emerge from a desire on the part of the lay people to meet and study – or reflect together; in others, groups are seen as an integral part of the church's life. How can the culture of discipleship be cultivated through eldership?

## Moving Forward

In the time of persecution, the earliest Baptist churches found fellowship and comfort in the translocal nature of Baptism. This was driven ecclesiologically by the need for churches to come together in discerning the will of Christ. Today, the issues are driven by an increasingly secular culture, declining numbers, and loss of translocal fellowship. This manifests in an increasingly inward orientation of churches, driven by the demographics of its congregations who look more for support and confidence within their own groups rather than an outward facing mission. The above recommendations envision a church that must balance (like the present Baptist Union with its roots in General and Particular Baptists) the autonomy of the local congregation with the wider translocal appreciation of covenantal, rather than governmental theology. In this way, churches would retain their autonomy, but elders and deacons would undertake a wider shared ministry in the spirit of covenant, developing the potential for greater links between Baptist churches in the discernment of Christ's mission. In short, the place of the regional assembly would arguably change with consultation giving way to increased deliberation on the part of members, facilitated by the real need for structural change within their own congregations.

# The Methodist Districts of Newcastle and Darlington

## Introduction

On the whole, the Methodists are doing many things right when it comes to balancing local congregations with significant structural oversight. Our research indicates that they have a lot to offer in an ecumenical setting of shared ecclesial learning. However, our research also indicates some areas of improvement in the form of operative contradictions within Methodism in the North-East of England. In light of the general decline in attendance (felt by all denominations), Methodists are:

1. Recuperating the financial and personnel resources by placing more pressure on local ministry teams to develop ecumenical partnerships, fresh expressions, and justify local mission initiatives.

2. At an institutional level, smaller circuits are being absorbed into larger ones and future plans are being drawn up for the amalgamation of districts.

Our research indicates a structural dilemma that obscures the historical connexional principle: a simultaneous emphasis upon centralisation of the institution, and an emphasis upon local autonomy risk an evacuated middle. Moreover, the proliferation of local fresh expressions can be perceived as a threat at circuit level. Fresh expressions, along with Venture Fx, do not easily fit into a traditional circuit, raising questions as to the collective funding of such ventures, and the stationing of ministers. In extreme cases, should a church become too independent, the very meaningfulness of the circuit is put into jeopardy? This is evidenced in the case of Hexham Trinity Church where the congregation was spilt by the decision of one half to move with their minister. In other words, a congregation's mentality engendered a commitment to a minister and not the circuit. All of this is compounded by the national mechanisms of rationalisation and centralisation which have seen the closure of the regionally based Wesley study centre, and thus the means to address lay formation practices which, as we have argued, further engender an insular discipleship.

In light of this current situation, we recommend that to retain the Methodist identity of structural flexibility and oversight, circuits must be revisited along with the underlying connexional principle.

Putting this into an ecumenical context initially raises some interesting question. In the light of diminishing resources – financial and human, and a process of rationalisation, some denominations have looked to the circuit as a model which gives expression to a more generalised need for translocal ministry and mission support, be it parish-sharing or clustering. Arguably this misses the point that first: The circuit has its foundation in the invitation by several religious societies for John Wesley to visit them. The circuit therefore was not driven by a reaction to a diminishing church, rather the very opposite. Second: the circuit is an ecclesial and constitutional element of the Methodist Church and while there may be lessons to be learnt, there is no evidence of an ecclesial commitment to such a model. Third, because the circuit is constitutional, it cannot be under threat. However, regarding the latter, the international perspective offered by the Methodist Church of New Zealand highlights that it is entirely possible to envisage the Methodist Church organisationally without a circuit and part of the perspectival shift required of Methodists may be precisely to view the circuit from the perspective of a minority: Methodism may need to receive the way in which other denominations view it, even while ecclesiologically at odds with it. This is not to suggest that they view it as a temporary measure rather than a constitutional aspect of their ecclesiology, but that they receive what it is that the temporary call perceives pragmatically and ecclesiologically. This, we suggest, serve as the basis for the recovery of a healthy approach to the circuit, the means to develop their own heritage anew, whilst reclaiming it at the same time.

In practice this may mean looking at the particular issues that arise for a congregation as that congregation pertains to the circuit and in line with the Methodist calling. For example, if as

Anglican studies have suggested, the length of tenure in post is positively correlated with growth, especially where congregations have strong family representation, might the stationing of ministers within the circuit be extended in such churches? And to combat congregationalism, the circuit may also wish to explore ecumenically discipleship formation to include wider circuit level concerns rather than limit it to local family-style concerns. This might include for example, contrasting the way questions arises in, say, the context of a meeting of Catholic clusters with Methodist circuit meetings including the way that pastoral oversight is met as the idea of a church 'community' is stretched with ever-increasing disregard for traditional geographical boundaries. And if the circuits are amalgamating, to what extent is the process of rationalisation in conversation with the roles of 'greater churches' in the Anglican tradition, one of the key areas of growth within the Anglican Church? Furthermore, the issue of the connexion and the circuit can be addressed by re-examining the place of the superintendent minister.

How is the superintendents' role defined and understood and how coherent is that role? In our interviews, the task of the circuit superintendent was understood by one minister: not to 'interfere in the day to day running of the Circuit' rather, 'making sure the right people are in the positions of senior management to run those establishments,' allowing them to 'manage in their way and not tell them what to do […] our role is to support them'. The suggestion here is that the role is seen less in terms of spiritual oversight so much as change-management. So while one local perception of the circuit was recorded as being to 'enable local churches to exercise their mission, others commenting on the district and circuit simultaneously said: 'Principally reactive, rather than pro-active. Methodism was born in a different age, and we spend so much time trying to maintain them, but we never get time to sit around and say, if we could start again. We are constantly adapting and adjusting to the latest pressures put upon us.'

Is there a sense as some have argued that superintendents need to recover personal episcope, as distinctive from general episcope, a robust theology of representative ministry which has been arguably lost at congregational level evidenced in their comments? Said otherwise, to what extent has the success of lay ministry within the Methodist Church worked against the connexional principle by undermining the ordained status of the superintendent minister?

The rationalisation of circuits into wider geographical areas is only going to compound the difficulties in more rural areas for circuitous travel, and hence their reception by the local congregation. In short, is there a sense in which a renewed vocation is needed to be restored to a ministry which is no longer treated connexionally? Or, how can the Methodist Church re-render connexional thinking as normative? This, arguably, is of course not just a matter of reassessing the theological importance of the minister, but also the reception of the minister, whose authority qua the circuit must issue primarily from the churches; i.e. their authority must be recognised.

## Recommendations

1. Develop programs of formation to allow for the strengths of congregational formation (i.e. close ties of friendship in Christ) while remaining attentive to wider circuit level concerns, both practical (e.g. resourcing for mission) and theological (e.g. enacting

the body of Christ) in ways which drive home the ecclesial significance of Methodism's unique contribution to the ecumenical scene: the connexion.

2. Reassess the role of the circuit superintendent with an emphasis on the theological nature of oversight. This would help impress upon local churches the theological value of the connexion through his or her representative ministry.

3. Assess how can superintendents can work more proactivity rather than reactive to the current forces of circuit rationalisation. This might include for example developing the theological understanding of oversight to include a prophetic role alongside the priestly and kingly aspects of oversight.

4. Encourage superintendents to identify the charisms on offer in the congregations in ways that promote the connexional principle.

5. Encourage stewards to consider the 'culture' of their officership in both socio-practical and theological terms.

## Moving Forward

### *Ecumenical:*

1. One way to recover connexionalism is to re-evaluate the role of the superintendent qua representative of connexionalism, i.e. recovering a representative ministry for the superintendent. This is not to suggest a form of ordination akin to bishops, but to suggest that the roles embodied in the episcopal tradition have much to offer in securing the unity of Methodist church. This is not to suggest a hierarchical understanding of episcopacy – resisted in Methodist ecclesiology – but to ask how the spiritual function of episcopacy, i.e. the 'unity' of the Body of Christ it represents, can be 'repeated' within Methodist ecclesiology. For example, strengthening the role of sacramental oversight given the superintendent (e.g. presiding over local services more often?) would strengthen the representative ministry of connexional unity. In other words, what matters is pneumatologically endowed communities rather than apostolic hierarchy – an entirely different way of the framing the problem to that of the spiritual connexion verses the practical function of the connexion. The practical function requires the former. In this the Methodist can receive much from connexional episcopacy at superintendent level as well as connexional episcopacy at conference level. To put the matter more particularly, given the strategic drive on the part of the Anglican Diocese of Durham to strengthen the role of the deanery, what might the Methodists learn from the Anglicans in this regard?

2. How might a more robustly sacramental vocation to the ministry be fostered for superintendents? Superintendents preside over the ministries of Word and sacrament, including worship and doctrine and exercise a personal episcope following Christ's servant ministry: priest, prophet and king – the threefold spiritual powers ascribed to the early apostolic bishops. How might superintendence in the Methodist Church be developed ecumenically in the light of Catholic and Anglican understandings of episcopacy?

# The Anglican Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle

## Introduction

One of the historic strengths of Anglican ecclesiology is the significance its accords to the consultative role of the clergy in the governance of the church, both regional (e.g. the council of laity) and local level (e.g. the PCC). Along with these governance roles, the laity also engages in a range of key ministerial positions, from initiatives around shared local ministry to reader ministry and authorised pastoral assistance to name but a few.

Yet increasingly it is the strategic drive around finance leading to the reduction of stipendiary ministry that has become synonymous with the drive to increase the participation of the laity. The reduction in full-time stipendiary ministers, and the rapid diminishment of traditional parish life in favour of 'big-church' worship or fresh expressions, has seen a renewed focus on the deanery as a key site of administration in the life of the parishes and the diocese as a whole. Administratively, financially, and pastorally, the deanery is key to developing opportunities for mission and community through various gospel expressions of church. By consolidating the deanery as the key site of governance and decision-making, both dioceses hope to provide more immediate and shared support for mission by fostering intra-church relations at parish level. This can be seen as a wholly beneficial move. In times of scarcity there can be a tendency on the part of church organisations to centralise governance at the regional level and consolidate church smaller units, and thereby risk an increased parochialism. Strengthening the deanery should preclude this.

However, as the deaneries take on an increasing administrative role a question is raised as to the ways in which they can foster an ecclesial identity and facilitate the participation of the laity to look not just in terms of their immediate communities but other local Anglican expressions. In other words, can deaneries really become the locus of shared Anglican identities in a way that connects to the diocese as a whole? Are deaneries an irrelevant body to the life of a parish as one priest suggested, or the chance to foster new pockets of vitality?

Both Durham and Newcastle have, over the course of our study, already recommended and implemented Deanery Development Plans[321] in line with the Synodical Government Measure 1969. For example, in Newcastle the Deanery Development plans invite deaneries to ask specifically:

- What people resources are needed over the next 5 years?
- What vacancies will arise in the next 5 years under normal circumstances?
- Are there Deanery wide roles that could be developed?
- How best do we deploy the available ministerial resources across the Deanery?
- What are the ministry development needs and what ministries are in development?
- Where do Diocesan Ministries fit in?

---

[321] For Newcastle see *Deaneries Development: A Guide*. Published by the Strategic Development Group, Diocese of Newcastle Advent, 2009; For Durham see *Diocesan Business Plan* 2016-2020. http://newsroom.durhamdiocese.net/plan-on-a-page-launched/ (last accessed 30.5.16).

Yet, these are precisely the questions to ask in a receptive ecumenical manner, with a view not just to 'best practices' but an enriching of Anglican ecclesiology. Indeed, in the Durham Diocese a white paper is already underway to look at how to do better at planning for 'mutual flourishing' across the different traditions within the diocese and the deaneries. Thus, these recommendations speak to that possibility a genuine ecumenical reception to facilitate the renewal of local church life.

## Recommendations

5. The Dioceses should explore the extent to which the four official locations of governance at diocesan level (bishop, diocesan synod, bishop's council, and the diocesan board of finance) enable a clear strategy to be articulated and its implementation enabled with a view to embedding local parishes in a shared strategy.
6. Given the increasing independent expressions of church and the already ecumenical makeup of its learning and formation, a sense of Anglican identity needs to be fostered in ways that speak to the unity of its regional (diocesan church), intermediate (deanery), and local (parish) context.  If, as the study suggests, formation is principally about fostering trusting relations within churches, then formation also needs to take on a regional expression *qua* mission and speak to Anglian identity in that respect.
7. The Anglicans have already developed a wealth of ministerial opportunities, lay and ordained alike (e.g. non-stipendiary ministry, reader ministry), yet Freehold, or its legal successors, and the legalities associated with parish reorganisation make rapid redeployment of clergy and pastoral reorganisation more difficult to achieve. There are both personal and structural rigidities – individuals, particularly clergy, but also parishes, which may choose not to participate in the diocesan strategy or who resist change. Anglicans should address the difficulties in encouraging parishes to cooperate and collaborate in the light of their traditional independence.
8. The diocese should explore further the enhancement of the deaneries as a key part of the organisational strategy. The existing shift to making deaneries the key site of financial administration should develop a sense of shared support in the work of individual churches within deaneries. In particular, deaneries need to foster:
    a. a shared ecclesial understanding, to develop patterns for formation alongside its mission which is also to the future of the Church;
    b. the role of the Area Dean and deanery ministries. Area Deans are more than an administrative post; when working well they serve as a sign of the Church's unity at deanery level enabling imaginative and embedded deanery wide roles to share and share *in* the Church's ministry and strategy.

## Moving Forward

1. Central to the governance of the diocese is the synod, but its practice is inscribed in such a way that, as suggested by one interviewee, it can descend into parliamentarianism and fail to express the unity of the Anglican Church. The Anglicans can learn from Catholic practices of synodality where the emphasis is on time-consuming and patient deliberation on key issues, leading to consensus between

clergy and laity. This of course relies on structures to facilitate such a space, and the issue is not restricted to the diocesan synod. Deaneries need to develop the existing structures in ways that facilitate catholic synodality, seeking a unified mind within local contexts, as shifting organisational changes are impressed upon communities.

2. Central to the development of the Dioceses is the need for a stronger middle tier of governance (the deanery) and the concomitant role of the Area or Rural Dean. In this regard, Anglicans can learn much from the patterns of Methodist circuit life and the role of the superintendents. Methodist ministers have a long tradition of operating within a circuit whilst nonetheless maintaining pastoral charge with a particular congregation or congregations in ways that anticipate the situation that Anglican governance must take account of (e.g. one priest serving a number of parishes/benefices).

3. Anglicans can learn from all the denominations about parish re-organisation and with an increased eye to the significance of the middle tier of governance (deaneries, circuits, or clusters). In the event that Deaneries become a site of increased focus, both administratively and pastorally in the exercise of mission, how might notions of Catholic subsidiarity inform restructuring?

4. Anglicanism can learn also from the Methodist exercises of oversight or personal episcope, where the emphasis lies not in the formal notion of the office as such, but its broader ministerial significance in personal, collegial, and communal relations. How for example might Methodist oversight inform the understanding of the dean and the role of key laity?

In enquiring after Anglican ecclesiology, one does well to start with Paul Avis's observations. Ever since the reformation Anglicans have had to ask how to be 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' when the very fracture *from* Rome was constitutive of the Anglican Church. This question has fundamentally shaped Anglican ecclesiological consideration.[322] While on the one hand Anglicans have seen themselves in continuity with Catholicism to the extent they profess 'the faith that is uniquely revealed in the Bible and set forth in the Catholic Creeds (i.e. the statements of faith developed in the Early Church that are still used in the Church's worship today)'[323] on the other hand, the Reformation highlighted both the paucity of a scriptural basis and the dangers of clericalism. Said otherwise, structures can get in the way of the gospel 'the true treasure of the Church" as Martin Luther put it.[324] As a result, Anglican ecclesiology has maintained a healthy self-critical awareness of structures alongside the commitment to word and sacrament and a sense of individual freedom, the heart of the English Reformation and the reformed character of Anglicanism.

This is evidenced for example by the 1948 Lambeth Report on Authority, which famously situated authority in Anglicanism as being 'dispersed'

> Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the
> early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine

---

[322] Paul Avis, The Identity of Anglicanism: The Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology, London: Bloomsbury, 2008, p. 3.
[323] See Canon C15 and 'Being an Anglican' https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/being-an-anglican.aspx
[324] Martin Luther, The 95 Thesis, No. 62

source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation, the authority of the eternal Father, the incarnate Son, and the life giving Spirit. It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of Saints, and the *consensus fidelium*, which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through His faithful people in the Church. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralized authority having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other.[325]

Hence in the Anglican Church, we find self-governing churches (freehold/benefices) that are interrelated; a Church decisively shaped through sensitivity to the cultural conditions that gave rise to the reformation, which continues to take the given cultural conditions as the basis for articulating gospel mission.

The situation it can be argued has, in the first instance, fostered a willingness on the part of Anglicans to accept some variation of doctrine and concomitantly a growing variety of worship forms and styles, grounded all the while in their foundational texts. Anglican ecclesiology therefore, while marked by a number of tensions which are sensitive to the conditions out which it arose, is as Avis suggest, characterised better, not in terms of *what* Anglican's believe, but *how* they do church.

Yet our study has highlighted amongst others the question as to whether deaneries as a structure continue to function in a proficient way. Deanery organisation needs to be attentive to the changing demographics, real and virtual, if it is to serve as the locus of shared Anglican ecclesial identity. Moreover, this needs to be undertaken in a way that connects to the diocese as a whole. What then, in this regard, can the Anglicans receive from the other traditions in ways that meet the ecclesiological self-understanding of the local parishes, gospel expressions, and the diocese as a whole?

The current Anglican-Methodist Covenant already encourages collaboration between deaneries and circuits and has provided some useful documents in this regard; it is worth rehearsing some of the key points[326] with a view to the issue of a stronger middle tier of governance (the deanery), the role of the dean, and the place of authority qua 'freehold'.

First, deaneries tend to be geographically defined as opposed to say mission; where the forma is a property of boundaries and hence an ontic measurement (i.e. it pertains to the facticity of the body), the second pertains to the ontological: the self-understanding of the church in the light of gospel mission.

Second, it follows that an Anglican priest has freehold, i.e. exercise autonomy within the given parish or benefice; whilst Methodist ministers operate within a circuit whilst nonetheless maintaining pastoral charge with a particular congregation or congregations.

---

[325] 'The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion', in *Authority in the Anglican Communion*, edited by Stephen W. Sykes. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1987.

[326] 'Deaneries and Circuits Partners in Mission: A briefing note' by John Cole, National Adviser (Unity in Mission) for the Church of England and member of the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.

Third, the deanery is presided over by a dean who acts on behalf of the bishop or archdeacon in a role that is largely administrative, e.g. functioning through synod and assisting in the allocation of the parish share. For example, Canon C 23 accounts for the role largely in terms of a 'reporting back' to the bishop on 'any case of serious illness or other form of distress amongst the clergy' and dealing with vacant parishes. In other words, this casts the deanery Synod in a 'reactive light'. By contrast, and despite the Methodist Church of Great Britain not having bishops, personal oversight (episcope) is exercised by district chairmen and circuit superintendents. The concept of 'oversight' within Methodism, ensures that the given roles are seen not merely in terms of governance (e.g. to ensure that information is co-ordinated between the levels) but pastoral, helping colleagues to 'inspire confidence in the Gospel of grace through their own spirituality of prayer, confidence, enthusiasm, happiness, and vulnerability and through their Bible study and theological reflection.'[327]

Fourth, Anglican deanery governance is exercised through the deanery synod, a deliberative body comprising the house of clergy and house of laity bringing together the views of the parishes as well as making known that which comes down from the diocese. The dean and a member of the house of laity, elected by that house, serve as joint chairs of the deanery synod, agreeing for example precisely who shall chair each meeting of the synod or particular items of business etc.

In Methodism, it is the superintendent minister who presides over the circuit staff (both lay and ordained) and the circuit meeting, sharing a collegial and communal 'episcope' with the circuit stewards and other ministers, undertaking responsibility for the ministry, mission, and life of the circuit's congregations. Hence responsibility for the direction and policy for the circuit is shared between lay and ordained.

Fifth: both deaneries and circuits operate of level of fiscal responsibility with deaneries deciding/assisting on the parish share and circuits taking financial decisions regarding the costs of ministry.

However, as stated, authority in Anglicanism is 'dispersed'. Authority resided with the church incumbent and the diocesan Bishop, (hence the dean's role is largely inscribed as administrative) even if, in the final analysis, it is the collegial role of the synod that matters. By contrast, Methodists understand authority in a corporeal manner; e.g. personal episcope which is also necessarily collegial and communal episcope by virtue of their structures.

Now, let us return to my point, succinctly put in the research by one Anglican Bishop: 'where the deanery is really working well the area dean is a very key person. In a dream world area deans would be more and more the key people – almost mini-bishops in that they have a ministry of oversight, so it is an episcopal ministry.' My point is not simply that deaneries and circuits (and by extension Catholic clusters) should be sharing notes so to speak rather than competing *in* the mission field. Rather, that the way superintendents and circuits operate

---

[327] What is a Circuit Superintendent? 2006. §33, lt.t

offers many points of receptive learning to take place in terms of both governance and ecclesial self-understanding.

Take the issue of episcope. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (§26) highlights the distinction between the formal notion of episcope (i.e. the office as such) and its broader ministerial significance in personal, collegial, and communal relations. But again, the question is not simply what can Anglican's dean's learn from Methodist understandings of episcope, but rather, how do current ecclesial structures mitigate against the exercise of the threefold pattern of episcope?

For example, where the drift is towards consolidating deaneries to drive down central costs, how might deaneries look when self-organised along missional grounds? And how is the flexibility to migrate across boundaries facilitated in the constitutions of the deaneries? In other words, how would a 'ground' up approach to deaneries help re-orientate the deanery as such? Missional context for example would have to be one of the central planks for a shared ecclesial practice? In this way, the overall context would assist in re-orientating the role of the dean in such a way as to develop the threefold episcopal role of the dean. And if, as research suggests, growth in the Church of England is a feature of 'big' churches, one might expect a further contextual understanding for the role of the dean. All of this should also impact on synodical understanding which is not simple the means which dual consideration of priest and laity voices can be considered, but a spiritual community bought together through patient deliberation.

In sum, the argument is that the financial and structural procedures of the Church have fallen out of step with a shifting demographic base, creating attitudinal deficits (e.g. a shared deanery wide sense of ecclesial identity and mission). This impact upon the church precludes the dioceses ability to implement a shared strategy, provide more immediate and shared support for mission, and foster strong intra-church relations at parish level. How then to target the deficit?

In what follows, I do not develop the given recommendations on the basis of receptive ecumenism, but instead, highlight how the most recent (2016) governance reforms in the Durham Diocese, following various white papers, already presuppose and highlight the very practice Receptive Ecumenism is engendering more widely.[328] These reforms, as of writing, are still in the formal process of formal ratification, but are nonetheless the result of extensive research and work on the part of the diocese, both in terms of the analytic of thought (i.e. the process of rethinking governance structures) as well as the practical resources to support the proposals (e.g. the development of statistical resources to aid planning). In particular, I draw upon the various white papers of David Brooke, from the Diocese of Durham.[329]

---

[328] See Durham Diocese Synod: Proposed Structures, 8th November, http://www.stocktondeanery.org.uk/downloads/public/synod/2014/141110/141110-diocesan_synod-proposed_structures.pdf and Durham Diocese, 'Proposed New Diocesan Governance Structures Consultation Draft, March 2015.' http://www.durham.anglican.org/userfiles/file/Durham%20Website/General%20Pages/DIOCESE%20OF%20DURHAM%20GOVERNANCE%20STRUCTURES_CONSULTATION%20DRAFT_MARCH%202015.pdf

[329] David Brooke, 'Forming a Deanery Leadership team: Some Pointers' Existing rules 4th March, 2016. David Brooke 'Some Essential Features of an Effective Deanery' 6th April 2016; Brooke, 'Forming a Deanery

The overall aim of the planned governance changes broadly mirror the concerns identified in our study: to reform and simplify Diocesan governance structures in a way which both eases the work at diocesan level, whilst ratifying the significance of the deanery. At diocesan level, under the new proposals, the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC) would sit directly within Bishop's council (co-terminus membership), so that the same group of people are responsible for the development of strategy (mission) and the management of the resources (finance) necessary to implement that strategy. In other words, Members of Bishop's Council would be Members of the DBF and Members of the DMPC. A number of linked boards feed into the Bishop's Council and serve to facilitate the services and provisions that flow from Diocese to Deanery and Parish and vice-a-versa.

What then of the deanery? The kinds of tasks deaneries have undertaken have traditionally arrived in an 'informal fashion.'[330] The introduction of the Deanery Plans (a proposed statutory feature of deaneries) however provides a concerted mechanism for consolidating the deaneries to resource mission and shape ministry, and thus facilitate the work of the diocese as a whole. As Brooke argues, 'Deanery Plans formalise and commit the relevant people and highlight the link between planning and action at parish and diocesan level, ensuring they are owned as a whole by the deanery.'[331] The Bishop's Council has a pattern in the round, of meeting each deanery and assessing them based on their Deanery Plan.

What then the deanery synod? Deanery synods, it is assumed, have Standing Committees that manage the general business of the Synod. Occasionally they have a Mission/Pastoral Committee to assist in shaping the Deanery Plan, and in some cases, their own Finance Committee. However, as Brooke highlights:

> The rules as they stand are quite prescriptive in the way the Standing Committee is established, but very permissive for all other committees, which creates a dilemma. Arguably the most efficient way to operate is to have a single committee fulfilling several roles, in the same way that our Bishops Council now operates. Unfortunately, that means that the committee must have equal numbers of elected clergy and laity (potentially a problem in small deaneries with very few clergy), and precludes co-opting people for their particular skills. The bottom line is that some deaneries are already operating outside the rules, which are no longer fit for purpose.[332]

What is proposed then is a set of new rules for Standing Committees which allows for flexibility in the membership alongside its existing ability to establish additional committees.

---

Leadership Team: Some Pointers' 4th March 2016; Brooke, 'Valuing Deaneries – Empowering Deanery Leadership.' 16th February 2016; Brooke, 'Models of Deanery Leadership: Some Options, 13th January, 2016.' Brooke, 'Formal Basis for Deanery Planning: Delegation to Deaneries' May 2016.
[330] Durham Diocesan Synod. Brooke, 'A Formal Basis for Deanery Planning: Delegation to Deaneries' May 2016, p. 1
[331] Brooke, 'Formal Basis for Deanery Planning: Delegation to Deaneries' May 2016.
[332] David Brooke, 'Forming a Deanery Leadership team: Some Pointers' Existing rules 4th March, 2016. p. 1. See also https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/church-representation-rules/part-iii.aspx

While emphasis will be on creating dedicated 'task-and-finish' groups in place of 'committees' the hope appears to be that 'it will be much easier to form a single committee (formally speaking, the Standing Committee) with the capacity and remit to function as an effective Deanery Leadership Team.'[333] Taken together, such a model and its constitution would be adaptable across the various patterns of deaneries that currently operate across the diocese.[334]

**Receptive Ecumenism**

In Brooke's documents he writes: the basis of this proposed change lies 'not in need, but in principle – in fact, in Catholic social teaching on the balance between subsidiarity and solidarity' (i.e. the ecumenical thrust is made explicit):

> Where there are effective teams, groups, localities or benefice structures, they may be the clearest vehicle for solidarity, and also the right trans-local forum in terms of subsidiarity where parishes come to the end of their 'competence' (in the strictest sense). More commonly, however, the deanery is the best place for that to happen – even though it has no power, as such… The deanery should serve to remind both parish and diocese that, in subsidiarity terms, neither may be the most effective level for some tasks to be performed. At the same time, if deaneries are to fulfil their call to be the most effective level in at least some cases, we need both to build up their capacity, and to avoid undermining them, either from above or from below. You could say that deaneries (and their leadership) operate at the intersection of policy and practice, solidarity and subsidiarity, and that makes them strategically vital – life giving, not life sapping. [335]

In short, drawing on the concepts of subsidiarity and solidarity, the documents make clear the case that Deaneries are best suited in that regard (i.e. the delegation of tasks) but also, that this can only be undertaken with new provisions for standing committees. In other words, we encounter here the attempt to make procedural changes to committee structures in ways which allow for a practice, disposition etc., from another tradition (in this case Catholicism) to be exploited to the betterment of Anglican intentions.

It follows from the principle of subsidiarity and solidarity (without which subsidiarity quickly loses its meaning) that the proposed changes make a renewed case for the place of oversight in the Anglican Church. In the first instance the proposed changes lend an increased significance to the Area Dean who is better able by virtue of the structures to represents the unity of the deanery in the way a Bishop represent the unity for the diocese as a whole.

---

[333] David Brooke, 'Forming a Deanery Leadership team: Some Pointers' Existing rules 4th March, 2016. p. 1.
[334] The Synodical Measures of 1969 gives room for giving Deanery Planning process in Durham a formal, recognised, and long-term basis. See Brooke, 'Formal Basis for Deanery Planning: Delegation to Deaneries' May 2016.

[335] David Brooke, 'Valuing Deaneries – Empowering Deanery Leadership' 16th February 2016

In the second instance, the increased engagement on the part of the laity (invested through the Deanery Plan) makes the case for sharing the Bishop's oversight in ways that affirms its personal, collegial, and communal aspects. For example, the establishment of a Deanery Leadership Team makes not only better administrative sense, it makes governmental sense in terms of the exercise of personal, collegial and communal 'episcope'.

Brooke points to the Ordinal and some of the key passage recited during the consecration of a bishop to, if not make the case, to argue nonetheless that it needs to be kept in sight. He points out that 'the teaching ministry of the bishop, the role as principal minister of the sacraments, or as upholder of discipline – can't easily be shared with 'their fellow presbyters'' but 'much of what the extracts describe can, and should be. That sharing strengthens the whole ministry of oversight, rather than diminishing the oversight of the diocesan bishop. It is sharing or delegation, not devolution.'[336]

So while the proposed structures invite the deaneries to understand themselves more rigorously in terms of finances, creating flexible models to serve in changing times, they also invite a more concerted self-understanding on the part of deaneries in the light of God's mission. In other words, the new structures for deaneries facilitate the type of corporal understanding that Methodists attribute to circuits.

In sum, by making better sense of the governance structures through the Catholic principle of subsidiarity and solidarity, one facilitates the possibility for a corporeal understanding of authority, in a structure which nonetheless values dispersed authority. This in no way implies a perfect and 'graced' structure, but to say that in the same way we can make constitutional and structural reforms in the development of democratic process, one can make changes which, drawing on the ecumenical discourse, can be translated into the betterment of the churches mission.

Adding to Brooke's given ecumenical suggestions, one might make two observations. First, it should be hoped that a corporal understanding of the deanery on the part of clergy and laity would foster the basis for formation at the deanery level in ways that targeted precisely the question of post-denominationalist and Anglican identity. Second, a question remains as to the synodical life of the deanery with the possibility of a much tighter leadership team. In the first instance, one could imagine that with much of the mundane business undertaken via the leadership team in conjunction with the Area Deans and Lay Chairs Forum, and the Deanery Finance Forum, deanery synods would have a freer hand in their self-understanding, giving for example more time over to collective worship and inviting a richer understanding of synodical practice. As the recent Porvoo Churches Agreement put it: 'what would synodical oversight be without the Spiritual element that is most adequately lived out in common worship'[337]

---

[336] David Brooke, 'Valuing Deaneries – Empowering Deanery Leadership' 16th February 2016
[337] Porvoo Communion of Churches, 'Towards Closer Unity: Communion of the Porvoo Churches, 20 Years', 2016