

Chapter One

Introduction and Method

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1.0 Introduction

Fresh Expressions, an ecumenical charity with an increasingly international scope, was established in 2004 to encourage local Christians to cultivate new forms of church. A fresh expression is,

A form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, contextual mission and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.¹

The *Methodism in Numbers* report of 2015 states, 'British Methodism has long faced numerical and demographic challenge. Membership numbers were over 800,000 in 1908 and over 600,000 in 1980.'² Between 2003 and 2013, Methodist Church membership decreased by an average of almost 10,000 members per year, closing at 224,500. The number of church closures during this period was 1,474, approaching an average of 150 per year, and leaving a remainder of 4,282. Against this broader context of decline, fresh expressions have become the source of celebration and encouragement. By 2013 at least 1,550 'Methodist' fresh expressions met monthly or more frequently across the connexion.³ By 2015, this had risen to 2,705. The situation in regard to how many of these projects have constituted themselves as churches is unclear. The 2015 *Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions* working party report to the Methodist Council stated, 'A small but significant number of fresh expressions have become a church of the circuit in which they reside.'⁴

¹ "What Is a Fresh Expression?," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/whatis>.

² Alan Piggot, "Statistics for Mission," (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2014). <http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/228157/conf-2014-37-statistics-for-mission.pdf>. See also "Methodism in Numbers - Statistics at a Glance, June 2014," All statistics are as of 31st October in the year cited.

³ Martyn Atkins. "General Secretary's Report," (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2013), 3. Paragraph 13. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2013-3-general-secretary's-report.doc>.

⁴ Nicola Price-Tebbit, "Report of the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church to the Methodist Council: Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions: A Response to Notice of Motion 103," The Methodist

However, according to the Methodist Church statistics office, only one fresh expressions project has *legally* constituted in this way.⁵ As a Methodist superintendent, and a member of the Fresh Ways Working Group, I am interested in the ecclesial relationship that exists between these forms of church and their parent churches, and in how ministry within such contexts challenges the inherited processes, practices, and disciplines of Methodist oversight. This qualitative study suggests that fresh expressions are generating deep ecclesiological questions for British Methodism.

1.1 Introducing Methodism

The Methodist Church bases its understanding of oversight in the meaning of the Greek word, '*episcopé*':

...used in the Bible to describe God visiting people and "keeping an eye" on what is happening... it is the process of reflecting on experience in order to discern the presence and activity of God in the world... It involves aspects of watching over, watching out for, monitoring, discerning, disciplining, directing, guiding, encouraging and caring.⁶

Methodism began from within the Church of England as a movement for reform, challenging clergy to live a life of piety and service.⁷ In 1726, Charles Wesley formed the Holy Club at Christ Church, Oxford⁸; a group committed to prayer, bible study, and charitable works. The term 'Methodist' was

Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1541973/coun-mc15-49-recording-pioneering-fresh-expressions-april-2015.pdf>.

⁵ E-mail to the author from The Statistics Office on, 8th June 2015 in response to a direct question about how many fresh expressions had legally constituted themselves as churches, as outlined in CPD. 'New Song Network in Warrington is unique in constituting itself as a CPD Methodist Church on the back of a prehistory as a FX cafe church.' Permission was given to cite this figure. Discussions with the Methodist Church Connexional Fresh Expressions Missioner (also the former Methodist Church Church Planting Secretary) revealed that a small number of new churches had been planted in ecumenical partnership, but that not all would identify readily or solely with Fresh Expressions.

⁶ "The Nature of Oversight: Leadership, Management and Governance in the Methodist Church in Great Britain" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2005), 1. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_05_natureofoversight_0805.doc.

⁷ For a summary of how the Anglican Church struggled to maintain unity amidst the cultural freedoms of the early 18th Century, See Kenneth Wilson, *Methodist Theology: Doing Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 7.

⁸ "The Holy Club," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/history/the-holy-club>.

just one label given to this group in reference to their methodical process and planning. Charles's brother, John Wesley (hereafter referred to as 'Wesley') soon emerged as a leader, but it was not until after his difficult experiences as a missionary in Georgia, his encounters with Moravian tradition, and his 'heart-warming' Aldersgate conversion-experience of 1738, that Methodism grew in popularity and prominence. On his return to Britain, Wesley found that he was unwelcome in many churches and so joined with the evangelist George Whitfield, preaching in the open-air. As Methodism grew, its leadership structures evolved to include stewards, 'class' and 'band' leaders, local preachers (also known as helpers) and trustees. The practice of meeting for mutual support as classes and bands imitated Moravian tradition, and it was from here that leaders could instruct adherents on the nature of faith and the obligations of membership. Wesley coordinated Methodism centrally through a series of conferences at which his preachers and ordained helpers met to agree, 'what to teach, how to teach, and what to do.'⁹ His most senior assistants worked itinerantly, visiting societies (which were grouped together in circuits), chairing quarterly meetings, and retaining a sense of connexion with himself. Wherever possible, Wesley sought to work in tandem with the Church of England. Despite local tensions and as late as 1787, Wesley was still insisting Methodist and Anglican meetings should not interfere with each other.¹⁰

Wesley was, arguably, something of an enigma. He was a High Church authoritarian who disregarded ecclesial protocol and discipline when it did not agree with him. For Wesley, the practice of open-air preaching was unorthodox. He found it discomfiting but saw no other means of reaching those who would never likely enter a church. He would preach without invitation or permission if

⁹ Barrie W. Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1995), 47. For a complimentary account of early Methodism, see Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds., "John Wesley," in Vol. I of *A History of the Methodist Church of Great Britain Volume* (London: Epworth, 1965), 37-79.

¹⁰ John Wesley, "Wesley's Threat to Deptford," ed. Percy Parker, *Wesley's Journal* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), 463. Published by Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.pdf>.

necessary. He authorised his own preachers, including many ordained Anglican priests.¹¹ In 1784, he ordained Whatcoat and Vasey as elders for work in the Americas, and re-ordained Coke (who was already an Anglican priest) as their superintendent. This momentous move contributed to a growing separation between Methodism and the Church of England. Wesley safeguarded Methodism's future by overseeing the 1784 Deed of Declaration (giving the Methodist Conference an independent legal status).¹² When Wesley died in 1798, Methodism became a *De facto* Church. However, as the movement grew, ecclesiological differences gave rise to schism; over whether the movement should adopt episcopacy or strengthen its conciliarity; on the balance of power between preachers and the laity; and of how Methodists should relate to the Church of England. It was not until 1932 that some – but not all – of these factions were reunited.¹³

Much of this infrastructure remains. Wesley's assistants have become superintendents overseeing the work of circuits. Presbyters who are under their charge typically oversee a section of churches and exercise a three-fold ministry of:

- The Word, '(formal and informal) preaching, evangelism, apologetic, theological, and prophetic interpretation, teaching and the articulation of faith and human experience'.
- The sacraments, 'presiding at acts of celebration and devotion, especially baptism (and, in the wider sense of sacramental acts, confirmation), and Eucharist.'
- Pastoral responsibility, 'oversight, direction, discipline, order, and pastoral care.'¹⁴

¹¹ Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, 42-43.

¹² Tabraham, *Making of Methodism*, 49. See also Jonathan Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism* (New York: Daniel Hitt & Thomas Ware, 1813), 36-62.

¹³ Tabraham, *Making of Methodism*, 64-65. For a rich perspective on how history has shaped Methodist Presbyteral Ministry see also, Martin Wellings, "Presbyteral Ministry: A Methodist Perspective," *Ecclesiology* 1, no.2 (2005) 57-74.

¹⁴ "What's a Presbyter?" paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2002, 4. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-presbyter-2002>.

The circuit remains the principal authority by which the Methodist Church resources local churches and appoints staff. Local churches are governed by church councils, normally chaired by a presbyter with 'pastoral charge', and send representatives to a 'circuit meeting'. Likewise, circuits, chaired by a superintendent, send their representatives to a District Synod. Finally, the Districts, covering distinct geographical regions within England, Scotland and Wales, encompass the entire 'connexion'.¹⁵

Representatives from each District gather with other senior church leaders for an annual 'conference'. This is the Church's ultimate decision-making body. By capitalising on the strengths of its delegated representation, the Methodist Conference strives to encourage an attitude of constant reflection between its centre and peripheries as it explores the impact of changes to Church policy. Shier-Jones, writing in 2004, reports that since 1932 the Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee had spent the majority of its time focused on issues of ecclesiology and discipline, rather than faith or doctrine. Questions raised at Conference have centred primarily on the nature of the church, who has authority, by what right they hold it, the nature of church leadership, and the place of Methodist membership.¹⁶

1.2 Three new contentions through a combined method

This thesis considers how presbyters serving in the Methodist Church can best oversee the development of fresh expressions. It is the first, systematic, detailed, and transparent study of *circuit* fresh expressions within British Methodism. It surveys the thinking and process that underpins Fresh Expressions, considers the experience of practitioners who have worked in these contexts, examines this in light of Methodist tradition, and suggests how fresh expressions might challenge presbyters who have oversight of local projects. Crucially, it sensitively applies qualitative analysis to a range of

¹⁵ "The Connexion," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/the-connexion>.

¹⁶ Angela Shier-Jones, "Conferring as Theological Method," in *Methodist Theology Today*, ed. Clive Marsh (London: Continuum, 2004).

fresh expressions, and explores the ecclesiological synergies and tensions that become apparent. It brings three new contentions to the ongoing debate:

First, this study offers empirical evidence in support of the claims made by Horsley and Cox-Darling that few fresh expressions are fresh expressions of 'church':

Horsley stated in 2011:

A large number (the majority?) of fresh expressions are not strictly fresh expressions of church, but rather fresh expressions of worship, often seeking to meet the spiritual needs of Christians who might otherwise drift away from church.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in 2015, Cox-Darling stated:

There is an argument, to suggest that many self-identified fresh expressions are extraordinary experiments in mission and ministry, but are not actually fresh expressions. They use missio Dei missiology as their theological frame-work, and they are beginning to engage in creative forms of mission and worship – but their outcome is not an ecclesial community in its own right.¹⁸

And in respect of Fresh Expressions in the Church of England, George Lings, of the Church Army

Research Unit, writes:

I do think that we need to work harder at recognising that not all that grows is a fresh expression of the Church. Some things are pale imitations, or even plastic copies, or the real deal and need exposing. Some things may not even be Christian. Some are honourable mission initiatives from an existing church. But their aims, to assimilate newcomers into existing church, and the lack of intention to begin further churches are clear indications that they are not fresh expressions.¹⁹

¹⁷ Graham Horsley, "Fresh Expressions of a Biblical Faith," *Epworth Review*, April (2011): 84-97. 84. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/604949/epworth-review-freshexpressionsofabiblicalfaith-0411.pdf>.

¹⁸ Joanne Cox-Darling, "Mission-Shaped Methodism and Fresh Expressions," *Holiness*. 1, no. 2 (2015): 202.

¹⁹ George Lings, "A History of Fresh Expressions and Church Planting in the Church of England," in *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 162-178.

Within Methodism, the evidence for this has been largely anecdotal. Whilst the Methodist statistics are useful in that they reflect the number of churches who are keen to affiliate with the movement, they are a self-declaration by local churches. Unlike the Church Army, the Methodist Church has not developed a set of criteria by which they can differentiate between those projects that are intending to form a new ecclesial community (I term this 'ecclesial intent'), and those who view themselves as an extension of local church mission.²⁰ Almost all of the Methodist fresh expressions lay leaders who participated in this research viewed their projects as fresh and creative forms of fellowship, worship, and mission that belonged to the local church, rather than newly emerging faith communities that had genuine ecclesial potential. Whilst some presbyters argued that they were intent on forming a church, this had not yet progressed to the point of baptism or communion being celebrated within the newly emerging community. These were the preserve of the Sunday morning or evening inherited church congregations. This research advances Horsley and Cox-Darling's arguments by identifying two factors that may be influencing this resistance. In some cases, fresh expressions lay leaders had not fully appreciated the link between Fresh Expressions and church planting. In others, lay and ordained leaders were simply uncomfortable with the concept of forming new churches. Whilst this may have been linked to a difference in language (participants responded better to the concept of establishing a new 'congregation' than a new 'form of church'), many leaders were nervous about the conflict that might arise in the event that they pressed their inherited congregations to give fresh expressions greater autonomy and freedom.

Second, this research suggests that the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church, particularly the Methodist construct of membership, is inhibiting rather than enabling the ecclesial development of fresh expressions. For Methodists, the question of whether a fresh expression is a church or a

²⁰ *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Program 2011-2013*, (The Church of England Commissioners, 2014).

congregation is significant. Local churches have a distinct legal status. They are self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-financing. Whilst a congregation within a church might be encouraged to develop a distinctive form of worship, or develop a particular niche in mission, it remains accountable to a church council. In this study, fresh expressions leaders were a minority voice on local church councils and struggled to convince members of the wider church that:

- The desire to create alternative forms of worship was not a compromise driven by a need to respond to the latest trend, and/or a response to consumer demand. Rather, it was based on the conviction that culture impacts community formation. Practitioners argued unsuccessfully that the local church had a culture of its own, and that if the cultural distance between newcomers and the emerging church was too great, community development would be difficult. Effective engagement was complicated further by differences in pastoral needs, teaching needs and learning styles that were evident between those who attended 'mainstream' church, and those who attended fresh expressions.
- The locality of 'church' for those who attended a fresh expression demanded a new form of church. The wider church struggled to recognise that traditional patterns of worship (such as attending Church on a Sunday), worked against the pressures of work and family that limited when people could gather. It also failed to capitalise on existing community networks that bound people together – often when they had a shared interest, such as raising children.
- Fresh expressions should be treated as missional-ecclesial units in their own right and be freed from unrealistic expectations as to how they might be present at, or serve the wider church.

This amounts to more than fresh expressions simply finding themselves on the losing side of an argument. It is a product of Methodist ecclesiology. It concerns how both formal and informal authority present themselves in the Methodist Church, and who is empowered to enable change. The prevalence of membership (by necessity) in established churches, coupled with its relative sparsity amongst fresh expressions adherents, exposed these newly emerging communities to an unequal power balance that acted as a centripetal force, pulling fresh expressions towards rather than pushing them away from conforming to the very form of church from which they sought an alternative.

Methodist membership is significant because it gives those who hold it greater power than those who do not. Although Church Councils are in the first instance open meetings, and opinion may be canvassed from non-members, only members are entitled to vote and take-up office. Whilst developing a creative synergy between the basic obligations of membership and the aims of Fresh Expressions might be theoretically conceivable, in practice, the wider church expected members to attend Sunday worship and serve the inherited church by taking up roles and responsibilities. Churches viewed their fresh expressions as just one form of worship or fellowship among others. Newcomers who opted to become members of the church, but express this primarily through their commitment to a fresh expression, struggled to gain credibility (and therefore social capital) among permission givers. To complicate matters further, whilst some participants who had previous experience of journeying with other denominations appreciated the obligation for local Methodist Churches to appoint trustees (as required by charity law), they questioned Methodism's much broader emphasis on membership and its scriptural warrant. Why should membership be required beyond baptism and confirmation? Whilst participants recognised the importance of membership as a means by which they could demonstrate their commitment to a local congregation, they believed that they were already showing this by virtue of their attendance. This proved to be a significant

argument given that in all of the churches studied, pastoral secretaries were aware of members of the inherited church who rarely attended, and yet the church was reluctant to remove them.

Ominously, the literature review suggests that Fresh Expressions does not major enough on the importance of denominational affiliation. At best, it assumes that those who lead fresh expressions are already comfortable within the oversight structures of the parent church. At worst, it avoids confronting the issue of denominational affiliation and church authority because it wishes to help people remain positive, rather than agitating scepticism. Therefore, for Methodists, the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church and the very concept of membership makes the prospect of achieving a mixed economy, whereby fresh expressions can grow and co-exist alongside inherited churches, difficult to implement.

Third, the Methodist Church has stated that in order for the mixed economy to be a success, presbyters need to 'bring about as light a touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches'.²¹ Initially this appeals, because it allows practitioners to apply the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. However, this research generates two significant concerns. First, CPD is a legal document and whilst there may be some instances where presbyters can interpret its requirements in a certain way, or even delay applying them, other requirements are non-negotiable. The regulations concerning church planting are a case in point. New churches can only exist if twelve locally resident *members* unite.²² The second concern is that rather than gifting fresh expressions with a freedom in which they will flourish, the 'light touch' risks destabilising fresh

²¹ Martyn Atkins, "General Secretary's Report: Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2012), 16. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-2-gen-sec-conference-report-0812.doc>. See also, 'Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission. A summary of the General Secretary's Report to the Methodist Conference,' <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/intra-contemporary-methodism-280611.pdf>.

²² *CPD*, Vol. 2., 605, S.O. 605(1). (*sic.*)

expressions through a lack of consistency in policy between presbyters who have oversight. This thesis suggests that more rather than less legislation – encapsulated in the form of a Fresh Expressions Mission Order - might be required to safeguard development. The word ‘order’ may admittedly make some nervous, since it might be confused with creating a third order of ministry. However, this term originates from the Church of England, in which a Bishop’s Mission Order has become one way of facilitating fresh expressions development.²³

Finally, it is important to note that the methodology for this research fuses three contrasting but complimentary Practical Theology methods.²⁴ Its strength rests in its simplicity as practitioners are encouraged to discern the difference between what should be happening in their contexts, and what is happening, remain open and attentive to a wide range of voices, and reflect on how differences in cultural perspective, experience and tradition are impacting those whom they serve.

1.2 Previous research in Methodism and the call for further work

Fresh Expressions literature ranges from material that outlines the vision that drives the movement, self-help guides, theological critique, and insights from small-scale research. Whilst some case studies do originate from exclusively Methodist contexts, little attention is given to how projects are overseen, or the relationship between the fresh expression and the wider church. Even less are the product of sustained academic research. For Methodists, there is one notable exception. In 2012, Cox in her *Challenging Leadership: Mission-Shaped Presbyters in Methodist Fresh Expressions*²⁵

²³ “Working text reproduction of House of Bishops' Code of Practice on Bishops' Mission Orders,” The Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1499290/workingtextbmcop.doc>.

²⁴ Jane Leach, "Pastoral Theology as Attention," *Contact: Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*, no. 153 (2007): 19-32; James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry : Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 57; Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology : An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

²⁵ Joanne Cox, "Challenging Leadership: Mission-Shaped Presbyters in Methodist Fresh Expressions" (DThM diss., University of Durham, 2012), http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3276/1/DThM_thesis_corrected_submitted_13_Nov_2011.pdf?DDD32+.

found that the concept of pioneer and the nature of pioneer ministry led to ‘irreconcilable tensions’ between the vision and values of three VentureFX (VFX) fresh expressions and those of the wider circuits or districts in which they were situated. She suggests that the Methodist Church should consider three options; ordaining people locally to fresh expressions projects, developing a new *order* of ministry from which the church deploys ministers in evangelism, church planting and mission, or rethinking the Church’s present understanding of presbyteral ministry.²⁶ Whilst this work was important, VFX incorporates only fourteen pioneers working in thirteen centres and involves only three presbyters.²⁷ A further consideration is that VFX operates under a different mechanism of oversight in comparison to circuit presbyters. In contrast to Cox’s work, this research explores the tensions and challenges for presbyters who have pastoral charge of fresh expressions alongside traditional churches.

Most recently, *Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions*, a Faith and Order report submitted to the Methodist Council, stated:

Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church calls for a “light touch” to the way in which ecclesiastical discipline is applied to Fresh Expressions, whilst recognising that a permissive interpretation of discipline needs to be balanced by proper and appropriate structures of accountability. It offers no suggestions as to how this can happen. Further work on what forms of oversight are appropriate and enabling for fresh expressions is needed. This requires consideration of appropriate and effective oversight structures and processes, as well as looking at how the Methodist Church might foster supportive relationships and encourage wider ownership of the mission of fresh expressions.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 228-229.

²⁷ Obtained by cross-referencing the names of pioneers on the VFX Website with the 2015 Conference Directory.

²⁸ Nicola Price-Tebbit, "Report of the Faith and Order Committee to the Methodist Council: Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions: A Response to Notice of Motion 103," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1541973/coun-mc15-49-recording-pioneering-fresh-expressions-april-2015.pdf>.

This research considers the nature of fresh expressions, the tradition of the Methodist Church and the impact of CPD. It identifies areas where presbyters are struggling to implement CPD in inherited contexts and explores where areas of tension and incongruity lie in respect of Fresh Expressions.

1.3 My Context

During the first phase of this research, I was a presbyter responsible for the oversight of fresh expressions in a semi-rural circuit. Working alongside a superintendent minister, I shared pastoral charge of fourteen churches. I inherited the oversight of four fresh expressions, and planted a further project:

- Sonrise, a children's 'puppet' service based in a market-town church.
- Breakfast Church, an all-age congregation meeting in a village hall.
- A Café Church, a gathered congregation meeting in a village church.
- Animate, an all-age congregation offering 'lounge' style worship in a church hall.
- Coffee and Cakes drop in, held in a rural village church.

My role was not to lead these congregations but to mentor the lay leadership within. My style of leadership was one of 'high-accountability, light touch.' After five years, I moved to become a circuit superintendent elsewhere. Here I found eight activities that the circuit was promoting as fresh expressions:

- Messy Church meeting in a rural village church.
- Messy Church meeting in a suburban church.
- Café Church meeting in a suburban church.
- Messy Church meeting in a city centre church.

- Messy Play in a rural village church.
- Anglican-Methodist led Messy Church, meeting in a town chapel.
- URC-Methodist led Messy Church, meeting in a town chapel.
- An ecumenical Messy Church project being planned for a village hall.

1.4 How the thesis developed

In contrast to taking a positivist approach, beginning with a theory and subjecting it to testing, Cohen cites Meinefeld, Whyte, Glaser, and Strauss and poses the question, 'Should one have a hypothesis in qualitative research?' This is based on the conviction that 'the research is much more open and emergent in qualitative approaches.'²⁹ Harding finds this argument to be persuasive one, stating that deductive approaches produce an 'embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research.'³⁰ Conversely, Barbour is critical, suggesting that grounded approaches appeal to researchers who are, 'too lazy to read the relevant literature.'³¹ Whilst my own position is closer to that of Cohen than of Barbour, I suspect that whilst many qualitative researchers would reject the idea of an initial hypothesis, few would deny that their research often begins with some prior knowledge about why a particular subject area or sample is of interest. Qualitative researchers will also find it difficult to declare with absolute integrity, that their own approach and findings are free from bias.

Personally, I was wary of both extremes. I did not want to resist exploring questions and ideas that surfaced during the observations, holding off until the writing stage. Ethnography and journaling go hand in hand; the research context allowing theory to surface, and providing a constant source by

²⁹Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, *Research Methods*, 226.

³⁰ Harding, *Qualitative*, 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14. Harding cites Rosaline S. Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research*, 197.

which I could establish clarity and deeper understanding. At the same time, I wished to avoid entering and revisiting the research context with a set of suspicions and a fixed theory to prove or disprove. The danger in this instance is that the research would miss an alternative view, or lack the capacity to explore it further if it were identified. My approach was to generate data about the nature and challenges of work in Methodist fresh expressions from the earliest point, contrasting this with both the ideals of Methodist oversight, and the disciplines of the Church. Some aspects of Fresh Expressions left me feeling uneasy in that I wanted to support the movement's vision, and in particular how it gave presbyters the freedom for people to break with tradition. At the same time, my conviction was that freedom without limits could give rise to anarchy on the one hand, or alternatively the Methodist Church might promise freedom, whilst resisting changes to practice and discipline. This latter view became reinforced at the point when *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* was published, midway through my research. The report argued that neither Church of England, nor the Methodist Church needed to change its ecclesiological structures or disciplines in order to accommodate fresh expressions.³² This did not resonate well with my early research observations.

1.5 Methodology

I turned to four practical theologians, each of whom provide a simple and contrasting way of thinking through issues of pastoral challenge or organisational conflict; Evelyn Whitehead & James Whitehead, Richard Osmer, and Jane Leach.³³ Whitehead and Whitehead encourage practitioners to consider how pastoral challenges are influenced by differences in culture, experience, and tradition. The first task is to discern these voices whilst suspending judgement. The second is one of assertion;

³² *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 183-184, Section 7.7.

³³ Jane Leach, "Pastoral Theology as Attention," 31; James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 57; Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

of bringing the different voices into dialogue and asking, 'What does this add up to?' The final stage is to suggest what pastoral responses might be appropriate. This helped me to discern some basic research questions which were then nuanced in light of Osmer and Leach's insights. Osmer encourages practitioners to ask four key questions - What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? And, how might we respond? Importantly, he suggests that practitioners should reflect on their *responsibilities* as well as their legal obligations. This forces an honest dialogue between orthodoxy, as laid out in CPD, and questions of orthopraxis, raised by practitioners. Finally, Jane Leach, a Methodist presbyter and Practical Theologian who specialises in enabling ministerial formation, proposes that reflection and reflexivity in ministerial practice improves if practitioners can be attentive to all of the voices – audible and inaudible – within any given context. Leach moves on to direct practitioners to explore the wider issues that are implicit to any given situation; one's own bias, 'What are your heart's saying?', what Christian Tradition has to say, and what the implication of these strands might be for the mission of the Church. Leach's method was helpful because it gave warrant to working with material in which I had an investment, and because it encouraged reflexivity as a key component of the research process.

Significantly, Leach offers some challenging questions in relation to the wider issues; what trends in culture are exemplified here? What kinds of human behaviour are evident? How has the past shaped the present? She then directs practitioners to question how their role might be influencing their perspective, and how their emotions are impacting upon their observations, urging them to acknowledge their immediate instincts so that these can be challenged through subsequent analysis and reflection. Finally, Leach encourages practitioners to ask questions about how theological tradition is at work in any given context; what ethics are being practised, and what theology/ideology is implicit to this? Leach's end goal is to encourage a form of theological reflection which is based on scripture; 'What Biblical texts resonate or set up a challenge in this

encounter/situation?' Whilst I did not identify any Biblical texts, or ethical dilemmas (apart from a dismissiveness from some groups within the church towards fresh expressions), I was able to distinguish the contrasting theological perspectives that underpinned different viewpoints and practices.

The importance of reflexivity as an interpretative resource within ecclesiological and ethnographic research has most recently been highlighted by Kaufman, who states that the crux of successful research is to be aware of 'what normativity is at work, and how it is at work'.³⁴ As a presbyter and a practitioner, I was likely to have a normativity which could impact how I interpreted my observations; reflexivity would be a guard against this. What aspects of espoused theology; either from Methodist Conference, Fresh Expressions, or the Methodist Church was I accepting uncritically? How would I be open to challenge? In practice, the Whitehead's method gave structure to the literature review, whilst the initial questions posed by Osmer and Leach proved simple enough to focus my thoughts during the research, whilst providing a foundation for further reflection. I might leave a church meeting and think, 'What just happened? What should have happened? Who were the loud voices or the principle actors? Who was overlooked or silenced?'

1.6 Blending Research Methods

My first priority was to try and understand how ministry in fresh expressions challenged presbyters who had been given oversight of local projects, and what might constitute best practice. Osmer calls for four elements of research design; purpose; strategy of inquiry; a research plan and a degree of reflexivity over the assumptions upon which observations are built. He observes that 'strategies of enquiry' in church contexts often employ a blend of quantitative and qualitative research. Osmer suggests that researching life histories, carrying out case studies and conducting ethnography are all

³⁴ Tone S. Kaufman, "Normativity as Pitfall or Ally," *Ecclesial Practices* 2 (2015): 92

useful ways of understanding the narratives that drive particular responses in any given context.³⁵

My initial explorations began with a literature review and a small degree of quantitative work to explore the nature of those fresh expressions that I could access easily, with a view to identifying key centres that might provide fertile ground for further father qualitative research.

1.6.1 Three research foci: Literature Review, Consultation and Case Studies

The Whiteheads' approach helped focus the literature review by generating four key areas for reflection; *Methodist Church Tradition*, *Fresh Expressions Tradition*, *Practitioner's Experience*, and *Ongoing Methodist Experience and Debate*. I decided against examining culture as a separate category for two reasons. First, I found that tradition and culture were so closely related that to consider one was to consider both. Apart from helping me remain attentive to the relationship between Methodist tradition and context, the process of divorcing one from the other in search of a more detailed analysis seemed inefficient. Much Fresh Expressions literature responds to concerns about how the inherited Church should respond to cultural diversity, and so questions about the significance of culture would surface naturally and serve as a better starting point. Second, I sensed that an ethnographic approach to case study work (carried out as a separate research focus) might be more productive, in that it would generate fresh insights that would confirm or challenge arguments put-forward by supporters and critics of the movement. The literature review succeeded

³⁵ The following also proved helpful. In terms of approach, Helen Cameron, *Studying Local Churches : A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2005); In terms of ethnographic candour and style, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger : An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002). John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field : On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). In terms of considering the weaknesses of ethnography, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture : The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). As for the focus of ethnographic study, Matthew Eric Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, *The Limits of Meaning : Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007). Finally, as an outline of the ongoing debate over the place of ethnography in investigating church practice, Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, *Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) and Christian Scharen, *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, *ibid*. Also consider, Theodora Hawksley, "Book Review on Ecclesiology and Ethnography by Pete Ward," *Ecclesiology* 10, no. 2 (2014): 263-265.

in identifying an array of principles and concerns that presbyters should consider. It also highlighted areas where the Methodist Church needed to provide greater clarity and direction.

The second research focus addressed one question in particular. To what extent did CPD inhibit fresh expressions? Whilst I had ten years' experience of applying CPD, I wanted to critique my understanding of what the Church did or did not permit against the views of other leaders. I therefore developed a means by which a sample of practitioners could consider my experiences and offer their own interpretations. I began by developing a broad qualitative survey (Appendix A). This outlined a number of scenarios in which CPD had informed my response. In line with the *Nature of Oversight*, I categorised each example according to whether they related more closely to leadership, governance, or management. I then outlined my understanding of whether (and if so, how) Conference was exploring any given issue, or what the latest developments might be. Finally, I left a column for participants to pass comments themselves. This is a helpful document in itself because it demonstrates how CPD reflects Methodist Church culture (understood as 'the way we do things round here' or the way we do things without consciously thinking about it).³⁶ However, was my interpretation correct? Did participants agree with the requirements laid out by CPD in the first instance? Had any participant had trouble implementing this particular aspect of CPD? What tensions existed between orthodoxy and orthopraxis?

The third research focus began with a number of pilot studies to try and find the best approach for generating data through case-studies. I needed to examine the feelings and motives of those who were involved in fresh expressions, and to try to understand the dynamic of leadership that was

³⁶ Marvin Bower, *The Will to Manage; Corporate Success through Programmed Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 22.

present. Where were the points of conflict and synergy between Fresh Expressions and the wider church? How did differences in culture, experience, and tradition influence this? Cohen *et al* state:

Research must include 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of the contextualised behaviour; for descriptions to be thick requires inclusion not only of detailed observational data but data on meanings, participants' interpretations of situations and unobserved factors.

And:

Social research needs to examine situations through the eyes of the participants – the task of as Malinowski (1922: 25) observed, is to grasp the point of the native [sic], his [sic] view of the world in relation to life.³⁷

Denscombe writes:

Ethnographic research calls for a certain degree of introspection on the part of the researcher. He or she needs to reflect upon the way in which background factors associated with personal experiences, personal beliefs and social values may have shaped the way in which events and cultures were interpreted. However, the ethnographic researcher needs to go beyond mere reflection. This is, in a sense, a private activity. Researchers need to supply their readers with some insights into the possible influence of the researcher's self to the interpretation of events or cultures.³⁸

Each phase of the research was scrutinised by the Ethics Board of the Department of Theology at Durham University.

1.6.1.1 Consultation: sampling and scope

Sampling Methods

Cohen cites Borgan & Bilken (1992) and LeCompte & Preissle (1993) suggest a range of sampling

³⁷ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed., (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 220.

³⁸ Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide : For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 4th ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), 81 & 84-87.

methods that may be helpful in ethnographic research. I included a mix of reputational critical-case sampling, convenience sampling, and extreme-case sampling.

Number of participants and interviews

Initially, I circulated the consultation document across two Methodist districts and received sixteen responses from twenty-four invitations. By the close of the consultation, forty-five individuals had taken part, including thirty ministers; twenty-six presbyters, three presbyter-ordinands and one deacon, (twenty-one males, nine females). Of these, ten occupied District leadership roles (five combining this with circuit responsibilities). Five were Methodist supernumeraries who still contributed to circuit life, and four were ecumenical partners; Anglican, Baptist, United Reformed Church, and Free Church.³⁹ The remaining fourteen participants were non-ordained (four males, ten females). Four of these were District leaders. As part of my ongoing ministry, I also attended a VentureFX support group which gave rise to a continuing dialogue with two presbyter-pioneers. In total the consultations resulted in thirty-two submissions of written material (either e-mail responses or annotated forms), twenty short research conversations, and twenty-eight follow up interviews. The participant age range (apart from the supernumeraries) was between forty to sixty years. Apart from one Black-British participant, the remainder were White-British. This demographic reflected the comparatively low numbers of female ordained and/or ethnic minority leaders within the learning regions covered by three Districts.⁴⁰ The consultation ceased at the point where new insights were proving difficult to find. The full list of participants and their roles are detailed in Appendix B.

³⁹ Baptist, Anglican, United Reformed and one free-church pastor

⁴⁰ Stated during a meeting of the Regional Learning Area forum, October 2015.

The focus group

One of the unintended but welcome consequences of the consultation was how a group of five retired Methodist ministers, a supernumerary support group who met with me on a monthly basis, offered themselves as a source of collaboration and encouragement I reflected on my research observations, and began to develop this thesis. They held contrasting theological views, had served in a diverse range of contexts, and continued to support circuits by covering in emergencies, leading communion services and by encouraging particular forms of ministry. We met monthly, for two years, and on every occasion they asked how the research or my thesis was progressing. This group provided a forum where I could reflect on my experiences and question my own understanding and interpretation of CPD.

1.6.1.2 Discerning the best approach for consultation interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to:

1. Allow respondents to explain the comments in greater depth.
2. Discern how and when they used CPD.
3. Identify instances when CPD was proving difficult to implement.

The first three conversations served as a helpful pilot. My first concern was to ensure that I suspended judgment until the participants had contributed all they wished. I drew from the same observational and listening skills that counsellors use in order to enable their clients to share their own story; watching (and noting) body language, reflecting back, paraphrasing what the participants shared so that they could confirm that I was understanding them correctly, and being unafraid of silence. As I took notes I used Osmer and Leach's basic questions to discern areas that I could explore once the participant had finished sharing. What was happening? What did they think should be happening? Whose voice was not being heard? What did they think needed to change? Direct questions that would clarify my understanding of current policy or practice were left until the end of the interview... 'Am I right in thinking that?'

One early lesson was in how, as the interviewer, I needed to create the best possible dynamic. I found, as Barbour⁴¹ cautions, that using the word 'interview' was unhelpful, in that it created a dynamic where I the researcher was seen as the expert, conversations were guarded, and there was an air of formality. Conversely, when I began to speak in terms of interviews as 'research conversations', participants became much more relaxed and open. Patton confirms this, stating that informal conversational interviews allow questions to be raised, 'In the natural course of things (whereby) there is no predetermination of question topics or wording.'⁴² Participants responded warmly when I stressed that the purpose of the research was to *help me understand* how as a presbyter, I could best oversee fresh expressions. Interviews were normally conducted in participant's homes, or at conferences.

1.6.1.3 Processing the consultation data

Collating the written responses to the consultation was simple, in that most related to the scenarios that I had outlined in the original documents and could be added to my own comments. This allowed me to both critique my own understanding, to discover new insights, and identify areas of congruence or difference.

I developed a rigorous pattern for processing the interviews; reflect immediately and record my initial impressions and feelings; listen to the interview at home, noting how the conversation flowed and the themes that were covered (this helped me to suspend judgement, rather than be heavily influenced by a single striking statement); then transcribe. Transcription proved demanding and time-consuming; it was not just a matter of recording words. As Cohen rightly states, a vast array of other features; pauses, hesitations, inflections, emotion, volume, speed, breaks, stresses and

⁴¹ Rosaline S. Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research : A Student Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2008), 120.

⁴² Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 1990). Cited by Cohen *et al.*, *Research Methods*, 413.

phrases, audible breathing and non-verbal activity, are also be significant.⁴³ One advantage of listening to the interview before was that I could note the confidence (or nervousness) and emotion behind what was said. Importantly, Silverman argues that the level of transcription should be appropriate for the research problem; interviews requiring the greatest detail are those that use a constructivist model as a basis for analysis.⁴⁴ Helpfully, my approach in inviting participants to share in an open-ended conversation about what they had submitted, was more naturalistic. Meanwhile, Harding similarly notes that pauses, interruptions and rephrases are always significant but also affirms that the level of detail required is at the discretion of the researcher.⁴⁵ My transcription was in the first instance words only, but became fuller during the key points of the conversation.

1.6.1.4 What to include, and what to exclude?

This was a fundamental question throughout the entire of the research. All of the submissions and observations were valuable, in that they enabled me to gain a greater understanding the wider context in which this work is undertaken. Nevertheless, to keep the focus on the central question, 'How can Methodist presbyters best oversee fresh expressions?' I developed a checklist:

1. What information has the participant shared?
2. Does it reflect an attitude of the wider Church?
3. In light of Osmer, is anything 'not happening that should be happening'?
4. In light of Leach, who are the principal actors, and is there an absent or silenced voice?
5. Does this relate to CPD?

⁴³Cohen *et al.*, *Research Methods*, 538.

⁴⁴ Cohen *et al.*, *Research Methods*, 205. Cohen cites David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data : Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage Publications, 1993).

⁴⁵ Harding, *Qualitative*, 52.

6. Does the participant's position or experience give the scenario greater significance?
7. Has this influenced the fresh expression?
8. Has this issue been replicated elsewhere?
9. Am I giving this more scenario profile that is justified? Am I keeping an open mind?
10. How is my emotional state impacting my judgements?

After I had transcribed each interview I summarised *each theme* and the context in which it was evident on to a separate card. This allowed me to form a card index and identify, again, points of congruence and contrast.

1.6.1.5 Case Studies: Identifying centres, conducting pilot studies, developing a methodology, and refining methods.

The case study work comprised an initial qualitative survey, ethnographic participation-observation, informal conversations, an online quantitative survey, and follow-up interviews. In total I studied thirteen fresh expressions across two centres. I carried out a total of thirty-six observations within Animate and messy church, and a further twenty-two observations within the surrounding satellite projects. I conducted twenty-eight research conversations or formal interviews across the whole.

How I identified centres that were suitable for case-study work:

Cohen states that finding a role and managing entry into the context is one of the most important phases of the research planning.⁴⁶ He suggests that researchers need to:

Identify the gatekeepers to establish trust with the wider community.

Negotiate a participant-observer role.

⁴⁶ Citing Margaret Diane LeCompte, Wendy L. Millroy, and Judith Preissle, *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1992).

Ensure there is enough time, space and social relations to carry out the research.

Have the capacity to join in with people and share in the same experience.

Appreciate that the field under study becomes clear once the researcher has entered it.

Cohen also cites Swan who draws from his experiences of researching in educational environments and advises that role negotiation, balance and trust are significant issues:

One must try to select a role which will provide access to as wide range of people as possible, preserve neutrality (not being seen on anybody's side) and enable confidences to be secured.⁴⁷

With reference to De Laine (2000), Cohen states that:

Role conflict, strain and ambiguity are to be expected in qualitative research...Diverse role positions are rarely possible to plan in advance, and are an inevitable part of fieldwork, giving rise to ethical and moral problems for the researcher, and, in turn, requiring ongoing resolution and negotiation.⁴⁸

Drawing from Walford (2001), Cohen also adds:

This becomes sharper as researchers feel forced to retain neutrality, compromise their own beliefs and values, manage relationships carefully without breaking confidences and try not to divulge too much information about themselves...there is a need for researchers to develop rapport, trust, sensitivity and discretion. They need to find a way to manage people or issues which they find difficult. They need to be attentive, empathising, discreet and know how long to stay. Herein the researcher needs to remain long enough to be able to observe regularities.⁴⁹

The initial search for suitable case studies began with four lines of enquiry:

1. *Researching in VentureFX projects*

⁴⁷ Cohen et. al, *Research Methods in Education*, 233.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

I approached the two VentureFX projects that were within closest reach. Both pioneers felt that their projects were not at the point where there was anything resembling 'church' or an emerging 'Christian community' that I could research. Both were uneasy about how my presence would alter the dynamics within small groups, and how further input from the Methodist Church (even though I was acting independently) might be viewed by other stakeholders.

2. *Researching a church in a circuit that had reconfigured itself so that one of its presbyters could serve a single church as a 'pioneer minister', intent on creating fresh expressions:*

This pilot was immediately frustrated by the practicalities of travel. I learnt that in order to construct reliable conclusions from quantitative work, I needed to be consistently present.

3. *Researching in a circuit where a presbyter had sole oversight of a group of fresh expressions, rather than only those fresh expressions within their 'section'. :*

Despite information to the contrary, I could not find a context that offered this.

4. *Researching a fresh expression was looking to form itself as a church:*

I was able to travel regularly to this project, and could trial participation-observation, conversations, and recorded interviews. This was the first pilot, and proved successful in that I was able to establish its history, discern the oversight issues that were of concern, identify the points of conflict and congruity between different leaders, and what measures had proved helpful in securing its future. I also began to reflect on the possibility and legitimacy of my researching a fresh expression that was under my own oversight.

5. *The fifth and final pilot was a case study at Animate.*

Animate was a fresh expression within my own circuit. My task as a minister was to accompany and mentor its senior leaders. From its conception, Animate followed the guidance issued in *Mission Shaped Ministry*⁵⁰, the training course developed for fresh

⁵⁰ "Mission Shaped Ministry," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry>.

expressions leaders. I developed a methodology which blended the research methods that proved successful in the above, and developed two surveys, one to generate data on those who attended the project, and one that explored the question of engagement. Whilst Animate was the primary centre for research, I was also able to visit other local 'satellite' projects. Animate became the first full-fledged research centre. This methodology was then applied to messy church when I moved circuits.

Incorporating a quantitative and a qualitative survey

The basic survey (Appendix C) generated data about ages, gender, life experience, and attendance. It also asked participants to share their understanding of the purpose of their fresh expression, how they were using their gifts, and whom they approached for guidance and pastoral support. For example:

What previous training do you draw from in your role?

Who do you confide in when you are going through a difficult time with your faith?

What do you enjoy most about being part of this project?

The second survey (Appendix D) was inspired by Kirby's theory on the process by which people engage with fresh expressions.⁵¹ It probed how the different elements of worship and fellowship at Animate impacted participants' sense of belonging and belief. It also explored how their attitudes and behaviours had changed, and included open questions:

Tell us something of your Church history - i.e. Attended Methodist Church as a child, then left as a teenager; or used to worship regularly at....

Do you attend both Animate and another Church? If yes, please state where and tell us why Animate is helpful?

⁵¹ Jeff Kirby and Vanessa Kirby, "The Pitmoor Cycle," *TSC Research Bulletin* (Winter 2010), <http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138332>. For a fuller description of what Kirby means by engagement and how these are reflected in the survey, see also section 2.1.5 of Chapter 2.

Would you be happy to ask your friends to come to Animate? Again, please tell us what holds you back (if anything).

In respect of some of the worship activities at Animate, namely Meaningful Gossip, Sharing Bread, Bite-Size Bible, and Chillax, participants were invited to reply to questions such as:

Rate the following in terms of helping you to believe God can change your life...

Now rate them in terms of how they help you feel that you belong to the group.

...using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). Likewise, I invited them to respond in the same way to statements such as:

I am more aware of God's presence at other times in the day/week.

I pray more by myself than I did before.

I feel more confident to talk about what I believe with others.

1.6.1.6 Translating from Animate to Messy Church

The online survey was adapted for messy church (Appendix E) to cover its key elements of engagement; conversations, worship songs, bible teaching, craft activities, and prayer. The open questions included:

Please share anything else that has been really important in terms of making you feel welcome and part of a family at Messy Church.

Please let us know if there are any other aspects of Messy Church or any experiences that have encouraged your belief that God can make a difference to your life?

Would you be happy to ask your friends to come to Messy Church? Again, please tell us what holds you back (if anything).

1.6.1.7 Using participation-observation and conversation within the case studies

Osmer's prophetic discernment raises a single question, from which others develop:

What is the 'norm' that each fresh expression is judged against?

Evaluating the worship that is taking place in each case study was at considerable risk of being highly subjective – and therefore required some kind of framework. Whilst many approved sources for worship offered some guidance (such as the *Methodist Worship Book*), Fresh Expressions cautions practitioners to guard against introducing forms of worship that may be culturally inappropriate.⁵² Helpfully, the training for local preachers and worship leaders encourages practitioners to develop 'liturgies' or orders of service of their own (whether written or extempore).⁵³ At the time of writing, the Methodist Church is in transition between previous and newly updated versions of *Faith and Worship*. The former assessment sheets for local preacher 'on trial' include a number of valuable questions:

- How was the place, time and season are taken into account?
- Was the worship was appropriate to the congregation?
- How well did the preacher and congregation related in the service?
- In what way were the congregations' gifts were used?
- How were people helped to encounter and respond to God?

⁵² *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999).

⁵³ Local preachers are trained using the *Faith and Worship* course material, and their services are assessed periodically. See "Faith and Worship Course Information," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoyou.content&cmid=3524>. Also, "Worship Leaders," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/local-preachers/worship-leaders>.

- Were any 'ingredients' of worship absent?
- If they were deliberately omitted, then why?
- How well did the language used relate to the congregation?
- How did the service develop and flow?
- What were the strongest aspects of the worship and what could be developed?
- What was the aim of the sermon and how successfully was this achieved?
- What were the strongest points of content in the service?
- What were the strongest points of delivery?⁵⁴

The updated version of Faith and Worship is currently being piloted by the Church.⁵⁵ It also asks:

- Were you able to hear the leader clearly?
- If used, were projector and screen, service sheets etc. used effectively?
- Did any elements of the service feel too short, or rushed?
- Did any elements of the service feel too long, or laboured?
- Where in the service were you particularly aware of the presence of God?
- Was there space for flexibility and/or spontaneity?
- Was the space / setting for worship used creatively?
- Was the language and imagery about God generally inclusive and creative?
- Did the worship make connections with the world beyond the church?⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Service Report Form," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1821155/servicereportform130812.doc>.

⁵⁵ "Faith and Worship Course Information," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/local-preachers/faith-worship/faith-worship-course-information>.

⁵⁶ "Worship and Preaching Feedback Form," The Methodist Church, http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1820302/servicereviewer_s_feedback140815.pdf.

I used these broader criteria to make an assessment on the worship in each fresh expression. This said, I was conscious of how Fresh Expressions emphasises that worship is only one aspect of a much wider community life. Thus, any analysis of local projects must ask questions about how people are welcomed, affirmed, and supported in their faith journey. In terms of assessing Christian character and ecclesial potential, VFX has developed some key questions intended to help the wider Church:

Is there a good relationship with those among whom mission is taking place?

Is there good engagement with the question, 'What is the Good News in this place for these people?'

'Is there a fledgling community that might become the context in which a fresh expression might grow?'

Is there a constructive relationship that places this ministry in the context of the wider Church?⁵⁷

The joint Anglican-Methodist report, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* has also offered some guidelines for fresh expressions development. In the closing sections of the literature review that features in Chapter Two of this thesis, I summarise:

Fresh expressions must keep the vision [of becoming church] in mind; they must strive to embody the Church's ministry of word and sacrament; they should look to develop a full koinonia with the wider Church; they should be subject to normal ecclesiastical discipline; they should work in partnership with other churches.

Therefore, in line with the guidance offered by the report:

Fresh expressions should be worshipping communities who are sent out to engage in mission and service.

⁵⁷ "Journeying Out: Pioneer Mission: 3. How are we doing?," VentureFX, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/635996/venturefx-how-are-we-doing-0912.pdf>.

The gospel must be proclaimed appropriately within the community.

Baptism needs to be conferred and the Lord's Supper must be celebrated by an authorised minister.⁵⁸

1.6.1.8 Conducting case study interviews

I applied the same principles for the case study interviews as I did for the consultation. These interviews explored the information that participants had disclosed in the basic survey. To guide my own questioning, I developed a personal checklist (Appendix F) of areas that might be relevant. This was based on the insights of Harding (2013)⁵⁹, who suggests that researchers generate richer data by asking questions that are motivational, amplificatory, exploratory, explanatory and clarificatory. Matching the participant's initial responses with the checklist also helped me to question what might be the most valuable use of my time; what statements had the participant made (wither on paper or in general conversation), or what specific expertise might they bring that could help me understand the project's needs?

1.6.1.9 Processing Case Study Observations and Interviews

For Aspire and messy church I journaled on a monthly basis, noting down significant conversations and events. This process was made easier by logging conversations or meetings in my diary, so that I could reflect on them later. This resulting in a rolling document where it became easy to note where the same themes repeated in different scenarios. For the interviews, I used the same checklist as for the consultation. Once again, brief answers to these questions were used to summarise each point which surfaced in the interview, and each point was transferred to card system, allowing me to sift

⁵⁸ Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Fresh Expressions of Church (JAMWPEEC), *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2011), 178-179 & 181-183.

⁵⁹ Jamie Harding, *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* (London: SAGE, 2013). Harding cites Monique M. Hennink, Ajay Bailey, and Inge Hutter, *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2011); R. Legard, L. Keegan, and K. Ward, "In Depth Interviews," in *Qualitative Research Practice : A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, ed. Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage, 2003).

through the data and discern where the same phenomena was evidenced in different contexts. The final step of the exercise was to cross reference the case study observations with the interview data, and vice versa.

1.7 Reviewing the Methodology and the Analysis

One of the most prominent and early questions that I asked when developing this methodology was whether it was possible for me, a presbyter, to conduct research in contexts where I had an investment? How might my pastoral responsibility to the participants, my oversight responsibility to my seniors, and my very identity as a minister impact the research? My approach addressed these questions by making participants aware that I was a presbyter first, and a researcher second. There would be no difference in how I kept confidences and acted with discretion. One key question is what could go wrong? Would my role as a minister impact the research in a negative way? Would respondents be more, or less open owing to my presbyteral identity? My conviction is that the former is true, and that my identity gave credibility to the research (because I understood the context), and helped establish trust. My pastoral-mentoring role, and the fact that I was able to observe for a long period of time, gave rise to a depth in the research, and helped me develop thick descriptions. Any internal conflict resulting from the closing interviews made at Animate were made easier by the fact that I had moved circuits and no longer had pastoral charge. Without this pastoral-mentoring relationship, generating data in the second case study centre took longer. Even so, the fact that my role was different in each case study centre gives my research greater rigour, because I made my observations from different perspectives.

An additional concern was that even though at Animate I ministered with a 'high accountability, light touch' approach, I was still influential in the decisions that the group made. My instinct was that I should be completely detached. However, I also recognised that this was permitted within other research methods, such as Participatory Action Research, where research and action is an activity to

be carried out with people and not for people, and where communities of enquiry and action evolve.⁶⁰ Here, researchers work alongside teams of professionals and measure how changes to process, practice and discipline help an organisation achieve a particular goal. Animate was a living project. Its leaders sought to fulfil the Fresh Expressions ideal, and I shared in this task with them.

In terms of the volume of data that my methods generated, whilst the response to the basic survey (which was circulated among leaders), the consultation, and the online survey on engagement at Animate were pleasing, the response to the online survey at messy church was low. I cannot account for this. Even so, one advantage of this methodology is that it allows for a measure of redundancy. Whilst the online survey at messy church comprised only three respondents, I was able to discern how people were engaging by other means; through observation, conversation and more formal interviews. Also, the focus of the online survey was narrow and represented just one aspect of oversight, whereas the main focus of this thesis is how CPD impacts fresh expressions. In terms of the case studies, my journaling gave rise to copious notes that began with an observation and questioned what themes might be emerging. One challenge was managing the sheer volume of data. One advantage of my methodology was that it allowed me to process material and form theories during the research phase, whilst suspending complete judgement.

In terms of scope, the consultation was eventually circulated across three districts. I would have preferred for it to have included more people from ethnic minority backgrounds, who may have been able to offer insights on the contrasting cultural attitudes that were in operation within the Church. The number of women who were in leadership was low. However, District Chair suggested that this reflected the low number of women in Church leadership. Ultimately, this research was

⁶⁰ See Peter Reason and Hillary Bradbury (eds.), *Handbook of Action Research: Participatory Inquiry and Practice* (London: SAGE Press, 2008), 1.

never intended to be representative of what might be happening across the wider Church. I did hope, however, to generate insights that were worthy of further investigation.

This research blended a small degree of quantitative research with a much larger body of qualitative work. In fact, even the most quantitative survey (which explored engagement at Animate and messy church), contained large sections to allow for qualitative input. Cohen *et al* state that validity and reliability are two key factors in assessing the value of any given piece of research. For *valid* quantitative research, survey construction must be neutral in the sense that the way in which questions are put should not bias the outcome. Results must be replicable and provide a basis for predicting attitudes and events across a larger whole.⁶¹ For *reliable* quantitative research, the method needs to be stable: there must be a consistency in how data is measured. For example, a survey cannot be taken over a long period where situational factors might distort the results. In the case of qualitative research, Cohen suggests that honesty, depth, richness and scope are significant contributors towards validity. The quality of the research is advanced further as the objectivity of the researcher increases, and as they triangulate their data to form conclusions. The concept of reliability for qualitative research however, remains deeply contested. Cohen states, the possibility of demonstrating reliability through replication is rendered impossible through 'the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations'.⁶² This said, Cohen acknowledges the contributions made by Denzin and Lincoln⁶³ who suggest that, reliability in qualitative research can be addressed by (among other factors), establishing the *stability* of the observations; would the researcher have made the same observations and interpretations if they visited a second time. Additionally, reliability increases if

⁶¹ Cohen, 178. My interpretation.

⁶² Cohen, 202.

⁶³ Cohen, 202., citing Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1994).

researchers have been open to *parallel forms* (paying attention to other phenomena rather than allowing one event to dominate their impressions). My methodology mitigates against these concerns by conducting multiple observations, and suspending judgement. A final mark of reliability is *inter-rater reliability*, would another researcher, using the same method, have observed as I did, and come to the same conclusion. This is a difficult question to answer, but the fact that the method requires the researcher to be openly reflexive and transparent, provides a further safeguard. Finally, whilst I am aware that this method could be questioned in any number of ways, I am encouraged by Cohen's statement that, 'It is impossible for research to be 100 percent valid; that is the optimism of perfection.'⁶⁴

In reviewing the analytical process, I have come to focus on two key questions. First, have I been objective? My response to this is to question whether a researcher can ever claim that they are completely objective. Instead, as Cohen suggests, it is important that researchers are honest about any bias that they might hold, and derive their conclusions from thick descriptions.⁶⁵ I am given confidence in my research from the fact that my research challenged my own normative assumptions; the circuit drives for mission in local churches; membership is a workable construct; the light touch is releasing. Also, I do not particularly like this thesis; as a practitioner who wants to support fresh expressions I am disappointed with the reality that so few projects had ecclesial intent. I am also uncomfortable with the intensity with which it challenges the wider Church. The second question is, 'Has this research methodology put a negative bias on my observations? Are, 'Why is what should be happening not happening?' and, 'Whose voices are silent or have been silenced?' helpful starting questions? I believe they are, particularly in examining oversight. However, I also

⁶⁴ Cohen, 179.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

note a difference between how the research generated strong examples of what was good in fresh expressions, and the observations, specifically relating to ecclesial formation, that I present in order to defend my three main contentions. Fresh expressions' practitioners were deeply committed, and their projects were transformative. There were excellent examples of fellowship, worship and teaching. Their parent churches were being challenged and enriched. However, this transformation did not extend to these fresh expressions becoming new churches.

1.8 Thesis Outline

The remainder of this thesis proceeds as follows:

The Literature Review is presented in Chapter Two. This demonstrates how Methodist presbyters serve in a context of general decline, in which they must sustain what they can whilst encouraging the development of fresh expressions. The call for Methodism to rediscover its roots as a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' raises questions about what distinguishes a movement from a church. Should Methodists identify with the independence and freedom that a range of Methodist denominations experienced after the death of John Wesley, or the United Church that emerged following the Deed of Union in 1932? I find, on reflection, that much of Methodist ecclesiology and practice is a blend of Anglicanism and Moravianism in which orthopraxis has, at times, been given a greater weight than orthodoxy. I outline in detail the findings of Jo Cox, Bell and Lindridge's call for fresh expressions to be nurtured through special oversight measures, and the findings of *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*.

In Chapters Three and Four the issue of culture becomes much more prominent as I outline my observations and experiences at each of the centres where I undertook ethnographic research. I begin each chapter with a list of findings, specially intended to provide insight and direction to other practitioners. By the end of Chapter Four, areas of common concern become clear. In Chapter Five, I

summarise the findings of the consultation on CPD. I demonstrate those areas of Methodist practice and discipline that are already a challenging for this small sample of leaders working in inherited church settings. I then highlight areas where CPD may prove even harder to apply in fresh expressions contexts and how, when the wider church raises questions about fresh expressions, it inadvertently highlights its own shortcomings. I demonstrate how presbyters who are not supportive of fresh expressions can use CPD to inhibit development. I also demonstrate how the superintendent's role is crucial. The chapter closes with a deeper reflection on how differences in cultural perspective and patterns of worship may account for some of the difficulties faced by the Methodist Church. In Chapter Six I summarise by demonstrating how my thesis is supported by evidence on multiple fronts. In line with Osmer's question, 'What should be happening?' I return to the *Nature of Oversight* and focus on the question of how the Church enables a subsidiarity that is effective. I conclude by offering six suggestions for immediate action. I concede that whilst my observations and conclusions may not necessarily be true across other areas of the British Methodist Connexion, they do warrant further work.

I.9 Table I: Whitehead, Osmer and Leach: A combined Methodology

Key: Data attainable from LR (Lit. Review), CS (Case Study), C (Consultation)

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
<p>Attending to Religious Tradition</p>	<p>What is it to be Methodist and what is the nature of Methodist oversight and discipline? (LR, C)</p> <p>Given that CPD is such a key component of Methodist Religious Tradition, how might this be outlined and critiqued? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What is the theology and vision of Fresh Expressions? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What other traditions have influenced this? (LR)</p> <p>What of Methodist Tradition elsewhere in the world. How does the practice and disciplines of other conferences differ? (LR, C)</p>	<p>Osmer suggests that different types of congregations tend towards conflict in contrasting ways dependent on the numbers present and the context in which they serve. How do the needs of fresh expressions congregations differ from those of the inherited Church? What impact does this have on how the mixed economy? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>Leadership is exercised through a mix of expertise and communication, both individually and/or collaboratively. What differences might exist in how leaders communicate? Where are the formal and informal authorities, and how do they act? What impact might this have on how Methodist authority figures and process is received? (CS, C)</p>	<p>What ethic[s] are being practised in any fresh expressions and what is their implicit theology/ideology? (CS, C)</p> <p>What Biblical texts resonate or set up a challenge in this encounter/situation? Why are those texts used as opposed to others? (LR, C)</p> <p>What has the Methodist Church said about fresh expressions? (LR, C)</p> <p>How helpful/realistic is the stance taken for dealing with this situation? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What other theological resources can I bring to bear? (LR, C)</p>

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
<p>Attending to Culture</p> <p>'Convictions, values and biases that form the social setting in which the reflection takes place.'</p>	<p>What is the culture of the inherited church? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What cultural sensitivities exist in fresh expressions? (LR, CS)</p>	<p>Our preunderstanding of fresh expressions may be based on inaccurate assumptions. I will look for where the research exposes this. How do these examples help us see things anew? What are the challenges of applying CPD in fresh expressions? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>Sees leadership in three forms; competence (in tasks), transactional leadership – a sense of reciprocity and mutual exchange (meeting needs in exchange for support, or politically trading one thing off against another), and transformational leadership (deep change) –whereby the identity of an organisation is completely rediscovered. People resist change if it is likely to lose power or control. Moving from an old pattern to a new one, feels chaotic – this is where conflict, failure and dissatisfaction surface. Leaders have to change to model the new behaviours. (LR, CS)</p>	<p>Whose voices are part of the conversation?</p> <p>What are they saying?</p> <p>What feelings are being expressed?</p> <p>Whose voices are absent or being silenced?</p> <p>Whose voices are being mediated by someone else and how does that nuance them?</p> <p>What trends in culture are exemplified here?</p> <p>What kinds of human behaviour are exhibited here?</p> <p>How has the past shaped the present?</p> <p>(All – LR, CS & C but CS will generate original data.)</p>

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
Attending to experience	<p>What has been the experience of Church leaders who have overseen fresh expressions work? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What has been the experience of fresh expressions practitioners? (LR, C)</p> <p>What of my own experiences? (CS)</p>	How is hierarchical-pastoral authority being received by fresh expressions? (LR, CS, C)	<p>What is my role? How do I feel? (CS)</p> <p>Where do I locate myself in relation to the issues that are emerging? (CS)</p> <p>What are my instincts about the real issues here - where do these instincts come from? (CS)</p>
Assertion: (Bringing perspectives into dialogue)	<p>What specific tensions exist between Methodist discipline and this experience? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What fundamental issues are at the core of these tensions? (LR, CS, C)</p>	<p>What should be happening? What is happening? Why is this happening? What is to be done about it?</p> <p>(LR, CS, C but CS and C should generate original data)</p>	<p>Raises the profile of thinking pastorally as opposed to procedurally. ((CS and C)</p> <p>Emphasises the need to interlink thoughtfulness (which is consideration and kindness as opposed to impatience and irritation) with theoretical interpretation (which includes a nuanced understanding of situations where complexity is embraced and simplistic views are challenged. What are the simplistic assumptions surrounding fresh expressions and the church? (LR, CS, C)</p>

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
Responding	<p>What can be done? (C)</p> <p>Review of what we still do not know and therefore areas for further research. (LR)</p>	<p>Osmer draws on Niebuhr’s moral philosophy in which to be able to discern what to do, one needs to know what is happening in the first place. Osmer argues that when leaders are presented with a diverse mix of opinions and values, the concept of responsibility becomes more important than obedience to the letter of the law. This seems to link with the tension evident in much of the literature, between orthopraxis and orthodoxy. How do each inform the other as tradition develops? (C)</p> <p>Osmer refers to Elaine Graham’s work on transforming practice, whereby the focus of pastoral care needs to be on transformation, and how this might be achieved through good practice suited for particular rather than generic contexts. (CS, C)</p>	<p>Wise judgement is about phrenosis – practical wisdom and prudence. In fresh expressions how might phrenosis conflict with the wider disciplines of the Church? (LR, CS, C)</p>