

Chapter Two

Fresh Expressions in the Tradition of the Methodist Church: an exploration of the synergy and disparity between Fresh Expressions Tradition and Methodist Experience.

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2.0 Literature review: Perspective, Method, Scope and Depth

For this literature review, I have refined the Whiteheads' categories into three points. This provides a means by which I can examine and interrogate the literature and force a dialogue between the Nature of Methodist Oversight and the vision of Fresh Expressions.

In the first section, *Fresh Expressions Tradition*, I survey the literature produced by Fresh Expressions and many of its practitioners. I explore the origins of the movement and the advice given by Fresh Expressions through its training course, *Mission Shaped Ministry*. I outline how the vision for a mixed economy developed. I highlight some of the deeper reservations that have been raised by academics and/or church leaders.

In the second section, *Methodist Tradition and Oversight*, I will focus on a number of characteristics that are distinctive to Methodism; the centrality of CPD, how Methodists understand and experience oversight, the role of its presbyters, the place and status of the class meeting, and how, over the past decade, the Church has committed to 'reshaping for mission.' Crucially, I will show how fresh expressions have impacted the church and are challenging the scope of presbyteral ministry.

In the final section, *Recent Methodist Experience and Debate* I examine three documents that are particularly challenging; Cox's research on pioneer ministry, the VFX scheme review, and *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church* (a report produced by the Joint Anglican Working Party on Emerging Ecclesiologies of Church (JAMWPEEC). This remains the most recent review of how both denominations are progressing in respect of fresh expressions. Significantly, it explores the ecclesiological questions that are emerging and questions how these relate to current Church practice and discipline.

It is important to acknowledge what this review does not include. First, as per my method, I do not consider Culture as a separate category of analysis alongside Tradition and Experience. Neither does

this review explore how Fresh Expressions may have been influenced by the Emerging Church tradition.⁶⁶ Second, this review examines the literature concerning the relationship between fresh expressions and their parent churches, particularly in respect of how fresh expressions are adhering to Church process and discipline. I also focus more on insights that are grounded in academic research, as opposed to those that appear within a much broader volume of what might be termed popular literature on fresh expressions. Whilst this is informative, its primary purpose is to present the vision and theology that is behind Fresh Expressions, reinforced with an examples of good news stories, in such a way that encourages practitioners and churches. Rarely (if ever) is this material written from a position that seeks to constructively critique the movement by highlighting areas where tensions and conflict between local leaders, projects and their sponsor churches have frustrated ecclesial development - apart from in the broadest terms. Third, this review is written from the perspective of presbyters who have 'pastoral charge'. Whilst the Methodist Church's Diaconal Order asserts itself as a 'pioneering religious community committed to enabling outreach, evangelism, and service', I will not explore how deacons might contribute to the staffing and oversight of fresh expressions.⁶⁷ Whilst deacons might be able to make an attractive contribution to fresh expressions (they are free from many of the ecclesial tasks that are carried out exclusively by ministers), deacons do not have pastoral charge. Fourth, this review does not explore those fresh expressions where the Methodist Church and other denominations share oversight of any given

⁶⁶ For further reading consider, "Are 'Fresh Expressions' the Same as 'Emerging Church'?", <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/whatis>. See also, D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church : Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids.: Zondervan, 2005), Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). "One, Holy, Catholic and Fresh," In *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, edited by Steven J. L. Croft and Ian J. Mobsby, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009). Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006). Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003). Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church : Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003); Mike Yaconelli, *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003).

⁶⁷ See "Methodist Diaconal Order," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodistdiaconalorder.org.uk/>.

fresh expression. This would require a much deeper study on the nature of oversight as understood from each denominations' perspective, and how, where differences in ecclesial practice become evident, presbyters have been able to reach a consensus.

2.1 Fresh Expressions Tradition

2.1.1 Breaking New Ground and Mission Shaped Church

Fresh Expressions originated from the evangelical wing of the Church of England, somewhat paradoxically, following concerns raised within the wider Church about church planting practice.⁶⁸ The principal anxiety was that some initiatives were proceeding without the approval of the bishops and the local clergy. By 1994, the Church had published the findings of a working party, set up to explore this, in the form of *Breaking New Ground*.⁶⁹ Whilst this unearthed only four examples of irregularity, the stories of church planting highlighted important issues; 'the legal position of church plants, the authorisation of leaders, the use of buildings, relationships with the diocese and other Churches, permitted forms of worship, and Anglican identity'.⁷⁰ Whilst King suggests that one of these events had the potential to undermine the Anglican Church planting movement nationally,⁷¹ *Breaking New Ground* affirmed church planting as a supplementary strategy to the parish principle, and called for a collaborative and co-ordinated response. Almost a decade later, a review of *Breaking New Ground*, *Mission Shaped Church* (hereafter referred to as 'MSC') considered that the nature of community had changed so much that parishes needed to view church planting as an imperative rather than optional component of local ministry; 'The existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose.'⁷² MSC associated the decline of the

⁶⁸ See 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). Fresh Expressions now has an increasingly international following. See <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/international>.

⁶⁹ *Breaking New Ground : Church Planting in the Church of England, a Report Commissioned by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, (London: Church House Publishing, 1994).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

⁷¹ Philip King, "Bishops, Church Planters, Mission Shaped Partnership," in *Fulcrum*, 2006, http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/bishops-church-planters-mission-shaped-partnerships/#_edn1.

⁷² Graham Cray, ed. *Mission-Shaped Church : Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House, 2004). See also Stuart Murray; *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004); *Post-Christendom, After Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); *A Vast Minority : Christians in Post-Christendom Britain* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015).

Church with the passing of Christendom and the rise of post-Christendom.⁷³ Changes in housing, employment, mobility, family life, and entertainment had influenced communities in a manner that challenged the historic base and geographic boundaries that once defined them. This was complicated further by an increase in social networking. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, alongside the Methodist Council, responded to these changes by establishing Fresh Expressions as a separate charity to encourage new forms of church.⁷⁴ Missioners needed to enculture the gospel in a way that was appropriate for these alternative contexts. MSC firmly rejects the 'cloning' model of church planting – whereby practitioners assume that model of church that has been successful in one locality, can be transplanted elsewhere, with no consideration for differences in community and culture. Church planters needed to shape their emerging church communities around the needs of the people, rather than expecting people to conform to the 'normal patterns' of church worship and fellowship.⁷⁵

Fresh Expressions grounds its argument in the Trinity; new churches will be missional⁷⁶, incarnational⁷⁷, formational⁷⁸, and ecclesial⁷⁹. They will exhibit the four classic marks of Church; as One (through baptism and common discipleship), Holy (dying to self for the sake of mission),

⁷³ For a fuller description see Robin Gill, *The "Empty" Church Revisited : Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (Farnham : Ashgate, 2003). As to the complex link that exists between belief and affiliation, see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, Second Edition (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), and Matthew Guest, Elizabeth Olsen, and John Wolffe, "Christianity: Loss of Monopoly," in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁷⁴ Cray, *Mission-Shaped*, 23.

⁷⁵ "Is there a difference between fresh expressions and church plants?," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/ask/planting>. Also, "Fresh Expressions: Culture - a Different Approach to Church," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/category/story-tags/culture>.

⁷⁶ Cray, *Mission-Shaped*, 79-80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

Catholic (inclusive and diverse) and Apostolic (sent).⁸⁰ They emphasise particular values; living is incarnational ('dying to live' in response to the needs of others); engagement with the community is authentic in that it looks to bring about transformation; relationships are encouraged by a strong focus on welcome, hospitality and intimacy.⁸¹ 'Church' is not somewhere that the community gathers: it is where the community is headed.⁸²

2.1.2 Mission Shaped Ministry & the training of fresh expressions practitioners

The MSM course material is available only to those who register for what has become a year-long course incorporating twenty-four sessions spread over six weekday evenings, three Saturdays and one residential weekend.⁸³ So far, the course has run 115 times across the U.K., with over 3,600 participants.⁸⁴ In essence, Fresh Expressions encourages local leaders to learn from the pattern of discipleship in the gospels⁸⁵ and the nature of the early church in Acts.⁸⁶ Its authors underpin this by drawing from *missio Dei*, stressing the need for forms of culturally sensitive community engagement. This is incorporated with teaching material produced by the Anglican Church Planting initiative.

In relation to the link between fresh expressions and the wider church, MSM gives little priority to exploring the benefits and risks of denominational affiliation.⁸⁷ In my view, it is forced to underplay

⁸⁰ Ibid., 96-99.

⁸¹ Ibid., 81-82.

⁸² For a more comprehensive outline of Fresh Expressions tradition, see Michael Moynagh and Philip Harrold, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012), and Michael Moynagh, *Being Church Doing Life* (Oxford: Monarch, 2014).

⁸³ Fresh Expressions also offer an introductory course; "Mission Shaped Intro," Fresh Expressions, <http://course.missionshapedministry.org/login/index.php>.

⁸⁴ *Mission Shaped Ministry*, Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry>.

⁸⁵ "B04 – Members Handout." MSM, 3.

⁸⁶ The course refers to the Apostle Paul's founding of churches and the call to prayer in Colossians 4:2-18. B05 – *Members handout*, 5.

⁸⁷ MSM includes only four references to the word 'denomination'. '...many denominations have affirmed this movement (A01 Intro. 3.) 'Denominations and new churches are engaging with processes of change'. (A02 Additional Notes. 1.) 'Emerging Church is not one single unified movement, and is not contained in any one denomination.' (A02 Additional Notes. 5.) 'This vision is being explored and owned across many

this because Fresh Expressions contends that the institutional church is struggling in its mission. The movement wants to give hope to those people who whilst being sceptical of the institution, see potential for success if people can be freed from those practices, processes and disciplines that in their view, frustrate and inhibit development. Thus, too much focus on denominational affiliation, and in particular the need for fresh expressions leaders to submit to authority and adhere to regulation, potentially undermines this process. In *Vision and Call*, and drawing from Croft's *Transforming Communities* (2002), MSM states, 'Our horizon must be on the Kingdom of God rather than the extension of influence of a congregation or denomination.'⁸⁸ In *What is Church*, the question of denominational affiliation is not raised until after the bibliography, when participants are encouraged to select from a menu of opportunities for further study and reflection.⁸⁹ The last one reads:

Are you in your denomination or stream because you agree with its beliefs and practices more than those of other denominations? If not, what are your reasons for being part of it? How do you understand loyalty, order and being under authority? Consider how these will work out as you plant a fresh expression.⁹⁰

Elsewhere, in the *Share Booklet: What should we Start?* the word 'denomination' is not used, but practitioners are urged to 'listen to friends and the local church':

denominations and streams of church in the UK and worldwide.' (A02 Members Handout. 10.) A02. This also states, 'No-one is suggesting out with the old, in with the new. Traditional church still has an effective role to play among those with a Christian background who know what they like and like what they know'.

⁸⁸ Steven J. L. Croft, *Transforming Communities : Re-Imagining the Church for the 21st Century* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002). 38-40. In "Additional Notes, A04," MSM, 3.

⁸⁹ "A08 - Members Handout," MSM, 15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

This is easily forgotten, but is a vital part of the discerning process. Who are you acting on behalf of? Has anyone authorized what you are doing?...Ask the local church and/or your friends for prayer support. God may [sic.] speak through them to help your discernment. So keep them up to date with what you are discovering and seek your reactions.⁹¹

At the same time, the local church is also presented as a mixed blessing:

Some pioneers find that one of their biggest headaches is their relationships with the local church. They encounter misunderstanding, unrealistic expectations, and often suspicion. Managing these responses is helped by explaining constantly what you are doing, attending to the reaction and then showing that you have listened. Trust grows when people feel that they have been understood.⁹²

Thus, whilst Fresh Expressions emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful to Christian Tradition, it is coy about how projects should be committed to local churches and their denominations.

2.1.3 Oversight and coaching

In terms of leadership within fresh expressions, MSM suggests that normal protocols might not apply. *Mission Context and the Mixed Economy* states:

Who leads? Will it be lay or ordained, full-time or voluntary leadership? The key is not what is the 'done thing' but who the community will relate to best.⁹³

Nonetheless, MSM does stress that project leaders should to be accountable to a wider authority, citing Sue Hope, who writes in *Mission Shaped Spirituality*:

I have often observed a pattern which emerges in the life of those who receive a vision from God to do something - and that is a process whereby the vision is purged of the 'ego' of the originator/s of the vision. For example, someone has a vision of starting an

⁹¹ Michael Moynagh and Andy Freeman, *Exploring Fresh Expressions of Church Together: What Should We Start?*, ed. Karen Carter (Warwick: Fresh Expressions, 2011), 7.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Unit A02, Mission Context and the Mixed Economy," *MSM*, 6.

outreach and shares it and sometimes a PCC/church leadership will say, 'Yes but not yet'/'Yes, but it needs to be shared with a wider group and not just be about you ...' Sometimes when the vision is shared among a wider group, it changes - other people enlarge, refine the original idea. This can be painful for the original person/persons. But the process is one of letting the grain of wheat of the original idea fall into the ground and die. It is not the possession of the visionary. When it dies, it then bears much fruit.⁹⁴

Hopkins and Headley give an indication of the complex dynamics that can be at work in fresh expressions as different forms of authority are in play; positional, expertise, spiritual and relational. These need to complement each other. MSM also turns to *Planters Problems* for insights as to why projects fail.⁹⁵ 'Fixed mindsets, poor planning, issues of leadership, being inward focused, poor engagement and evangelism, cultural blindness, lack of team dynamics, the team not being effectively released or being under-resourced' – all of these are cited as reasons for failure.⁹⁶

MSM is less concerned about the nature of the relationship between the presbyter who has pastoral charge and the project leaders, and focuses more on the spiritual and practical dynamics of group leadership. The course draws from Belbin's model of how roles combine in a team, and encourages participants to reflect on their natural behaviour and to discern their individual strengths.⁹⁷ MSM also turns to Breen's *LifeShapes*⁹⁸ as a tool by which leaders can critique their work-life balance, relationships, priorities, prayer and personal devotions. It then progresses to help leadership teams discern their missional focus. Breen suggests that every group will journey through four stages;

⁹⁴ "Vision and Call, Handout A04," MSM, 9. Citing Susan Hope, *Mission-Shaped Spirituality : The Transforming Power of Mission* (New York: Seabury Books, 2006).

⁹⁵ Bob Hopkins, "Planters Problems", Anglican Church Planting Initiatives, <http://www.acpi.org.uk/articles/PlantersProblems.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Bob Hopkins and Freddie Hedley, eds., *Coaching for Missional Leadership* (Sheffield: ACPI, 2008), 153.

⁹⁷ In addition to R. M. Belbin, *Team Roles at Work*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam ; London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2010), MSM refers to Steve Chalke and Penny Relph, *Making a Team Work* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1995), David Cormack, *Team Spirit: People Working Together* (Oxford: Monarch, 1990), Bryn Hughes, *Leadership Tool Kit* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002) and John Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team (New Edition)* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

⁹⁸ "Vision and Call, Handout A04," 60-73.

biblical revelation (as leaders discern God's calling); dependence (on the wider church), counter-dependence (as differences within the team bring about tensions), independence (team members may feel unable to process these tensions), and Inter-dependence (when the third phase is overcome).

Hopkins points out the weaknesses of a (presumably Anglican) inherited church ecclesiology that puts the minister at the centre and encourages a model of working in which the minister speaks only with one person. He urges for a more collaborative model of working. Fresh expressions leaders are encouraged to find a coach or mentor. Hopkins and Headley define coaching as,

intentionally helping someone else perform to their highest potential... helping people to unlock someone's potential in pursuit of their goals... helping people be successful... where success is knowing God's will for your life and putting it into practice.⁹⁹

One important coaching skill is to help leaders or groups to discover *for themselves*, through the sharing and re-reading of situations, things that they do not know. *Coaching* also recognises that diverse patterns of learning may be present; visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and prophetic/instinctive learning. MSM contrasts coaching against line-management (ensuring accountability), self-development (which is about the individual rather than the project) and spiritual direction (whereby participant's journey with God is encouraged). The quality of relationship between both parties is crucial; both the person who has oversight¹⁰⁰ and the coachee must share the same goal and believe that by working together they can achieve it.¹⁰¹

Historically, for Methodists the language of 'coaching' or 'mentoring' has been largely absent from discussions about Christian formation. Instead, 'pastoral supervision' is the most commonly used

⁹⁹ Hopkins and Headley, *Coaching*, 25, citing Robert Logan, Sherilyn Carlton & Tara Miller in *Coaching 101: Discover the power of coaching* (Illinois: Churchsmart, 2003).

¹⁰⁰ I have used 'oversight' here rather than 'coaching'.

¹⁰¹ Hopkins and Headley, *Coaching*, 34.

term. It refers to the model of support that superintendents or other accompanists are required to provide for probationer ministers up until the point of ordination. However, by January 2015, the Church had trained and was in the process of appointing sixty 'pioneer coaches', using the Webb Coaching Model.¹⁰² These specialists will be distributed across eleven Fresh Ways Hubs that have been dedicated to enabling people in circuits (often volunteers but increasingly employed staff) who feel called to work exclusively among unchurched people.

Despite this progress, two prominent issues remain. First, whilst Hopkin's definition of coaching is inherent in some aspects of pastoral oversight, the term coaching implies coaches passing on and helping practitioners to develop a particular skill. Yet few presbyters will have the necessary expertise to advise people on how to plant new churches. Whilst the Webb model is useful in that it focuses on helping practitioners discern the outcomes that they are looking for, and discern what practical steps they could take to achieve them, it is not a source of training, or a model that permits the coach to be directive. Secondly, these coaches would not be able to focus exclusively on their task – it would be an addition to their current roles within circuits and districts.

2.1.4 Beginning a fresh expression

New forms of church can emerge in a number of ways; through the renewal of existing congregations as they listen to non-churchgoers; by reinventing an existing fringe group; by creating a new community, or by developing a new network church spanning several parishes or circuits. The fresh expression website categorically states that fresh expressions are not an old project with a new name or 'bridge' projects that point people to 'proper' church.¹⁰³ Thus, the challenge for Methodist presbyters is fourfold. First, they need to educate the wider church on the nature of fresh

¹⁰² Keith Webb, "The Coach Model," <http://keithwebb.com/coach-model/>.

¹⁰³ Fresh Expressions website, "What Is a Fresh Expression?" See also, Michael Moynagh and Andy Freeman, *Exploring Fresh Expressions of Church Together: How Can Fresh Expressions Emerge?*, ed. Karen Carter (Warwick: Fresh Expressions, 2011). Moynagh, Freeman and Carter have also authored/edited, *How Can We Get Support?*, *How Can We Be a Great Team?*, *How Can We Find Our Way?*

expressions and in particular, the notion that a fresh expression should be a missional-ecclesial unit rather than a mission-project intended to address a particular need. Significantly, MSM distinguishes between the concept of communities thinking of themselves as 'church' and argues that they should be constantly focused on 'becoming' church. Thus, the vision is one in which Christian eschatology is being realised, rather than being caught in a state of inertia and resistant to change. Importantly, Fresh Expressions encourages these emerging Christian communities to incorporate baptism and communion from the earliest opportunity. Second, presbyters need to oversee a process wherein newcomers discover the Christian faith, learn what it is to live in Christian community, and grow as disciples. Third, they need to help adherents develop an understanding of what makes the Methodist Church distinctive and how the wider church functions. Finally, presbyters must encourage those who attend to have faith not just in God, but in the practices and disciplines of the Methodist Church. Implicit to all of this is the need to balance autonomy and freedom with accountability to the whole.

2.1.5 Effective Engagement

Although Kirby does not feature within MSM, his insights are particularly relevant to the question of how presbyters can oversee effective engagement. In his *Pitsmoor Cycle*¹⁰⁴, and drawing from his experience as a Church Army Officer, Kirby reflects on the process by which people belong and invite newcomers to attend fresh expressions. He theorises that engagement can be understood through a cycle of experiencing God (in the sense of feeling blessed and a sense of belonging), understanding God (experienced as 'belief') and behavioural change (reinforced by a mixture of rituals and daily practice in the form of attendance, ceremonies, bible reading, care and service). Whilst the importance of these three emphases is not in dispute, the issue of whether newcomers belong and

¹⁰⁴ Jeff and Vanessa Kirby, "The Pitsmoor Cycle."

then believe, or vice-versa, is. Davie in her *Religion in Britain* (1994)¹⁰⁵ argues that many people believe yet choose not to belong, leaving a latency of belief that is (among others) either depressed, assumed or expressed clearly. In her *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (2015)¹⁰⁶, Davie notes whilst much affiliation in the Church of England is nominal, that does not make it meaningless.

2.1.6 Insights on sustainability, accountability and failures

Williams in her *Fresh Expressions in the Urban Context*¹⁰⁷ surveys thirty-one Anglican and one Methodist fresh expressions leaders. She found that some fresh expressions required leaders with specific key-skills in, for example, the ability to present 'up-front', or to compile and manage visual and audio presentations. She also noted that many of these individuals had additional church, family or work commitments which limited their involvement. Despite this, many participants were prepared to commit to their fresh expression for the long-term; common responses to questions about how long they intended to remain included, 'Until God calls me elsewhere' or 'As long as it takes'.¹⁰⁸ Their logic was that they needed to remain until the point at which their fresh expression had developed a core of indigenous leadership which would sustain them in the future. Many participants held the view that growth would not be evident until after five years, and that this therefore was the absolute minimum length of any appointment, voluntary or otherwise.

Williams discovered that many fresh expressions practitioners valued their link with the wider church:

Almost without exception, the leaders of the fresh expressions spoke of their support from the wider church alongside a need for accountability structures. It was felt that this needed to be set in place intentionally, so that it was functioning as a framework that

¹⁰⁵ Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*.

¹⁰⁶ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, Second ed., (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Eleanor Williams, *Fresh Expressions in the Urban Context* (Haverhill: YTC press, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

was present if and when a crisis occurred, rather than have to put something in place where there was a problem.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, William's research suggests that the sustainability of fresh expressions is influenced by their finance, leadership, and accountability structures. She confirms what one would expect of a fresh expression planted in an area of multiple high deprivation indices, where local communities appear marginalised. First, there is an increase in the number of people having 'significant physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs' – surfacing as low self-esteem, apathy and a general lack of involvement. Leaders need to address this as part of the ongoing formation of both individuals and the community as a whole. This weaker base made it harder for leaders to identify and nurture new talent. Additionally, some projects were important but short lived. Funding was a major concern. The wider Church funded projects by a variety of means; through dioceses, circuits, districts, or charitable trusts, by the local church as it fundraises to meet the costs of staffing and/or through experienced and newly retired people who offer their time or expertise. Where grants are concerned, funding was often time limited. The administration required to prepare repeated funding applications took time and distracted leaders from their core tasks. Some fresh expressions took a more commercial route by setting up shops or cafes but rarely was this enough to support salaries. Another key issue was how in certain cases, funding was split for example between sending churches and a fresh expressions project which did not take account of how the demands of the fresh expression would change as it grew. This dual role then became unmanageable. A shortfall in funding led to the closure of one initiative. Williams also provided valuable information about where projects went wrong; some pioneers shaped Church in their own image, rather than adequately assessing the needs of the local community and creating a church in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 61.

response. Alternatively, it is possible to be mission oriented and yet lack the marks of Church. She also noted instances where fresh expressions lacked proper oversight.¹¹⁰

Shoesmith visited 15 Anglican urban fresh expressions in 2009 and noticed some common issues.¹¹¹

The theological training and other expertise that leaders had gathered from their profession was rarely adequate for the task in hand. The support of leaders (through peers and mentors) was vital.

Whether and how the sacraments were incorporated was significant; if an ordained leader came in from outside this tended to 'disrupt fragile relationships and make the sacrament feel like an optional extra'.¹¹² Finance, again, was a crux issue. Not all grant providers recognised the

significance of small steps and low numbers. Literacy was a concern and finding appropriate resources for worship and training in discipleship was difficult. Membership within each fresh expression was low, owing to chaotic lifestyles, and different patterns of attendance (as opposed to regular weekly attendance) were apparent. Shoesmith reasoned that it will take 10-15 years for fresh expressions to become viable communities.

The question of the extent to which fresh expressions are indeed attracting new people and are ecclesial has been explored more beyond Methodism than within it. Walker in *Testing Fresh Expressions* (2014) surveys a range of fresh expressions in the Diocese of Canterbury. This led him to question whether fresh expressions were in fact helping reverse decline. In his view, fresh expressions did not have the unique role that the wider movement claims for them: they were 'clearly not discrete faith communities but a dimension of parish mission'. They did however have

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹¹¹ Francis Shoesmith, "Exploring Fresh Expressions of Church in Deprived Areas: Report on Study Leave 2009," 9, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/franceshshoesmithsabbaticalreport2009.pdf>.

¹¹² Ibid., 3.

the capacity to reinvigorate the church, particularly where mission among children and the unchurched was concerned.¹¹³

2.1.7 The Mixed Economy

Archbishop Rowan Williams first used the term 'mixed economy' in response to the rapid growth of fresh expressions and arguably, a desire to ensure unity in the Church of England.¹¹⁴ Concerns have been raised by among others, Davison, Hull, Alison Milbank, John Milbank, Percy and Walton.¹¹⁵ One implicit anxiety has been that Fresh Expressions is an evangelical-liberal attack on traditionalism. For example, Hull (2006) has been concerned that Fresh Expressions are warping the Church of England's approach to mission by interpreting the *missio Dei* too narrowly. In his view, Fresh Expressions places too much emphasis on conversion and not enough on service or engaging with people of other faiths. Davison and Milbank (2010) have been troubled by how Fresh Expressions seemingly downplay the importance of historic holy space and traditional liturgy, whilst pandering to individualism and shallow consumerism. In general, those who are sceptical about Fresh Expressions view the decline of Christendom, nervousness about the future of the Church, the call for more contextual forms of church planting, and the weight given to cultural accommodation, as postmodern turbulence, rather than the winds of an oncoming storm that require urgent action.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions : Identity and Transformation*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 234.

¹¹⁴ "What Is the Mixed Economy?," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/mixedeconomy>.

¹¹⁵ See Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish. A Critique of Fresh Expression* (London: SCM Press, 2010). John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church : A Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006). Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church : Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1998); John Milbank, "Stale Expressions: The Management Shaped Church," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 1 (2008): 117-128. Roger Walton, "Have We Got the Missio Dei Right?," *Epworth Review* 35, no. 3 (2008): 39-52. 42.

¹¹⁶ For further information on the amorphous link between postmodernity and the emerging church, see, Jonny Baker, *Transforming Preaching : Communicating God's Word in a Postmodern World* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2009); Graham Cray, *The Post-Evangelical Debate* (London: Triangle, 1997); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006); Graeme Fancourt, *Brand New Church? : The Church and the Postmodern Condition* (New York: SPCK, 2013); William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent : A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement* (Nashville: B&H, 2009); David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland : Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Gordon Lynch, *Losing My Religion? Moving on from Evangelical Faith* (London: DLT, 2003); David Lyon,

They place greater faith in a broader church tradition that has lived through centuries of decline and growth. In a worst-case scenario, the dynamic is one of conservative-traditionalists quarrelling with liberal-progressives. The counter-argument to this is that the decline of the inherited church is beyond dispute – and no other credible alternative has emerged. It was into this dissonance that Williams launched his mixed economy construct; fresh expressions and inherited forms of Church can co-exist, respecting and supporting each other. In 2011, at the Fresh Expressions National Day Conference in Oxford, Williams stated:

So mixed economy – yes it’s one of those phrases I occasionally regret having coined. It keeps coming back ad nauseam... we’re not looking for a church which is a kind of Balkan map of little independent, autonomous, self-serving groups doing what they fancy, finding the style that suits them, which is always a danger... but much more a context in which there really is a flow of communication, good news and challenge between different styles of church life that may respond to different personalities and different stages on the journey.¹¹⁷

Fresh Expressions’ vision for the mixed economy is that it should echo the distinctive and mutually dependent work of the Trinity, reflect the diversity of creation, express the Eucharistic heart of the Church (belonging to one body), and draw strength from the patience of the Spirit.¹¹⁸ Lings, writing from a Church Army perspective, offers a complementary and practice based way of understanding the mixed economy, by revisiting Winter’s work on sodality and modality.¹¹⁹ In examining the

Jesus in Disneyland : Religion in Postmodern Times (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Gordon Lynch, *After Religion : 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning* (London: DLT, 2002); Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side : Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000); Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1995) and *Re-Enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

¹¹⁷ Rowan Williams, "Making the Mixed Economy Work," <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2044/making-the-mixed-economy-work>.

¹¹⁸ "What is the Mixed Economy?," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/mixedeconomy>.

¹¹⁹ George Lings, "Why modality and sodality thinking is vital to understand future church," Church Army, <http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138339>. Winter was a Protestant missiologist.

pattern of mission in Acts, Winter noted how two contrasting expressions of church were interrelated; a people-centred, 'modal', and a task centred 'sodal' form.¹²⁰ Lings suggests that any ecclesial community is likely to be a blend of the two and states, 'sodality pioneers what modality sustains...and modality provides resources that enable sodality to flourish'.¹²¹ Whilst this insight is helpful in affirming role and diversity, it does not sufficiently examine the question of what degree of separation should exist between fresh expressions and their sponsor church. Originally, Winter attributed the emergence of fresh and increasingly independent sodalities, to the fact that the existing models of church mission had become too modal:

by the early part of the 20th century, the once-independent structures which had been merely related to the denominations became dominated by the churches, that is administered, not merely regulated. Partly as a result... there was a new burst of totally separate mission sodalities called *Faith Missions*.¹²²

2.1.8 Pioneer Mission and Ministry

Currently the Methodist and Anglican Churches incorporate pioneer ministry under different structures. In Anglican settings, dioceses have the option to create Ordained Pioneer Ministry posts, with training institutions providing a different training package for ordinands, whereas in the Methodist Church pioneer ministry has been introduced through its much smaller VFX scheme. VFX has been a deliberate move to plant new forms of church for newcomers in between the ages of twenty and thirty, and has deployed fourteen workers across thirteen centres. Meanwhile, a second strand of pioneer is evolving as local churches incorporate aspects of pioneer ministry into new staff appointments, and as the wider Church develops a pioneering pathway to support local

¹²⁰ Ralph Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," 1973, 4-5, published by World Evangelical Alliance Resources, <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/resources/view.htm?id=436>.

¹²¹ Lings, "Modality," 4.

¹²² Winter, 8.

practitioners.¹²³ Two observations indirectly challenge how presbyteral ministry is presently exercised. First, VFX pioneers live in the communities that they serve, unlike presbyters who serve across a circuit. Second, they work in deeper partnership with a single local community, rather than across a range of communities.¹²⁴

*Fresh*¹²⁵ (co-authored by two Anglicans and one Methodist) considers the nature of pioneer identity by examining the Apostle Paul's character and ministry. *Fresh* resonates with the shared experiences of pioneers as outlined in *Pioneers for Life*.¹²⁶ Lings and Drane¹²⁷ were the first to explore this link but in *Fresh*, Goodhew, Roberts, and Volland deploy their argument in calling for the Anglican and Methodist Churches to identify more people who have apostolic gifts. In their view, pioneers have the potential to reinvigorate fragile communities and/or plant new churches.¹²⁸ *Fresh* explores the qualities that pioneers might bring; identifying opportunities; focusing and achieving; seeing differently; having the strength to challenge the view of others; creating social networks; acting boldly and having persistence. The authors suggest that pioneering people do not readily fit the stereotype of those who would typically be welcomed in the life of the Church. They also acknowledge that some entrepreneurs can also have unhelpful character traits such as personal ambition and a worldly approach to wealth creation for personal gain.

¹²³ "Methodist Pioneering Pathways," The Methodist Church, 2014, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1246863/pioneer-pathways-report-140714.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 160.

¹²⁵ David Goodhew, Andrew Roberts, and Michael Volland, eds., *Fresh! An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 2012). For Methodist perspective, see Angela Shier-Jones, *Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: SPCK, 2009). For continued Anglican reflection see Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker, *The Pioneer Gift : Explorations in Mission* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2014); Steve Hollinghurst, *Starting, Assessing and Sustaining Pioneer Mission : A Guide for Pioneers, Permission-Givers and Local Churches*, Grove Evangelism Series, (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2013); Moynagh, *Being Church*.

¹²⁶ David Male, ed. *Pioneers 4 Life : Explorations in Theology and Wisdom for Pioneering Leaders* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011).

¹²⁷ John Drane, "From One Pioneer to Another: Insights from St Paul," in *Explorations*, 149-164.

¹²⁸ Goodhew, Roberts, and Volland, *Fresh*, 17.

2.1.9 Fresh Expressions literature and the wider church response

Fresh Expressions literature falls into one of three tiers. The first looks to encourage Churches and leaders to become mission-shaped and start fresh expressions. A second, much narrower band shows how some fresh expressions are drawing from catholic sacramentalism and tertiary monasticism. The third band of literature is more extensive, allowing both supporters and sceptics to share their reflections.

*Mission Shaped and Rural*¹²⁹, *Children*¹³⁰, *Spirituality*¹³¹ and *Youth*¹³² all form part of the first band and follow a similar pattern; show how the mission of Church was once successful but is now struggling to adapt to sociological change, give examples of where the decline has been reversed, and explain how this lends credibility to fresh expressions.¹³³ *Mission Shaped Parish*¹³⁴ calls for a change in the culture that surrounds church administration, in that leaders need to encourage mutual friendship and discipleship.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, Potter, in *Pioneering a New Future* (2015) encourages churches to look with honesty and humility at their situation, and examine their vision, aspirations, intentionality, and goals (with reference to the SMART model).¹³⁶ Although his text is

¹²⁹ Sally Gaze, *Mission-Shaped and Rural : Growing Churches in the Countryside* (London: CHP, 2006).

¹³⁰ Margaret Withers, *Mission-Shaped Children : Moving Towards a Child-Centred Church* (London: CHP, 2006).

¹³¹ Susan Hope, *Mission-Shaped Spirituality : The Transforming Power of Mission* (London: CHP, 2006).

¹³² Tim Sudworth, Graham Cray, and Chris Russell, *Mission-Shaped Youth : Rethinking Young People and Church* (London: CHP, 2007).

¹³³ Withers, 29. Withers argues for the legitimacy of fresh expressions in her introduction, then on pages 1-15 outlines how the sociological and cultural context in which the Church carries out its mission has changed. On pages 16-28 she evidences how the Church has struggled to respond effectively. On pages 29-40 she cites examples of how this trend has been reversed. Pages 41-55 provides an account of the form that Church has traditionally taken, and pages 56-65 suggest new ways of being church.

¹³⁴ Tim Sledge, "We Can't Go on Meeting Like This: Shaping the Structure of the Local Church for Mission," in *Mission-Shaped Parish : Traditional Church in a Changing Context*, ed. Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge. (London: CHP, 2006). 105-131.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹³⁶ Phil Potter, *Pioneering a New Future : A Guide to Shaping Change and Changing the Shape of Church*, (Abingdon: BRF, 2015). 97. SMART refers to Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed.

written with fresh expressions practitioners in mind, much of his writing provides guidance on how Church leaders can facilitate change by inviting churches to reflect on a range of pertinent questions. Potter's text reflects much of the Fresh Expressions literature in this band, in that all of the fresh expressions that he cites are presented positively and as evidence in support of the movement; rarely is there mention of any creative conflict either within a fresh expression or between the fresh expression and the wider church. There is some recognition that the structures, processes, and expectations of the Anglican Church have hindered development. Potter cites an observation made by Lings; 'Our efforts [within inherited church] to do church and mission effectively are like standing someone on the [swimming pool] board and teaching them to perform a perfect dive into the pool. The problem is...doing mission today is a completely different sport and it is not a diving board we need but a surfboard.'¹³⁷ Nonetheless Potter does not allow this to detract from the core task of communicating the vision for fresh expressions. Rather, there is a simple conviction that the Church has the capacity to embrace these new forms of mission. This *tour de force* - vision and theory followed by example - is also evident on the Fresh Expressions website, where a vast number of good news stories have been posted.¹³⁸

The seminal text within the second band is Croft and Mosby's *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (2009).¹³⁹ Herein, Williams argues that catholic disciplines can help Christian communities remain spiritually honest.¹⁴⁰ McLaren suggests that new communities need to resist the temptation to 'throw out the old wineskin before it is too early; 'if we discard the old wineskin before we have a

¹³⁷ Ibid., 166.

¹³⁸ "The Fresh Expressions Website: Stories," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories>. See also Graham Cray and Ian Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012).

¹³⁹ Steven J. L. Croft and Ian J. Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

new one in place, ready to receive the new wine of the gospel, the wine will likewise be lost.’¹⁴¹ Blair outlines the growth of the U2charist, a service of Holy Communion in which the gospel imperative to love the neighbour is reinforced through the lyrics of contemporary rock music.¹⁴² Cottrell similarly calls for fresh expressions to match words with actions; ‘St. Francis of Assisi famously told his followers to go into the world and preach the gospel, using words only if they had to...[this] does remind us of a vital truth that actions speak louder, and that sometimes words get in the way’.¹⁴³ Giles explores the concept of liturgy and argues that inward preparation needs to be matched with a willingness to physically change the space in which worship takes place; ‘When these two aspects of our common life [theology and architecture, theory and practice] stop talking to each other, buildings become untouchable shrines, and the people who use them prisoners or curators.’¹⁴⁴

In *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (2010), Cray encourages fresh expressions to search for ‘deep church’.¹⁴⁵ Fresh expressions must ground themselves in their heritage; ‘Consumer culture may be rootless, having turned ancient heritage into a tourist experience...it is the role of the Church to offer hope.’¹⁴⁶ Mosby discerns that three distinct expressions of monasticism are evolving; the development of new places for prayer and contemplation allied to a Benedictine vision; the planting of single households, communities, or pioneers in the Franciscan and Dominican traditions, and a blending of the two, exemplified in his own Moot community.¹⁴⁷ There are limited but powerful

¹⁴¹ Brian McLaren, "One, Holy, Catholic and Fresh," in *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, ed. Steven J. L. Croft and Ian J. Mobsby (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009), 25.

¹⁴² Paige Blair, "U2charist," in *Sacramental*, 28.

¹⁴³ Stephen Cottrell, "Letting Your Actions Do the Talking," in *Sacramental*, 78.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Giles, "Liturgically Informed Buildings," in *Sacramental*, 130.

¹⁴⁵ Graham Cray, "Why Is Monasticism Important?," in *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church*, ed. Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Ian Mobsby, "The Importance of New Monasticism as a Model of Building Ecclesial Communities Our of Contextual Mission," *ibid.*, 14 & 16.

examples of how some fresh expressions have been shaped in this way.¹⁴⁸ Safe Space in Telford practices 'daily rhythms and liturgies, Ignatian spiritual exercises and pilgrimage.'¹⁴⁹; Re-generation incorporates young people on their leadership team and enables their pastoral ministry to develop as older youth take on responsibility for younger groups¹⁵⁰; Wolverhampton Pioneer Ministries are developing 'rhythms of grace' as a means of 'staying close to the heart of God'.¹⁵¹

Evaluating Fresh Expressions sits in the third band and examines the ecclesiological issues raised by new work, asking some pointed questions; Are fresh expressions weighty enough to be called Church?¹⁵²; How might fresh expressions challenge not just our ecclesiology but also our patterns of training?¹⁵³; How might they challenge our pyramidal power structures?¹⁵⁴; Is it possible for fresh expressions to retain their prophetic witness whilst remaining part of the Church?¹⁵⁵ Male¹⁵⁶ and Moynagh¹⁵⁷ are both concerned that Fresh Expressions might pander to consumer culture rather than challenge it. Meanwhile, John Hull's criticism¹⁵⁸ (outlined previously in 2006)¹⁵⁹ was that whilst

¹⁴⁸ "New Monastic Fresh Expressions," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/examples/monastic>.

¹⁴⁹ Ian Adams and Ian Mobsby, "New Monasticism," in *Sacramental*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ "Regeneration," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/regeneration/feb15>.

¹⁵¹ Debs Walton, "Vitalise," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/vitalise/sep15>.

¹⁵² Sarah Savage, "Fresh Expressions: The Psychological Gains and Risks," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions : Explorations in Emerging Church ; Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 55-70. 57.

¹⁵³ Steve Croft, "Formation for Ministry in a Mixed Economy Church: The Impact of Fresh Expressions of Church on Patterns of Training," in *Evaluating*, 40-54.

¹⁵⁴ Savage, "Psychological," 55-70. 56.

¹⁵⁵ Pete Rollins, "Biting the Hand That Feeds: An Apology for Encouraging Tension between the Established Church and Emerging Collectives," in *Evaluating*, 71-84.

¹⁵⁶ David Male, "Who Are Fresh Expressions Really For? Do They Really Reach the Unchurched?," in *Evaluating*, 148-160.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Moynagh, "Do We Need a Mixed Economy? ," in *Evaluating*, 177-186.

¹⁵⁸ John Hull, "Only One Way to Walk with God: Christian Discipleship for New Expressions of Church," *ibid.*, 105-120. 115.

¹⁵⁹ John Hull, *Mission-shaped church : a Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 1.

Fresh Expressions have a vision to create mission shaped churches, the movement is driven by a conservative evangelicalism that is more likely to result in a church-shaped mission. Whilst Mason is wary of how the power-dynamics of the wider church might impact fresh expressions¹⁶⁰, and Rollins states, 'there is no such thing as the mixed economy'¹⁶¹, Nelstrop is the most direct in her criticism. In her view, Williams' approach is flawed; the formality of inherited Church hinders the development of intimate and supportive relationships that encourage seekers to question and ask for help. She fears that the mixed economy will result in some churches becoming either tourist venues or refuges, where those who attend will create a nostalgic community hankering after a golden age that never was.¹⁶²

Steve Hollinghurst has stated that he is a great supporter of both the analysis and aims of MSC. Despite this, he remains concerned about how, 'The language of fresh expressions of church may be killing our mission'.¹⁶³ Hollinghurst argues that if fresh expressions only offer alternative styles of worship, they will only attract existing or disaffected church members. He states, 'Such churches cannot enable new Christians from non-churched backgrounds to worship in their own culture when they have already had the culture of the fresh expression decided for them in advance by a group of well-meaning but culturally different Christians.' In *Mission Shaped Evangelism* (2010), Hollinghurst offers a much more detailed argument for increased cross-cultural mission and echoes some of Fresh Expression's contextual-incarnational themes. Evangelism is; 'Not getting people to church but getting people to be church'; 'Not taking God to people but seeing what He is already doing in their

¹⁶⁰ Mark Mason, "Living between the Distance of 'a Community of Character' and 'a Community of the Question'," in *Evaluating*, 85-104. Mason similarly argues that fresh expressions should be determined in developing their own ecclesial identity, and should be alert to how power is mediated. 88 & 98-99.

¹⁶¹ Pete Rollins, "Biting," 72. Argues that the process of incorporating fresh expressions into a mixed economy suppresses their prophetic voice in calling for ecclesial change.

¹⁶² Louise Nelstrop, "Mixed Economy or Ecclesial Reciprocity: Which Does the Church of England Really Want to Promote?," in *Evaluating*, 187-203. 195.

¹⁶³ Steve Hollinghurst, "The Language of 'Fresh Expressions of Church' May Be Killing Our Mission," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/views/language-of-fresh-expressions>.

lives'; 'Not first about getting people into heaven but getting heaven into people'; 'Not saving people from the world but allowing God to transform them as part of a plan to support the world'.

Evangelism is concerned with, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'¹⁶⁴

Mission Shaped Questions remains a significant text that invites a range of academics and/or church leaders to comment on Fresh Expressions.¹⁶⁵ Urwin calls for a deeper focus on the sacraments.¹⁶⁶

Sharing his practical experiences of working in an emerging church context with pioneering leaders, much of what he encounters requires adaptability as he shapes baptisms, communions, and confirmations in a way that is appropriate for newcomers. On one occasion, he recast a liturgy so that people could affirm their infant baptism (if this had indeed been undertaken in the first instance), rather than him inadvertently re-baptising those who were unsure. On another he suspected that many people who approached the rail for communion (after the confirmation candidates had first received), were doing so instinctively and had not yet themselves been confirmed. This willingness to be flexible and permit 'holy experimentation' is echoed in Tilby's conviction that the Anglican Church has the capacity to offer a safe-space and give permission for people to 'experience some of the elements of Christian worship either in an unstructured way or in a way that begins to develop form and structure.'¹⁶⁷ With reference to Methodism, Atkins similarly argues that the rules and structures of the Church should not inhibit those practices that new

¹⁶⁴ Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism : The Gospel in Contemporary Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), 245-251. See also Matt Stone, *Fresh Expressions of Church: Fishing Nets or Safety Nets?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ Steven J. L. Croft, ed. *Mission-Shaped Questions : Defining Issues for Today's Church*, (London: CHP, 2010).

¹⁶⁶ Lindsay Urwin, "What Is the Role of Sacramental Ministry in Fresh Expressions of Church," in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, 29-41. 38.

¹⁶⁷ Angela Tilby., "What questions does catholic ecclesiology pose for fresh expressions", in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, 89.

communities are rediscovering and reframing; 'Today the essence of the Church must be more discernibly holistic than modernist distinctions would permit'.¹⁶⁸

Moynagh (2011), turns to Venn and Andersons's 'three self's' and includes a further in light of Vatican II. Missioners should develop self-financing, self-governing, self-reproducing - and, 'self-theologising' communities. The goal of fresh expressions is not permanence but viability as they serve a particular community. However, fresh expressions will need to be 'attentive to flow', helping people to move on and settle in a different church when necessary. The ability to manage transitions will be crucial; volunteers come and go, funding may change; variations in attendance may affect group dynamics. The leadership's role during this period is to ensure that the community understands its values and the principles that guide them.¹⁶⁹

2.1.10 Deeper Reservations

For the Parish by Davison and Milbank reacts aggressively to MSC's criticism of the parish structure and the ease at which it dismisses centuries of tradition.¹⁷⁰ This, however, is not an argument made in relation to oversight; it is more concerned with the extent to which the wider church is losing faith in the parish system, and is allowing a particular form of evangelicalism (whose agenda accommodates rather than resists changes in wider culture). Perhaps regrettably, *For the Parish* has become a much-derided Aunt Sally. Cray states that when arguing against the mixed economy, Davison and Millbank select unhelpful examples of fresh expressions and are unbalanced in their

¹⁶⁸ Martyn Atkins, "What Is the Essence of Being a Church?," in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, 16-28. 27.

¹⁶⁹ Mike Moynah, "In for the Long Haul? Sustaining Fresh Expressions of Church," in *Pioneers 4 Life : Explorations in Theology and Wisdom for Pioneering Leaders*, ed. David Male (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011), 130-148. 130, 132 & 144.

¹⁷⁰ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish. A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. Fresh Expressions is generating discussion about the extent to which the traditional parishes structure remains appropriate. See Steven J. L. Croft, *The Future of the Parish System : Shaping the Church of England for the Twenty-First Century* (London: CHP, 2006); Malcolm Grundy, *What's New in Church Leadership? : Creative Responses to the Changing Pattern of Church Life* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007).

approach.¹⁷¹ Stephen Cox argues that *For the Parish* is written defensively, and that Davison and Milbank's work contains 'a fair amount of intellectual and cultural snobbery' and a 'deliberately wilful' misreading of fresh expressions.¹⁷² Tueno notes that Davison and Milbank wrote their book without having visited any fresh expressions.¹⁷³ Cookson is concerned that if their view is genuinely representative of the wider church, it risks appearing insular and losing an entire demographic. Poignantly, he cites the separation and growth of Methodism in the 18th and 19th centuries as an example of where this has happened before.¹⁷⁴ The core question is the extent to which church tradition can change, and whether the polemic between the traditional wing of the Church of England and Fresh Expressions is one of one-sided condemnation, (Fresh Expressions are far gentler in their criticisms of the wider church), or shared learning. Importantly, in relation to the Mixed economy, Nelstrop in her *Mixed Economy or Ecclesial Reciprocity* (2008), and Gamble in his *Mixed Economy: Nice Slogan or Working Reality?* (2008) have both questioned how *mutual* listening and learning can feature.¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, *For the Parish* offers some important considerations. If the faith of the Church is embodied through place and liturgy, what is at risk if this changes? How might fresh expressions meet a particular cultural need without becoming exclusive? My work frames questions about fresh expressions within the context of Methodist Oversight.

¹⁷¹ Graham Cray, "We are all 'for the parish,'" *Fresh Expressions*, <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/news/cen/201011parish>.

¹⁷² Stephen Cox, "A critique of Fresh Expressions," Diocese of Guildford, <http://www.cofguildford.org.uk/assets/downloads/departments/missionevangalism/fortheparishreview.pdf>.

¹⁷³ Guerin Tueno, "Built on the Word: The Theology and Use of the Bible in Australian Fresh Expressions of Church." (DThM diss., University of Durham, 2014), 47. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11081/>. Tueno cites Graham Cray in "For the Parish by Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank - a Reponse," *Anvil* 27, no.1 (2011). Also consider, "Does Fresh Expressions Misrepresent the Gospel? – Opinion," ABC Religion & Ethics (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/02/21/3144358.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ William Cookson, "Review of For a Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions," <http://willcookson.wordpress.com/2011/06/24/review-of-for-the-parish-a-critique-of-fresh-expressions/>.

¹⁷⁵ Nelstrop, "Mixed Economy," 203.

Roland Riem, writing in *Ecclesiology* has suggested that Mission Shaped Church 'takes some short cuts which may not help the Church to be in mission in the most sustainable way.'¹⁷⁶ His principal concern is that whilst Fresh Expressions have engineered a number of values, intent on freeing up local churches so that they can mission effectively, the movement has not reflected deeply enough on what limits must remain:

What is most interesting about the values chosen and their justification is the lack of challenge they present to the argument of the report. That oneness involves a unity that goes beyond co-existence, that holiness involves separation, that there are limits to diversity, that apostolicity involves authority – all these are raced over to give primacy to diversity of form as determined locally. While the need for an 'obedient immersion in context' is seen to be crucial, this obedience does not extend to paying serious attention to the tradition.¹⁷⁷

Riem is concerned that fresh expressions might become 'disposable commodities' that pander to consumerism.¹⁷⁸ He notes the ease at which MSC shifts from talking about 'the Church' and begins speaking about 'new forms of church'¹⁷⁹, something that resonated with my own, early observations about the MSM course. Walton believes that Fresh Expressions views the *missio Dei* too narrowly.¹⁸⁰ Is the Church the primary means by which God fulfils His mission? If so, the Fresh Expressions strategy for church growth through conversion to Christ has warrant. Conversely, a more liberal interpretation of the *missio Dei* sees God present beyond the walls of the Church, at work in the lives of those who are of a different faith or no faith at all. Walton therefore considers that Fresh

¹⁷⁶ Roland Riem, "Mission-Shaped Church: An Emerging Critique," *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 1 (2006): 125-139.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁸⁰ Walton, "Have we got," 42.

Expressions have arisen from a more insular view of Church and calls for a model of discipleship that is outward looking.¹⁸¹

2.1.11 Immediate Oversight Concerns: Fresh Expressions Tradition

Whilst MSM has much to offer, Fresh Expressions is more concerned with encouraging mission shaped thinking and encouraging vision, than it is with asking questions of how individual projects might be incorporated into their parent denominations. The challenge for Methodist presbyters is to introduce those who are involved with fresh expressions not only to Christ and the newly emerging Christian community, but also to Methodism's distinctive charisms. One particular source of unease is that whilst Fresh Expressions is robust in calling Christians to focus on becoming Church, doing the work of the Kingdom, and developing their sense of continuity with broader Christian tradition, it is virtually silent on the value and importance of belonging to a denomination. One could argue that MSM takes this as read. Local projects must declare their sponsor church when registering on the Fresh Expressions website. Leaders who wish to attend MSM need to supply a reference from their minister. This infers that any fresh expression should be under the oversight of a parent denomination, and its key leaders should be functioning comfortably within its process, practice, and discipline. At the same time, implicit in MSC is a belief that the church is struggling to navigate post-Christendom environments because it is using structures and processes that were developed originally for use within Christendom contexts. I would also argue that many people who are attracted to fresh expressions carry within themselves a postmodern scepticism towards institutions, fuelled by a distrust of power, and those who have the authority to use it. This is characterised by a resistance to embrace forms of historic tradition which, by their very nature, underpin much of Church behaviour and process. Tradition is no longer simply accepted because it has proved helpful in the past. Some of these attitudes are clearly present within the relevant,

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 49.

reconstructionist, or revisionist facets of the emerging church movement. Substantiating causality, in what is such a complex and heady mix is difficult. Nonetheless, Driscoll states:

Relevants commonly begin alternative worship services within evangelical churches to keep generally younger Christians from leaving their churches. They also plant new churches to reach emerging people...Reconstructionists are generally theologically evangelical and dissatisfied with the current forms of church (e.g. seeker, purpose, contemporary)... Revisionists are theologically liberal and question key evangelical doctrines, critiquing their appropriateness for the emerging postmodern world.¹⁸²

Given that the movement is looking to inspire hope rather than despair in newcomers, it makes more sense for Fresh Expressions to underplay the issue of denominational affiliation, the role of the clergy and the question of accountability, and direct its efforts towards arguing for a practical missiology rather than practical ecclesiology. Meanwhile, Fresh Expressions could argue that the question of how any given denomination might incorporate fresh expressions into their own ecclesiological structure, process, and discipline, is beyond their remit.

MSM also calls for a mixed-economy approach in which congregations are encouraged to value both fresh expressions and inherited churches, and for presbyters to foster a relationship of mutual respect and learning. However, this may prove difficult given the decline of the Methodist Church and the challenge of developing new work in contexts where struggling and resource hungry inherited churches are drawing valuable ministerial support away from contexts of missionary potential. This is complicated further by Winter's exploration of mission modality and sodality. Taken to extremes, his argument might be used to view Fresh Expressions as the missionary movement that it is, and to form a new group within the Church comprised of those, who will focus on developing a Pauline model of apostolic mission, planting new churches and safeguarding their immediate development. Conceivably, the inherited Church remains, providing a longer term

¹⁸² Mark Driscoll, "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church," *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no.2 (2006): 87-93. 90.

stability. However, where would Methodist presbyters fit in this? Both Winter, and Cox's arguments strike at the core of Methodist presbyteral identity and purpose. In easier times, when demands and resources may have been less pressing, Methodist presbyters may have not had to concern themselves with the question of how they might balance providing spiritual nurture and pastoral care to those within the Church, whilst pioneering new forms of outreach to those who are beyond it. However, as demands have increased and resources have decreased, this question has become even sharper, forcing a binary choice. Should the presbyteral task be one of serving the inherited church, providing spiritual nurture and pastoral care, or should presbyters focus more on outreach? The evolution of VentureFX and its dissolution into the new Pioneer Pathway is evidence that the Church has recognised this tension. Is it possible to do both? Crucially, when presbyters chair church councils, where should their loyalties lie?

This initial analysis of Fresh Expressions Tradition suggests that in order to have any chance of success as project leaders, presbyters must be present consistently, and adopt a leadership style that enables others. The danger is that presbyters will be tempted to over-administrate and dominate new work, forcing their own understanding of what church should look like, inhibiting the self-theologising process that should be at work in enabling the emerging Christian community to develop itself. The crucial question is what model of working will enable the greatest freedom and flexibility, whilst maintaining accountability. The most likely outcome is that achieving a consistent presence, given the additional demands that presbyters face, will be difficult. This means that fresh expressions will rely on delegated leadership. Meanwhile, if Methodism cannot embrace the ideals of those who attend fresh expressions, history suggests that they may look elsewhere.

In terms of sustainability, the funding and resourcing of projects is likely to be of concern, especially given that grants are time limited. In addition, those who are involved in starting fresh expressions may require a measure of coaching/and or mentoring that is not required in established inherited

congregations. One important challenge is that few presbyters are likely to have experience in planting new congregations. How can presbyters pass on what they do not know?

Fresh Expressions Tradition argues that spiritual disciplines and the sacraments should be encouraged in fresh expressions from the outset. One of the strengths of Methodism is that it is the ordained presbyter who is authorised to conduct services, rather than the liturgy – although liturgies can be received and approved by Conference. This affords presbyters the opportunity, and considerable leeway in altering the form, content and shape of liturgies in a way that is appropriate to context. However, it will require presbyters to act with a confidence and boldness in working differently. Fresh expressions baptism and communion services will require empathy and creativity. The style, content, weekly rhythm, and geographical location in which worship takes place will also be an important consideration for presbyters as they work with fresh expressions leaders. All these combine to communicate an image of what it is to be a Christian and what it is to worship.

2.2 Methodist Tradition and Oversight

The *Statistics at a Glance* report of 2015 states that by the close of October 2014, the Methodist Church comprised 4,650 local churches and 1,780 active ministers, of whom approximately 180 worked in chaplaincy.¹⁸³ The *Statistics for Mission* report of 2014 adopted a standardised weekly attendance measure and calculates that 191,812 individuals attended Sunday Services, 32,680 attended weekday services, 483,786 attended groups or outreach activities and 38,483 people attended fresh expressions.¹⁸⁴ In contrast to the broader decline of church membership and attendance, the number of fresh expressions has grown rapidly. In 2009, 893 fresh expressions were recorded; an increase of 36 from the previous year. By 2010, this had risen to 941¹⁸⁵, by 2012 to 1,084 and by 2014 to 2,705.¹⁸⁶ In 2010, the two most popular forms of fresh expressions were Messy Church (at 40%) and Café Church (at 14%).¹⁸⁷ In 2014, 29% of fresh expressions reported that they were shared initiatives, 61% with other denominations, and 23% with other Methodist churches across a circuit. Whilst the statistics cannot serve as an indicator as to whether these projects have the concept of ecclesial formation in mind, there *is* some clarity in relation to outreach. 548 fresh expressions declared that they were intended for those who do not attend church at all, whilst 304 stated that they were for those do not attend church regularly. The presence of fresh expressions, their focus on contextual mission and community formation, the strength of local involvement, and the momentum of the wider movement, is likely to impact directly on the scope of presbyteral ministry and the skills required for effective oversight. The stationing profiles and statistics suggest

¹⁸³ "Methodism in Numbers - Statistics at a Glance, July 2015."

¹⁸⁴ Alan Piggot, "Statistics for Mission," 10.

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Stephens, "Statistics for Mission 2008-2010" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2011), 17, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1154431/stats-statsformission-confreport2011-0511.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ Forwarded by the Methodist Church statistics office.

¹⁸⁷ Stephens, "Statistics for Mission 2008-2010," 18.

that a high proportion of presbyters will have either direct oversight of a fresh expression, or will work alongside colleagues who do.¹⁸⁸

This section of the literature review explores the structure of the Church and some of its distinctive charisms. I will outline the structure of the church, the concept of connexionalism, and the nature of Methodist oversight, the role of presbyters, and the Methodist Church's Constitution, Practice and Discipline (CPD). I will also explore how the class meeting once provided a means of Christian formation for the Methodist Church, and evidence how this has now been lost.

2.2.1 The nature of the Methodist Church

The definitive statement on Methodist ecclesiology, *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) states that Methodism has been influenced by a synthesis of distinct theological emphases; belief in the reign and mission of the Triune God; the conviction that Methodists live in covenant with God and each other; a desire to retain unity whilst embracing diversity; and their conviction that the Methodist Church stands, as part of God's Church, 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.'¹⁸⁹ *Called to Love and Praise* highlights how the Methodist Church is essentially societal in nature. Those who commit to the Church do so in an attitude of mutual obligation and dependency, rather than by mutual obligation or voluntary agreement alone. Commitment to the local and wider Methodist Church is expressed through baptism, confirmation and sharing in Holy Communion. Methodists view communion as a converting ordinance and advocates an open table policy. The Church welcomes three groups in particular; children (subject to certain conditions), communicants of other churches whose discipline so permits, and those who are exploring faith. The implication for fresh expressions is that for projects to be ecclesial, they need to be more than a particular interest group (such as a

¹⁸⁸ Confirmed by three Chairs of District.

¹⁸⁹ *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1984-2000* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2000), 42-46.
http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_PartI_0409.pdf.

toddler group or a women's fellowship), irrespective of the level of mutual support that exists.

Churches are founded on faith in Christ, and include the sacraments.¹⁹⁰

2.2.2 A Connexional Church

Rooted in the early Methodist practice of grouping congregations together for the purposes of oversight, connexionalism has become a cultural norm for Methodists. Atkins writes in *Discipleship and the People called Methodists* (2010):

Put very simply 'connexionalism' is the term used to describe the principles and practices by which Methodism is intentionally interrelated and connected together.¹⁹¹

In British Methodism, the 'circuit meeting' oversees the strategy for mission across the whole, directing property, finance, and staffing. Local churches share the costs of ministry and mission.¹⁹² Presbyters typically oversee a section of churches in a circuit and live out their calling through a ministry of 'word, sacrament, and pastoral responsibility'.¹⁹³ They work in partnership with church stewards and church councils to discern the needs of local churches. Deacons exercise a ministry of 'service and witness' exercised through 'pastoral care, outreach, and worship'.¹⁹⁴ Whilst local churches are autonomous, they share in a common constitution, process, and discipline. Districts comprise a number of circuits across a geographical region and, taken as a whole, form the entire

¹⁹⁰ For further information, see, Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*. Thomas A. Langford, *Methodist Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1998); J. Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998* (London: Epworth, 1998); Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines : Methodist Theology as Classical Christianity* (Calver: Cliff College Publishing, 1998); Jane Craske and Clive Marsh, *Methodism and the Future : Facing the Challenge* (London ; New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2000); Clive Marsh, *Unmasking Methodist Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2004); and Wilson, *Methodist Theology*.

¹⁹¹ Martin Atkins, *Discipleship and the People Called Methodist* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2010), 17. For further detail on the decline of the class meeting see David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting : Its Origins and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985), 145-152 and Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross : The Origins, Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in 18th Century England* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 145-187. See also, Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, 46.

¹⁹² comprising representatives from all of the churches across a region.

¹⁹³ *CPD*, Vol. 2, 530, S.O. 700.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 530, S.O. 701.

Connexion. The future of the Districts is presently the subject of a two-year consultation (*Larger than Circuits*) that is being driven by concerns over cost, the geographical size and changing demographics of Districts, questions about what patterns of leadership might be appropriate, and the challenge of finding suitably qualified staff. Their primary purpose 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 enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns.'¹⁹⁵ Every year, lay and ordained representatives from each District (lay and ordained) meet together for Methodist Conference. This is Methodism's supreme decision making body. At each gathering they elect a President (a presbyter) and Vice-President of Conference (a deacon or layperson). The work of Conference is overseen by the Methodist Council.¹⁹⁶ Herein, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church is instrumental in leading the development of its vision, mission, and strategy. Standing Order 302 states that, '...[they are]...the executive leader of a management and leadership team, comprising also the Co-ordinating Secretaries, the District Chairs and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order.' The Methodist Church values this connexional pattern of working, holding that it has the capacity to incorporate views from every level of church life, and that the process of conferring restricts the likelihood of autocratic leadership.¹⁹⁷

Two of the most influential regional offices within the Church are circuit superintendents, who oversee the work of circuits, and Chairs of District. *What is a Circuit Superintendent* (2005) describes

¹⁹⁵ See "The basis and purpose of districts" and "A review of a changing context for districts: Why now?," in "Larger Than Circuits" (paper presented at the the Methodist Conference, 2013), ed. Susan Howdle, 5 & 7. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2013-35-larger-than-circuit.doc>. Consider also, "What is a District Chair?" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference), 2006. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf06_What_is_a_District_Chair_pc.doc.

¹⁹⁶ "The Nature, Theology and Role of the Methodist Council," The Methodist Church, www.methodist.org.uk/.../coun_nature_theology_and_role_of_the_council_1006.doc.

¹⁹⁷ "The Methodist Church in Britain: Structure," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/structure>.

superintendents as, 'the extraordinary overseers of a team of extraordinary messengers and of a movement or society of extraordinary disciples'.¹⁹⁸ Chairs of District have a pastoral role towards presbyters in circuits, reinforce aspects of church governance and policy passed down from the connexion, exercise leadership in developing a District strategy, and assist circuits who wish to recruit or replace ministerial staff. The relationship between Chairs of District and superintendents is curious, especially when compared to the relationships between bishops and clergy in the Church of England, in that whilst Chairs of District have considerable influence, superintendents have the final authority on how circuits conduct their affairs.

Atkins suggests that despite Methodism's inability to function without sharing its resources, some do not immediately recognise the principle of connexionalism, whilst others actively resist it:

For some folk, it [connexionalism] lies at the heart of Methodist Christianity and discipleship. For others it is unknown and for still others is well known and thought to be past its sell-by date. Connexionalism too has changed and developed since early Methodism, but probably more than society or class, remains with us and shapes our life together.¹⁹⁹

Atkins progresses to argue that if (*sic.*) the Methodist Church wishes to retain connexionalism, it must examine the extent to which its inherited structures still enable the church to live in mutuality and sustain its worship and mission:

If we choose to remain 'in connexion' with each other then we must seek new models of connexionalism which enable us to be 'ourselves' today. Connexionalism is not a straitjacket into which Methodism must fit, it is a way of living out our Christian discipleship together in a way which takes seriously the commands of Christ, that loving

¹⁹⁸ "What Is a Circuit Superintendent?", (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2005), 4. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_08_whatiscircuitsuper_0805.doc. See also "The Nature of Oversight" points 2.18 & 2.19, and Davies & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church*, 242..

¹⁹⁹ Atkins, *Discipleship and the People Called Methodist*, 17. For further information on the significance and decline of the class meeting see Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting : Its Origins and Significance*, 145-152. Also, Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross : The Origins, Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in 18th Century England*. 145-187, and Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, 46.

Him means loving one another and everything God has made. The future of connexionalism is therefore essentially not about maintaining certain structures intact, but about hearts and minds, about deciding together how a contemporary discipleship/disciple-making movement wants to live.²⁰⁰

This illustrates an important issue about how Atkins views Methodist ecclesiology: it is the practical outworking of a spiritual principle. At a point in its history when Methodism is struggling on multiple fronts, this allows Atkins to argue that if the historic structures of the church are inhibiting the Methodist Church from fulfilling its calling, then they must be dismantled or reconfigured. The Church has indeed seen significant change during Atkin's tenure.

2.2.3 The Nature of Oversight

The Nature of Oversight (2005) was written in response to ongoing questions and discussions about how the Methodist Church might enter into unity with the Church of England. It states that oversight is the means by which 'the Church remains true to its calling'. It involves 'theologically informed governance, theologically informed management and theologically informed leadership'. Oversight is 'corporate in the first instance and then secondarily focused on individuals'.²⁰¹ It consists of (among others) caring, reviewing, prophetic proclamation, planning, decision-making and reviewing progress. Presbyters have a key role in chairing meetings and steering conversations.²⁰² The Church should be a place where love is given and received through its worship and mission.²⁰³

The report outlines some fundamental questions in respect of oversight. Presbyters should encourage churches to re-express their Methodist identity faithfully. Their role is to help congregations discern the Holy Spirit's leading and develop structures that are appropriate to God's

²⁰⁰ Atkins, *Discipleship*, 17.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 67.

mission. At the same time, they must retain unity and order. Herein, the Church emphasises the importance of subsidiarity. Local people should be empowered to make decisions in small groups. They are best placed to understand the issues faced by their own communities, and are more aware of the local resources that are available to them. These groups *are* the church in action. They represent the corporate body.

In terms of how presbyters lead, Methodism calls for its leaders to balance personal and corporate episcopé. The oversight report states:

Appropriate respect for accountable personal episcopé can lead to a liberating and creative openness to the appropriate freedoms of, and expectations from, the Church's representative and authorised individuals. This said, it is not clear what the boundaries of this personal episcopé might be, apart from the fact that for presbyters, they will be defined by what accountability structures are in place. Thus, in every ministerial context the balance between personal and corporate episcopé will need to be renegotiated.²⁰⁴

This view of ministry raises two important questions for fresh expressions. The first concerns the style of leadership that presbyters might adopt. In a newly emerging community, they will have to navigate a shift in the extent to which they delegate authority as leaders grow in ability and confidence. Since presbyters are most likely to oversee a mix of inherited churches and fresh expressions congregations, models of teamwork that depend on ministers exacting a strong personal *episcopé* may risk inhibiting the emergence of indigenous leadership, and may also be unsustainable. The second concerns what might be termed 'the balance of subsidiarity'. Local groups need to create and innovate, reflect the 'common mind' and remain accountable. They should also contribute to wider corporate reflection. Importantly, the report recognises that 'in recent times there has been a growing tendency in some areas towards local autonomy and congregationalism which has shifted

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 3.

the balance away from local circuits to local churches.'²⁰⁵ The report decries this, since in the absence of the circuit, many local churches would struggle to exist. Local churches and indeed fresh expressions are then encouraged to innovate, but only as far as they do not exceed the bounds of CPD. Meanwhile, the annual process of challenging and changing CPD begins and ends with the decisions of Conference. One significant question is who, in the interim, gives permission for innovation to take place?

2.2.4 What's a Presbyter and what's a Superintendent

What is a Presbyter? (2002) explains that presbyters are interdependent on other forms of ministry (lay and ordained) throughout the connexion.²⁰⁶ Methodist presbyters do carry out some tasks exclusively. These include Eucharistic presidency and sharing in a ministry of collegial pastoral responsibility throughout the connexion. Superintendents gather together circuit staff and 'take the lead in a group that is primarily exercising leadership'. They chair the Circuit meeting ('the chief source of governance and decision-making').²⁰⁷ Superintendents have a considerable influence; facilitating conversations with circuit stewards about where and how presbyters serve²⁰⁸, organising the plan, and helping determine the priority given to one aspect of mission over another. There is a broad acceptance that whilst presbyters have considerable influence in the local church, the Methodist enterprise is one of mutuality and shared support.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 72.

²⁰⁶ "What's a Presbyter?" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2002), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-presbyter-2002.pdf>.

²⁰⁷ "What Is a Circuit Superintendent?" point 18.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., point 16.

2.2.5 Constitution, Practice and Discipline

Constitution, Practice, and Discipline (CPD) outlines the purpose, structure, practice, and discipline of the Methodist Church. Church councils arrange annual membership classes and welcome new members. The process of church planting in Methodism assumes that established Methodist members lead the way. In order to plant a new church, twelve ‘locally resident’ members must unite²⁰⁹ and appoint a church secretary, treasurer, and church steward.²¹⁰ Helpfully, Methodist churches need not meet on their own premises.²¹¹ Methodist fresh expressions can meet in homes, schools, community centres, or even public houses. Regulations about how circuits should respond to decline are also important. If the membership of a Methodist church falls below six people, the wider circuit is obliged to provide additional support. If the situation does not improve, the circuit may intervene and insist that the congregation become a ‘class’ of another larger church who can take on responsibility for their affairs.²¹² This would suggest that in terms of ecclesial formation, it is unrealistic to start a fresh expression with anything less than a core of six people. Significantly, the Methodist Report, *Changing Church for a Changing World* (2007), raised serious and hitherto unexplored questions for fresh expressions, in relation to Church practice and discipline:

How flexible do our denominational structures need to be to encourage fresh expressions of church?

Does our system of stationing ministers need changing to take account of the need for fresh expressions?

How can our rules and regulations be made to make room for fresh ways of being church which, almost by definition, will not fit the rules?

²⁰⁹ CPD, Vol 2, 513, S.O. 605.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 516, S.O. 610.

²¹¹ Ibid., 494, S.O. 605(4).

²¹² Ibid., 508, S.O. 612.

Should all fresh expressions of church come under an existing circuit? ²¹³

2.2.6 The class meeting as a tool to develop fresh expressions?

Horsley in *Resurrecting the Classes* (2010)²¹⁴ explores the ecclesiological links between Methodism and Cell Church. Quoting the *Deed of Union*, he writes, 'The weekly class meeting has from the beginning proved to be the most effective means of maintaining among Methodists true fellowship in Christian experience'.²¹⁵ Meadows (2009) agrees.²¹⁶ According to CPD, Methodist Churches should still be dividing their membership into classes and appointing class leaders and pastoral visitors.²¹⁷ A class leader is required to meet the class regularly, to visit its members individually, to exercise pastoral care over those under their charge, and to encourage members to fulfil the obligations of membership. Ministers are required to visit classes once a quarter and to issue membership tickets.²¹⁸ Historically, the class meeting (together with its smaller and intimate dedicated 'band' meeting), has been a cornerstone of Methodist oversight and pastoral care. However, the language and theology in which the concept of class was grounded (anyone who wished to 'flee the wrath that is to come' was welcome), may sit uneasily with those who are new to the church, or even some contemporary Methodists. Whilst the practice of arranging members into classes remains, Wesleyan Methodists revoked the requirement for members to meet in 1912.²¹⁹

²¹³ Martyn D. Atkins, Tom Stuckey, and Martin Wellings, *Changing Church for a Changing World : Fresh Ways of Being Church in a Methodist Context* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2007), 73.

²¹⁴ Graham Horsley, "Resurrecting the Classes : An introduction to Cell Church for Methodists," The Methodist Church, 2007, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/disc-new-resurrecting-the-classes-180610.pdf>

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹⁶ Philip Roger Meadows, "Conference Notes: D.N.A of Methodist Discipleship" (paper presented at Holiness and Risk, Swanwick, 2009), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/hr_dnaofdiscipleship_0209.pdf. See also *Wesleyan DNA of Discipleship S125 : Fresh Expressions of Discipleship for the 21st-Century Church*, Grove Spirituality Series (Cambridge: Grove, 2013).

²¹⁷ CPD, Vol 2, 356-357, S.O. 054 & 525, S.O. 630.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 477, S.O. 526.

²¹⁹ Charles Edward White, "The Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting," <http://myweb.arbor.edu/cwhite/cm.pdf>. White cites Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church*

Atkins, in *Discipleship* states, 'Classes' and 'bands' have largely disappeared, and with them key elements of disciple-making, though new models of small groupings [*sic.*] enabling disciple-making today are emerging.'²²⁰ Importantly, Horsley in his *Planting New Congregations* (1994)²²¹ is the only Methodist commentator to suggest an ecclesial mechanism, other than the twelve member rule, by which new churches might be nurtured. Writing in response to the growth of House Churches beyond Methodism, Horsley states that circuits might incorporate new churches by registering them as a class under S.O. 510(1x).²²² Importantly, *Planting* includes a report that was adopted by 1987, *House congregations – a Methodist Strategy*. The recommended procedure is that (i) the circuit meeting makes the decision to form a congregation, (ii) the congregation is placed under the care of a class leader, (iii) 'those who lead worship need not be accredited' but must respect Methodist doctrinal standards and, (iv) as the house group grows it either divides or constitutes itself as a local church.²²³

2.2.7 Our Calling: A framework for Methodist Mission

Between 1998 and 1999, the Strategic Goal's Panning Group concluded that the whole church would benefit from a process of developing a shared vision. They stated that the Church needed:

Significant changes of culture to take place – flexible and creative applications of the gospel to the Church's work in contemporary society; liberation from tired traditions and the Methodist obsession with procedures and rules ('CPD and all that').²²⁴

Renewal (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP 1980), 62. Also, Charles Christopher Keys, *The Class-Leader's Manual: Or, an Essay on the Duties, Difficulties, Qualifications, Motives* (New-York,: Lane & Scott, 1851), 21-24.

²²⁰ Atkins, *Discipleship*, 17.

²²¹ Graham Horsley, *Planting New Congregations : A Practical Guide for Methodists* (London: Methodist Church Home Mission, 1994), 30-34.

²²² CPD. Vol. 2, 465. .

²²³ *Planting*, 33.

²²⁴ "Our Calling: Conference Agenda 2000" (Methodist Conference, 2000), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-our-calling-2000.pdf>.

Our Calling (2000) followed and states; 'The Methodist Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love, help people to learn and grow as Christians, through mutual support & care, become a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice, and to make more followers of Jesus Christ'. By 2004, and as a consequence of the Conference Report, '*Where are we Heading?*'²²⁵, the Methodist Church began to explore how local churches were discussing and implementing *Our Calling*, and established a number of priorities.²²⁶ These included developing confidence in evangelism, encouraging fresh ways of being church and nurturing a church culture that was people-centred and flexible. The 2004 Conference Report stated that where *Our Calling* had enabled a process of critical discernment within churches, members discovered that they 'do not have to perpetuate what they have always done or continue to do things in the way they have always done them.' In addition:

Local churches have become clearer in distinguishing activities which are central to the church's worship and mission from those which are peripheral.

Local churches have become more aware of where their strengths and weaknesses lie, as their life is assessed against the *Our Calling* themes.

Congregations have increasingly recognised that they may be authentic churches but that they cannot do everything that may be implied by the *Our Calling* themes.²²⁷

Even so, not all churches had engaged properly with *Our Calling* process. The report suggested that they may be:

Living off the 'spiritual capital' of earlier generations and doing their traditional things very well indeed. Closing themselves off from the possibilities of change, or from

²²⁵ "Where Are We Heading?" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2003), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-where-are-we-heading-2003.pdf>

²²⁶ "Priorities for the Methodist Church," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church>.

²²⁷ "Priorities for the Methodist Church" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2004), 3. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-priorities-for-the-MC-2004.pdf>

creative engagement with their local communities. So we hear of churches in 'maintenance mode' or enveloped in what is sometimes called 'chapel culture'.

2004 was also the point at which the term 'fresh expression' was circulated widely, having appeared in *Mission Shaped Church*. Importantly, the report from Methodist Council makes the following observation on the mixed economy in relation to fresh expressions:

Even if there is mutual recognition as churches between traditional and new ways of being Church, there is no doubt that in the coming years a great deal of work will be required to look afresh at what in traditional church we call 'faith and order' questions, to enable the Conference both to affirm and to learn from 'new ways of being Church', within an ever-broadening understanding of 'Connexion'.²²⁸

Strikingly, the Methodist Council stated:

It has been frequently reported that our systems and procedures, our institutional frame of mind, readily deflect us from our aims. So instead of local churches flourishing by discerning and using the multitude of gifts among their members, they become somewhat atrophied by 'shoehorning' people into fixed roles where they cannot easily play to their strengths. In addition, there is throughout the Connexion an anxiety about the impact of an "over-managerial" approach to church administration - as opposed to a "pastoral" approach. Of course, in practice situations are much more complex than these analyses suggest. But this Connexional Priority indicates commitment to a vision of how in every Christian community, and in all aspects of connexional life, we help one another to grow and learn as Christians, honouring the amazing potential of every individual as a channel of God's grace and wisdom.²²⁹

2.2.8 Mission Shaped Thinking in Methodism

The *modus-operandi* of the Methodist Church is one of constant conferring. Conference is the final arbiter for decision-making. It can *receive* a report, it may request that further work is undertaken, or it can *adopt* a specific point or proposal. However, it is only at the point of *adoption* that a report

²²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²²⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

or aspects of a report that a statement of the Church becomes 'official'. Thus, whilst articles such as General Secretary's Reports reflect the views of key leaders within the Church and the trajectory of their thinking, they do not necessarily reflect the final view of the Conference. In terms of investigating how the strategy for mission in the Church has developed, I began by examining the General Secretary's Reports, Methodist Council Reports, and the Faith and Order Committee reports that had been published over the last decade.²³⁰ References within these documents led me to examine a number of key reports including *Called to Love and Praise* (1999)²³¹, *Our Calling* (2000)²³², *Where are we heading?* (2003)²³³, *Priorities for the Methodist Church* (2004)²³⁴, *Team Focus* (2005)²³⁵, *Mapping the Way Forward, Reshaping for Mission* (2006)²³⁶, *Fruitful Field* (2011)²³⁷, *Larger than Circuits* (2013)²³⁸ and *Statistics For Mission* (2014).²³⁹ Whilst it is not possible to précis all of these documents, they do illustrate how whilst the Methodist Church has accepted the need to reduce costs, it has used the opportunity to rethink its mission and question how to distribute its

²³⁰ As to the progress of fresh expressions see "Fresh Expressions" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2007), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf07_19_Fresh_Expressions_pc.doc, and "Fresh Ways Working Group Report" (Methodist Conference, 2009 and 2012), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-16-fwow-gp-2009-201109.pdf> and <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2012-pc-6-fresh-ways-working-group-2012.doc>, respectively.

²³¹ "Called to Love and Praise" (Methodist Conference, 1999), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/822065/ec-called-to-love-and-praise240908.doc>.

²³² "Our Calling: Conference Agenda 2000" (Conference, 2000), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-our-calling-2000.pdf>.

²³³ "Where Are We Heading?" (Conference, 2009), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-where-are-we-heading-2003.pdf>.

²³⁴ "Priorities for the Methodist Church" (Conference, 2004), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-priorities-for-the-MC-2004.pdf>.

²³⁵ "Connexional Team Focus 2005-2008" (Conference, 2005), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_42_teamfocus_0505.doc.

²³⁶ "Mapping the Way Forward. Reshaping for Mission" (Conference, 2006), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/coun_mapping_a_way_forward_1006.doc.

²³⁷ "The Fruitful Field" (Conference 2011), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/you-fruitful-field-consultation-171011.pdf>.

²³⁸ "Larger Than Circuits" (Conference 2013), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2013-35-larger-than-circuit.doc>.

²³⁹ "Statistics for Mission" (Conference 2014), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2014-37-statistics-for-mission.pdf>.

resources more profitably. *Team Focus* saw the restructuring of the central connexional team. *Mapping the Way Forward* encouraged circuits to reflect along similar lines, which for some resulted in amalgamations. *Fruitful Field* called for the Church to revisit its policy towards training. *Larger than Circuits* is part of an ongoing consultation about the role of Districts within the Connexion. *Statistics for Mission*, as we have seen, highlights the growth of the church in fresh expressions on one hand, with the decline of the inherited church on the other. Two other themes feature as part of these reports. One is Methodism as a 'Discipleship Shaped Movement for Mission': the other is 'Holiness and Risk'.

Holiness and Risk: an increase in mission momentum

In 2008, the General Secretary encouraged the Church to sustain its culture of change and look forward to the longer term:

What is critical is the balance between the visionary and the messy, time-consuming, process-driven realities of sustainable change. Danger comes when the latter becomes all absorbing, as it too easily does. Or when leaders are not released to lead, but are overly occupied with maintaining (to a high standard, even) that which must disappear or come under major review.²⁴⁰

And that the Church was beginning to:

See itself again as primarily a lay movement supported by a few ordained people. (Wherever I turn in today's Church, I see lay people taking initiatives and energy for mission being released.)²⁴¹

2009 was a significant year for the Methodist Church as David Deeks stepped down as General Secretary and Martyn Atkins took up the role. *Team Focus* ended, although the Church continued to process its conclusions. The Church's focus on renewal continued via *Holiness and Risk*, a three day

²⁴⁰ Martyn Atkins, "General Secretary's Report" (Conference, 2008), 23-24.
http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf08_02_General_Secretary_report210808.doc.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 18..

event aimed to enable those in positions of 'change leadership; within the church to 'think deeply about what it means to be Methodist, and what it means to express the charisms of the tradition in the 21st century'.²⁴² Atkins stated:

We are increasingly ready to take 'Godly' and 'holy' risks, and give permission to each other to do so. This will inevitably involve some failure, which, in the context of the proper accountability of being Methodists must be permitted as a necessary part of Godly risk-taking.²⁴³

In addition:

There is a general awareness and grateful acceptance that God is not finished with us yet, but as a consequence of this, continuing change and openness to change lie before us.²⁴⁴

Fruitful Field (2011)²⁴⁵ began during that same period. Here, the Methodist Church embarked upon what some might considered to have been one of its most challenging and far-reaching endeavours. This combined the need for the church to confront the unsustainable expense of training its ministers across multiple locations, with the conviction that the Methodist Church should invest more in lay training.²⁴⁶ By the end of the process, the Methodist Church had opted to close or withdraw from eleven training institutions, leaving Cliff College in Derbyshire (which historically, has specialised in lay training), and the Queens Foundation in Birmingham. *Fruitful Field* generated significant anguish for the Church. However, for fresh expressions, the change of ethos, coupled with

²⁴² "Holiness and Risk" The Methodist Church, (2009), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church/holiness-and-risk>.

²⁴³ Martyn Atkins, "General Secretary's Report" (Conference, 2009), 22. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-2-gen-sec-rep-201109.pdf>.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴⁵ "The Fruitful Field" (Conference 2011), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/you-fruitful-field-consultation-171011.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ The first institution to close was Wesley College, Bristol. See "Wesley College Bristol: A report from the Methodist Council" (Conference, 2011), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-41-wesley-coll-160211.pdf>.

the emergence of new regional learning networks, may increase the availability of local training for lay leaders.

A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission

This phrase originated in 2011 as part of the General Secretary's Report to Conference.²⁴⁷ The report argued that Methodism began as a movement, rather than a Church, with its missional base as class, society, or chapel. Mindful of challenges in terms of costs and the sheer volume of need, Atkins questions how the Methodist Church might develop lay pastoral ministry to support presbyters' in their work. He writes:

Should it be local ordained ministry rather than lay ministry with or without numerous dispensations to administer Holy Communion? We may have to revisit what it means to be in 'pastoral charge'. And what are the relational and operational issues of local pastoral ministry with ordained circuit staff and circuit lay leaders? ...Sufficient numbers of Methodists have suggested that the Holy Spirit is urging us to reassess our situation.²⁴⁸

Moreover, in terms of lay and ordained ministry:

Many Circuits believe that we have reached the point whereby the number of full time, stipendiary presbyters and deacons we have – and/or are able and willing to pay for – has now reached a critical point. Also, particularly in respect of presbyters, many consider that the policy of spreading essentially pastoral duties ever more thinly throughout a Circuit has now reached the end of its usefulness or workability.²⁴⁹

Thus, fresh expressions practitioners stand in a place where the wider church remains fixed to its inherited patterns of ministry and oversight, whilst admitting that the current pattern of working is unsustainable. The only solution that the Church offers is to encourage presbyters to adopt a 'light touch' approach to its disciplines, rather than imposing regulations that will suffocate new work:

²⁴⁷ Atkins, "General Secretary's Report: Contemporary Methodism" (Conference, 2012), 3. Paragraph 11.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 12. Paragraph 39.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 12. Paragraph 42.

This (the mixed economy) requires a long, hard look aiming to bring about as light a touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches, but which inadvertently paralyse or render stillborn some of the new congregations emerging among us.²⁵⁰

And,

In this and other ways we require to reassert our commitment to pursuing governance that enable what is discerned as the leading of the Spirit. Our CPD, which is in many respects a permissive document, must be presented so that it is realised and increasingly experienced to be so.²⁵¹

2.2.9 Oversight Concerns raised by attention to Methodist Tradition

This examination of Methodist Tradition raises substantial concerns about how the Church might incorporate and oversee fresh expressions. These are centred on five key areas; developing fresh expressions within a resource hungry mixed-economy, ecclesial formation, whether CPD is fit for use in fresh expressions, the challenge of ecumenism and emergent church thinking, and how Methodist membership affects the prospect of achieving a balanced, mixed economy.

Methodist presbyters minister in a pressured and changing context. In terms of fresh expressions, the challenge faced by presbyters is to promote and encourage new projects whilst attending, at the same time, to the needs of a declining wider church. Whilst some churches in a section may be static or growing, the overall consequence of this decline is a lack of financial and human resources. Within their sections, presbyters are already used to making difficult choices about where they focus their own ministries. The need to oversee the planting and early development of fresh expressions is an additional pressure. Superintendents are likely to be pivotal to the success of fresh expressions

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 16. Paragraph 62.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 16. Paragraph 63.

because they are so involved in permission giving, influencing and co-ordinating efforts to plan local mission.

The most obvious route for forming a fresh expression is for practitioners to make members within the newly emerging community but incorporate them into the membership list of the parent church, until the point at which those who attend are ready to constitute themselves into a new society. A further step might be to constitute a fresh expression as a class of the parent church; in doing so, the wider church may be more likely to recognise that the fresh expression is looking to develop its own identity, and allow them greater autonomy. Even so, despite these possibilities, the process of planting new churches will be new to circuit presbyters, most of whom will have more experience in managing church closures and forming new churches by uniting old ones. The Methodist Statistics Office states:

There are only one or two newly constituting Methodist churches each year (as opposed to several hundred we have to close)...newly constituting churches are usually formed from mergers of former Methodist societies.²⁵²

Crucially, the process of Methodist ecclesial formation appears at odds with that which is advocated by Fresh Expressions. Their vision is one in which an emerging Christian community begins life as a missional-ecclesial unit in its own right, providing the context in which new Christians are formed and nurtured in discipleship, *in situ*. However, the preoccupation for Methodist presbyters, if they take the ecclesial intent of Fresh Expressions seriously, is not one of simply engaging in evangelism with the intent of making new disciples, neither is it to incorporate people who have non-Methodist roots. Neither is it one of encouraging fresh expressions to adopt the classic marks of church, although all of these activities should be encouraged. Rather, the principle goal of the Methodist presbyter should be one of making members. Membership gives Methodists the right to vote in

²⁵² Alan Piggot, Research Officer (Statistics and Mapping), The Methodist Church. By e-mail, 8th June 2015.

church meetings and to take up office. It is also necessary if fresh expressions are to constitute themselves as churches. If they do not take this step, fresh expressions will exist as a subset of the parent church rather than existing as a church in their own right. Local projects will live under the perpetual grace of the circuit and the local church. Moreover, if the emerging fresh expression is not contributing to the financial costs of ministry, there is an argument that they are less deserving of support than those churches that, however fragile and declining, at least offer something.

Fresh Expressions suggests that the core leadership of new churches should comprise experienced Christians. This is understandable. However, within the Methodist Church, such people are also likely to be members of the Church who are a product of its culture. This raises a reasonable question about how the Methodist Church can draw from its traditions without imposing inherited processes, practices, and disciplines in a way that is unhelpful. This is more sophisticated than it might first seem. Methodist Tradition in any setting is, in part, a heady mix of what CPD requires and how this locally interpreted and enacted. It has shaped the communities that its members inhabit. I would argue that in some instances, in an effort to define and protect itself, the Methodist Church has created rather than bridged cultural divides. For example, CPD places severe restrictions on gambling. Church Councils must give permission for their societies to hold raffles. Door-to-door sales are forbidden, as are cash prizes, and the total spent on them cannot exceed £50. Consequently, few, if any Methodists would be seen in a betting shop. Tradition appears to have bred insularity rather than continued engagement. However, during a different period, Methodists were confident to protest against gambling whilst living alongside the working classes - in the pit, the foundry, or the mill - offering an alternative. Fresh Expressions argues that the established Churches have lost the ability to engage in a similar way with people who are *different*. The question for the Methodist Church is whether the requirement to include Methodist members will generate greater insularity, or educate adherents about their radical roots and stir their commitment to outreach. Whilst in theory, a presbyter could conduct membership classes within a fresh expression, it is highly unlikely

that twelve candidates for membership would emerge immediately and decide to constitute themselves as a church. Instead, the process is likely to be much slower. The fresh expression will meet and try to develop its own identity. New members will become part of the parent church but attend the project. As they negotiate their relationships with members of the wider church, they may feel obliged to meet expectations that undermine their involvement with the fresh expression.

Is CPD fit for use in fresh expressions contexts? Atkins' 2012 General Secretary's report is both uncompromising (unless practitioners interpret CPD properly, some of the new congregations that are emerging in Methodism will be stillborn or paralysed), and intriguing (practitioners should apply 'as light as touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches.')

In my view, this suggests that the disciplines and practices intended for inherited congregations are simply not suitable for fresh expressions. Moreover, if the purpose of CPD is to enable the Methodist Church to achieve its core aim of 'Advancing the Christian faith'²⁵³, the literature suggests that in terms of helping fresh expressions make the transition to 'church' (as understood in a Methodist-legal sense), the CPD's requirements will be difficult to attain.

Could it be that Atkin's view of connexionalism as a spiritual principle might be extended to CPD; that presbyters could argue that the spirit of the law carries more weight than the letter of the law, and that the 'light touch' already gives those who have pastoral charge the freedom to suspend or overlook certain standing orders? If this is the case, then how should the Church guard against inconsistent practice? What aspects of church discipline are negotiable and what is immovable? Who is the arbiter of CPD? Legally, it is the superintendent and thereafter the presbyter with pastoral charge? But what if the two do not agree? Moreover, at what point would a 'light touch' compromise rather than honour CPD?

²⁵³ CPD, Vol. I, (Norwich: Methodist Publishing, 2015), 8.

The ecumenical landscape in which Fresh Expressions was birthed, and the likelihood that fresh expressions in Methodist churches will incorporate individuals who have previous experience within other denominations, may also present a challenge. Whilst such diversity has the potential to enrich the Church, newcomers are likely to have understood and experienced oversight differently. This may influence their expectations on the extent to which presbyters will be present, pastorally involved, and how they will lead. In this respect, the 'distance' between Methodist presbyters and their congregations, the degree of local autonomy and conferring within congregations and the sudden arrival of presbyters to preside at Holy Communion, may feel unusual. Whilst Methodism has its particular strengths, one weakness is that this pattern of working, if not balanced with sufficient numbers of local leaders who are familiar with Methodism, is open to abuse. One possible area of conflict is at the interface between the positional authority owned by the minister and relational and experiential authority of a leader who can offer a more regular presence. It may be that presbyters are best placed to oversee projects with a high accountability, light touch approach, acting as spiritual directors or coaches.

Work in fresh expressions contexts will inevitably generate debate about Methodist doctrine and practice. The most obvious differences will surround baptism, Holy Communion, and crucially, membership. Another anomaly (most obvious in the local ecumenical partnership agreements between Anglicans and Methodists) is that whilst it is possible for Methodists to become members of multiple denominations at the same time, Methodists can be members of only one society.²⁵⁴ However, within fresh expressions, what would happen if Methodists were also permitted to retain their membership of the parent church, and become a member of the newly emerging church? This could have the effect of enabling a new church to be formed, with a mature and stable base, from a

²⁵⁴ One rare exception is when Methodists who wish to retain their membership to a church in the UK whilst worshipping for a period at a Methodist Church overseas. *CPD* Vol. 2, S.O. 051. 304.

much earlier point. It would also negate the need for a member of an inherited congregation to relinquish their association with the parent church before being able to commit to the fresh expression. Is this one way in which ecclesial formation could be catalysed?

My final point links to the vision for a mixed economy. This has not been the subject of enough reflection within Methodism. In one sense, I would argue that the Methodist Circuit is already an example of a mixed economy at work, although in many instances it will lack the diversity that Williams was hoping to encourage; unless fresh expressions are adequately represented, the circuit meeting will be a mixed economy of inherited churches, rather than a mixed economy of inherited and emerging churches. The potential for fresh expressions to become ecclesial begins with membership. One important area of concern is how membership affects the prospect of achieving a mixed economy in other ways. Within Methodism, whilst non-members are welcome, may be invited to speak, and may be listened to in local settings, they are dissociated from the wider ecclesiological process, debate and process. Non-members have a very lowly place on the Methodist family table. William's vision appears two-fold. First, the mixed economy should encourage Methodist Churches and circuits to embrace, rather than resist diversity. All forms of church are equally valid. They share the same theological root but express themselves differently according to cultural context. Second, the mixed economy is not intended to help churches justify their own insularity as if, 'they can do their thing whilst we do our thing.'²⁵⁵ Rather, the mixed economy should encourage mutual respect, reflection, and learning between different forms of church as they share stories and examples of good practice. In this respect, how is the church going to engage in mutual learning?

²⁵⁵ A quote from a church steward in one of my first churches.

2.3 Ongoing Methodist Experience and Debate

2.3.1 Research on Oversight and Leadership

Cockling in considering the role of superintendents across the Newcastle District of the Methodist Church offers insights on the difference between ‘the espoused and operant theologies of superintendency’.²⁵⁶ Whilst his work is not directly focused on the oversight of fresh expressions, it offers valuable insights into the wider context in which this ministry is exercised. Cockling tests the hypothesis that superintendents ‘exercise an effective ministry of oversight’.²⁵⁷ He identifies five key tensions:

The desire for leadership which seeks to help the church better serve the present age, which is in tension with the passivity of stable management and risk-aversion.

The normative view of shared and inclusive leadership compared with the practice of personal leadership.

How the circuit is structured and how a diversity of local churches operate in practice.

How personal episkopé can operate beyond or within collegial and communal episkopé.

Independence and accountability, and the search for mutual episkopé.²⁵⁸

Cockling finds that ‘the operant is in tension with the espoused’ in several areas, all of which are, arguably, linked to excessive workload. First, they struggle to relate the conference to the local circuit, with information often reaching members via hearsay. Second, superintendents are unable

²⁵⁶ Ian Cockling, "Watching over one another in Love: Methodist Superintendents and Oversight in the Church," (DThM diss., University of Durham, 2015), 16, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11372/1/Ian_Neil_Cockling_Thesis.pdf?DDD32+.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 14.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 16.

to preach around their circuits. Third, superintendents can struggle to provide their staff with adequate pastoral care.²⁵⁹ This is a serious concern for fresh expressions; local freedoms must be balanced with connexional accountability; preaching is a means by which superintendents can encourage new initiatives; practitioners are likely to need effective coaching. In terms of mission praxis, Cockling argues that ‘there needs to be a recognition that CPD can no longer be as prescriptive as it once was,’ and adds, ‘this could entail a transformation in ecclesiology which is as radical as was the first movement of Methodism.’²⁶⁰

Turning to the broader issue of leadership *within* fresh expressions, Cox conducted case studies of three contrasting VFX projects.²⁶¹ She concluded that the Methodist Church seems ambivalent to the nature of leadership and of how leaders function.²⁶² Cox uncovered ‘significant tensions between the personalities of superintendents and presbyters’ and has concluded that it is impossible to serve as a minister with oversight and pioneer a fresh expression at the same time.²⁶³

Cox’s thesis leads to three alternative suggestions:

1. The Church follows Wesley example further by recognising indigenous leadership and ordaining such people to celebrate the sacraments...or
2. The Church makes pioneer a separate authorised order of ministry that is facilitated through a pattern of training in which mission, church planting, pioneering and evangelism have greater focus...or
3. Presbyteral ministry is understood more broadly.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 192.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 202.

²⁶¹ Joanne Cox, "Challenging Leadership".

²⁶² Ibid., 220. Furthermore, Cockling argued that there ‘was a need for leadership skills to be imparted to Methodist superintendents’. “Watching Over,” 204.

²⁶³ Most likely presbyter-pioneers.

²⁶⁴ Cox, 227-230.

Cox similarly appeals to Methodist tradition by emphasising how it has relied on 'inherent pragmatism' since its conception. She argues that orthopraxis should have the ascendancy over orthodoxy (and missiology over ecclesiology) by citing John Wesley's willingness to ordain Coke and Asbury as superintendents in 1784 – a move that made separation from the Church of England almost inevitable. In her most recent work, Cox-Darling (formerly Cox) argues that Methodism's denominational distinctiveness is a vital component in helping fresh expressions develop into something new.²⁶⁵ In contrast to the 'Anglican, tone, tenor and behaviour within Fresh Expressions', she argues that Methodism has always been a fresh expression and has the potential to not only to broaden the ecumenical landscape but also to challenge ecclesial thinking. Methodism offers four distinct charisms; 'a history of tensions and schism; Central Halls as a model example of context-driven mission; small groups as a vehicle for formation, accountability and fundraising; and an open table which speaks of both inclusivity and Christology at the heart of what can occasionally be the province of independent-minded leaders'.²⁶⁶ In terms of accepting tension and conflict as the cost of progress, Cox-Darling draws from Murray, Bruce and Gladwell²⁶⁷ to argue that Fresh Expressions will also need to understand power in a way that Anglicans do not experience it. She argues that Methodism originally appealed because it offered a voice of protest for those who yearned for change, mobilising this through small groups. For example, she writes:

Methodism is positioned in such a place that it has a history of schism and unity, small units of class meetings which are intentionally outward-focused for the purpose of mission, and a passion deep within its DNA which is about enabling people of every

²⁶⁵ Cox-Darling, "Mission-Shaped," 199.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 200.

²⁶⁷ See Stewart Murray, *Post-Christendom After-Christendom*. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point : How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (London: Abacus, 2001) and Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead : Secularization in the West, Religion in the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

social class within society to have an identity and a respectability that other power structures have been and are keen to prevent.²⁶⁸

2.3.2 VFX Scheme Review

The VFX review of 2011 noted three key issues worthy of further reflection; 'the nature of the pioneer ministry, the emerging ecclesiology in pioneer localities and the Methodist identity of the pioneers themselves'.²⁶⁹ The review states that:

(i) The concept of pioneer ministry may be leading presbyters and deacons to question both their sense of call and how this is worked out (*thereby confirming Cox's findings*) and...

(ii) Whilst the relationships between pioneers, superintendents and Chair of Districts are often warm, there are examples where relationships with superintendents have proved difficult.²⁷⁰

As for the nature of the tensions; of the seven projects studied (forty-one interviews including eight active pioneers and seven district chairs), one concern was how the locus of VFX ministry was different to presbyteral ministry in circuits. Pioneers focus on working among people who had no prior experience of Church, and are intending to plant something new. Furthermore, VFX projects are managed by steering groups outside of the direct oversight of circuit presbyters. One pioneer stated, 'There were some who wanted me [the pioneer] to boost the numbers in the existing congregation.' In this instance, 'the local management group proved not to be helpful, and so it was disbanded.'²⁷¹ In another project, one superintendent (with whom the project had a constructive relationship) left, and was replaced by another who seemed less supportive. As the relationship

²⁶⁸ Cox-Darling, "Mission-Shaped," 206.

²⁶⁹ Vicky Cosstick, "Venture Fx Scheme Review," *The Methodist Church*, 2012, 8. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/ev-venturefx-review-190312.pdf>.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

between the pioneer and the superintendent grew more difficult, support from the wider circuit waned, and what could have been a productive mixed-economy relationship became compromised. Concerns regarding the need for the Methodist Church to find suitable replacements for superintendents was evident in another project, 'We can't have someone who is not on side with VFX.'²⁷² Another pioneer found it difficult to communicate with their circuit, particularly at the beginning of the project where issues of housing and finance were unresolved. This led to the intervention of a mediation team, which was nonetheless 'an extremely positive experience.'²⁷³ The review recommended that it was too early to make judgements on the success of the pioneers' ministry. It advised against pioneers becoming an 'explicit religious community' and suggests that, 'Emphasis should be placed on continuing to develop the pioneers' commitment to their own Methodist identity and the Methodist identity of the work that they are doing in their localities.'²⁷⁴ Thus, although VFX is a particular form of fresh expression, early experience confirms the concerns that emerged about the link between Christian community and denominational identity that have surfaced from my previous analysis of Fresh Expressions Tradition and Methodist Tradition.

My own experience journeying with pioneers (as part of early explorations and the consultation), provided valuable insight into the nature of the relationship between them and their communities. Whilst some pioneers were comfortable with me visiting projects and would share their experience, they were less willing to permit research. In some cases, the presence of a researcher would alter the group dynamics beyond recognition. One pioneer was sensitive to any move that disturbed the relationship between them and the wider project, by projecting an image of church in which they were the leader, and the wider church were the congregation. Their model of mission was to work informally and non-hierarchically, developing friendships by meeting in homes and small community

²⁷² Ibid., 27.

²⁷³ Ibid., 24.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 8.

spaces. Whilst this pioneer was prepared to talk to churches and districts about his experiences, she was wary about sharing this more widely, for example on local radio or the BBC's Songs of Praise. For her, this would feel like a betrayal. They were not like a missionary church leader who arrived wearing a dog collar and carrying a bible, assuming a position of leadership. They were more a friend who was sent by the Church to discern how they could offer support, to encourage conversations about faith and life, and to introduce a spiritual rhythm and form of church that would be attentive to this context. One other concern, which was regularly repeated in the VFX support group, was that the wider church would judge fresh expressions against the accepted norms of the inherited church – something to which they were deliberately seeking an alternative.

2.3.3 Insights from Superintendent's Conferences

In support group meetings and at successive superintendents' conferences (most notably in 2014 and 2015), Bell has referred to the insights of the catholic anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle.²⁷⁵

Arbuckle argues that dissent within leadership, (the practice of proposing alternatives) is crucial to refounding the church in response to local need.²⁷⁶ However, he also suggests that this process can generate fear among the faithful. Arbuckle proposes that there are moments in history when the Church does not need repair or renewal but a complete change of approach. Whilst his focus has been to analyse how Vatican II continues to challenge Catholicism, Bell finds that Arbuckle's insights are helpful in understanding the relationship between VFX and the wider Methodist Church.

Arbuckle's position is that prior to Vatican II the Catholic Church tended to value those who maintained the status-quo. Post Vatican II, and writing in 1993, he is concerned that having made progress, the Catholic Church was now becoming more conservative.

²⁷⁵ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church : Dissent for Leadership* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993).

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I.

Arbuckle states:

We require radically different and as yet unimagined ways of relating the Good News to the pastoral challenges of the world...we need pastorally creative quantum leaps in our thinking, structures and action. Thus prophetic people, or 'apostolic quantum leap' persons are needed within the Church to critique, or dissent from, the pastorally and ineffective pastoral wisdom of the present. Without these people the Church simply cannot fulfil its mission.²⁷⁷

The inference from his focus is clear. Pioneers are radical dissenters who although might struggle to find their place within the inherited church (and vice-versa), the Methodist Church needs to incorporate, listen to and learn from such people.

2.3.4 Joint Anglican-Methodist working party on Fresh Expressions

The report of the Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Fresh Expressions of Church (JAMWPEEC), published as *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (2012), affirms the mixed economy approach to managing fresh expressions. It also recognises that fresh expressions have 'ecclesiological implications' that both Churches should consider. It is the most recent statement from the Church on the subject of fresh expressions but has been received rather than adopted by Conference.²⁷⁸ Conference directed that the Methodist Council consider how its recommendations might be appropriately incorporated into the wider work of the Connexion.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁸ "Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church and the Faith and Order Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England : Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church. A report of the Joint Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of the Church" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2012), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2012-pc-39-joint-working-group-on-the-ecclesiology-of-emerging-expressions-of-the-church.doc>. Conference motions were as follows - 39/1: Conference received the Report. 39/3: Conference affirmed the mixed economy of church as an enduring model for ministry and mission. 39/4: Conference directed the Methodist Council to explore how recommendations contained in the final chapter of the report may be appropriately incorporated into the wider work of all levels of the Connexion.

The working party noted seven concerns raised by other commentators, all of which I have already identified or are implicit in this review:

- (a) Is this Church-shaped mission or mission-shaped Church?
- (b) Is the *missio Dei* being applied in a limited way?
- (c) Is active participation in mission being discouraged?
- (d) Are Fresh Expressions an Evangelical-Liberal attack on tradition?
- (e) Is the role of the Church in salvation being neglected?
- (f) Is there a lack of focus on reconciliation?
- (g) Is there a rejection of the Christian tradition?

All of these concerns are, in the main, rejected; Hull's understanding of Church is unscriptural in the way that it emphasises the 'horizontal' love of neighbour over the love of God that is received vertically.²⁷⁹ Walton is considered to interpret the *missio Dei* too broadly; the Church is not a body of Christ among others that it seeks to work in partnership with, it is the body of Christ.²⁸⁰ Percy, Milbank and Davison raise issues that are 'not borne out by experience'.²⁸¹ However, Davidson's insistence that fresh expressions undervalue Christian Tradition is accepted. Nevertheless, the authors conclude:

²⁷⁹ JAMWPEEC. *Fresh Expressions*, 119. Paragraph 5.2.10.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 125. Paragraph 5.3.8.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 131. Paragraph 5.4.12 & 136. Paragraph 5.5.7.

The principal criticisms of fresh expressions do not provide convincing reasons to suppose that the mission strategy of the Church of England and the Methodist Church is seriously defective in its aim to develop a mixed economy....nevertheless these criticisms raise important issues...which cannot be dismissed...a number of practical safeguards are required in order to ensure that the mixed economy does not compromise the integrity of the Church.²⁸²

The nature of these safeguards are that from the outset, fresh expressions must keep the vision of 'becoming Church' (my phrase) 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; be subject to normal ecclesiastical discipline and work in partnership with other churches. In response, the wider Church needs to redouble its efforts to identify and train pioneer ministers. Finally, the report suggests a 'vocational checklist' for fresh expressions which states (among others):

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

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.

The report devotes a chapter to ecclesiology, asserting that fresh expressions need to preserve the dynamics of 'intensity' within fresh expressions (requiring an orientation towards the sacrament), and the 'connectivity' (between themselves and the wider Church).²⁸³ They should enable this through 'authorised ordained and lay ministries'.²⁸⁴

²⁸² Ibid., 181. Paragraph 7.4.1.

²⁸³ Ibid., 154. Paragraph 6.1.5.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 166. Paragraph 6.4.7.

In my view, one of the report's weaknesses is that there appears to be little evidence of detailed engagement with practitioners concerns apart from a single paragraph in the conclusions and recommendations section:

A number of voices, frustrated with what they perceive to be unnecessarily restrictive controls, argue that it is desirable in the case of fresh expressions to relax normal ecclesiastical discipline concerning the conduct of worship, preaching, and the celebration of the sacraments. Appeal is often made to 'missiological reasons' though these might not necessarily be stated. There is a regrettable tendency to imagine that 'the needs of Christian mission' justify almost any development. However there is little evidence to suggest that relaxing ecclesiological discipline would in fact facilitate Christian mission. On the contrary, there is good reason to support that such a move would impair mission.²⁸⁵

One troubling aspect of the report is that it does not present the evidence on which it makes these claims. Whom do these voices belong to? What, precisely, were the concerns? Response to *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* has been limited and mixed. Gay (2014) suggests that both Churches have failed to appreciate the scope of the Emerging Church movement (which is not only confined to North America).²⁸⁶ He senses a certain level of 'Whig' exegesis; in how the report portrays the development of early church order (underplaying the impact of Constantinianism); in not considering Puritan influences; in emphasising the importance of apostolic continuity whilst ignoring Henry VIII's separation from Rome; and in stressing the importance of Anglican liturgical conformity whilst lacking transparency on non-conformity in certain Anglo-Catholic or catholic evangelical contexts. Gay finds that the report treats Methodism, 'with a hint of patronisation, as if

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 184. Paragraph 7.72.

²⁸⁶ Douglas Gay, "Book Review: *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* : Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party (London: Church House Publishing, 2012)," *Ecclesiology* 10 (2014). 406-409. As to the key themes that have driven the movement, and how these are impacting attitudes to ecclesiology see Gay's *Remixing the Church: Towards and Emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 2011). Significantly Gay prefers the term, 'the Church emerging' (xiii), emphasising that the wider Church must resist the temptation to speak in terms of separation, and engage fully with its implicit ecclesiological questions. In terms of scope, the movement has proponents based in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.

this warm hearted, tunefully connexional movement got a bit out of hand and fell out of the Church of England through a series of (Limony Snicket like) unfortunate events.²⁸⁷ His concern about Whig thinking is substantially correct. In my view the report encourages fresh expressions towards maturity but then limits their freedoms by implying, 'and when you arrive there, you will find that you look like us.'²⁸⁸ Similarly, Karyl Davidson suggests that:

...the central question at play is whether or how fresh expressions can be properly regarded as 'church' in the 'true' sense of the term... However, for me it feels like driving with the handbrake on. While on the one hand the report wants fresh expressions to continue, the "essential elements" listed looks like the church is trying to pull fresh expressions into a mould that looks very much like the traditional church.²⁸⁹

Perhaps the most critical and sobering judgment has come from the Church Army Research Unit. Shortly after the publication of *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church*, The Church of England Church Commissioners published *From Anecdote to Evidence*.²⁹⁰ As contributors to this, the Church Army examined 518 fresh expressions projects and outlined their deeper findings in their *Report on Strand 3b*.²⁹¹ Comparing their own criteria for fresh expressions with that offered within *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, they stated:

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 407.

²⁸⁸ Douglas Gay stated in an e-mail message to the author, 'I am using it [Whig] provocatively to suggest that Anglicans and particularly Anglo Catholics tend to tell the story of the past in such a way as to justify where they want the story end up – i.e. in justifying their own practice as the natural descendant of the original impulse. October 2015.

²⁸⁹ Karyl Davison, "Report of an Anglican Methodist Working Party," *Insights Magazine*, (Uniting Church in Australia), <http://www.insights.uca.org.au/reviews/fresh-expressions-in-the-mission-of-the-church>.

²⁹⁰ *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Program 2011-2013*, (The Church Commissioners of England, 2014).

²⁹¹ George Lings, "Church Growth Research Project report on Strand 3b: Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church and Church Plants begun in the Period 1992-2012," (The Church Army Research Unit. (http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/churchgrowthresearch_freshexpressions.pdf).

Our team accept that the search for such definitions is entirely proper...However, for many reasons we find it unhelpful and even unrealistic. At root it belongs within the stable that holds that practices are determinative of church identity, rather than relationships being foundational, which only then lead to practices that embody and fortify those relationships. This practice based approach is significantly prejudicial against young churches whose identity lies deeper than their performance, although that identity may be closer to their intentions and potential. The same critique would be true of arguing that children are not fully humans, because they are not yet adults with attendant possessions, employment, earning power or social patterns.²⁹²

The authors continue to argue that the presence and working of the Holy Spirit is also indicative of success, but recognise how this is a subjective measure.

In missiological terms, the Church Army focuses on Venn and Anderson's three self's of funding, governance and theologising, but replaces 'governance' with 'self-reproducing'. Fresh Expressions work should lead to a church that can support its structures on the financial realities of its context, whilst noting that, 'The last part of a person to be converted is their wallet.' Its leadership will need to be stable enough to survive the departure of a founding leader or change of minister. Its discipleship processes should be sufficiently lightweight so as to ensure ready reproduction.²⁹³

2.3.5 Oversight questions raised through Methodist Experience and debate

This literature review set out to explore the synergy and tensions between the Fresh Expressions movement, local fresh expressions projects, and the Methodist Church. I began by outlining Fresh Expressions vision, comparing this with Methodist tradition, and noting areas of concern. Having examined practitioner's experiences, it is clear that some of my reservations are a practical reality.

One initial concern was that Fresh Expressions was weak in stressing the importance of denominational affiliation. For Methodists, this is crucial. Unless those who attend fresh expressions

²⁹² JAMWPEEC. *Fresh Expressions*, 12-13.

²⁹³ "Church Growth Research Project. Report on Strand 3b," 13.

are members of the Methodist Church, the likelihood of the wider church being able to hear or listen is limited. Without membership, those who attend church are unable to take up office or take a full part in its decision-making processes. Without membership, a fresh expression cannot become a Methodist society or 'church'. It will therefore lack autonomy. One harsh reality is that out of approaching three thousand fresh expressions (arguably less, depending on the criteria), only one has constituted itself as a church in the Methodist-legal sense. Horsley's contribution on the possibility of the circuit incorporating new churches as classes is important. Circuits do indeed have the ability to confer a measure of legitimacy on a fresh expression and resource it as appropriate. Removing fresh expressions from the oversight of a local church might appeal, particularly if it gives the project greater freedom. However, there is little written and readily obtainable evidence that details the success, or otherwise, of this suggestion.

A second concern is that superintendents have a crucial role in setting the tone for mission and fresh expressions across a circuit. Although the potential for conflict in VFX is greater because they operate under a different model of oversight, early experiences suggest that superintendents can either enable or frustrate new work. Evidently, the Church needs to identify and appoint superintendents who will be supportive of fresh expressions. This raises questions for ongoing training; whilst for example, MSI and MSM provide a helpful grounding in fresh expressions, they are optional rather than obligatory. Yet it is the superintendent who recommends candidates for the new Pioneer Pathway.

Third, a significant shift is occurring as the Church moves from one model of selecting and training pioneers to another. It is tempting to assume that this will ease the vocational tension that Cox reported in presbyters and deacons, by giving them permission to engage in new work. However, having the warrant to serve in a pioneering way is different from having the freedom to live this out. Strikingly, deacons have now begun to market themselves as a 'mission focused, pioneering religious

community'.²⁹⁴ This still raises questions first about what pioneering opportunities are available for deacons locally, and second, how presbyters might also be able to serve in this way. Crucially, the difficulty of sustaining existing work whilst engaging with something new remains as a significant barrier. Furthermore, how will the church preserve the authenticity of pioneer ministry as the pathway expands?

Fourth, the appeal made through *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church* that fresh expressions must balance locality, intensity, and connectivity, is a fair response to concerns raised by both fresh expressions practitioners and commentators situated in the wider church. The call for churches to incorporate baptism and communion from the earliest point is also undisputed by MSM. However, the argument that both Churches have the necessary ecclesiology in place to support fresh expressions is, in my view, suspect. Having the necessary ecclesiology to support fresh expressions is different from having the capacity to resource it by appointing the right people, to the right positions at the right time.

Finally, the most challenging proposition is rooted in Cox's view that early Methodist ecclesiology was shaped by praxis. John Wesley's willingness to defy ecclesial authority and endure disapproval for the sake of mission, seems difficult to refute. Moreover, it offers little warrant for Methodists to accept ecclesial discipline unquestionably. Atkins proposition that Methodism is a *discipleship movement shaped for mission* does little to calm this. John Wesley was an autocratic, High Church Anglican who, somewhat peculiarly, left behind a conciliar movement that became a *defacto* Church. Within twenty years of his death, Methodism entered a period of schism. Whilst, a degree of separation may have been due to differences in culture and the limits of geography, Methodist disagreements over leadership styles and the role of a minister, the nature and content of worship,

²⁹⁴ Methodist Diaconal Order," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodistdiaconalorder.org.uk/>.

and the processes by which the church should be governed and disciplined, have been well-documented. Wesleyan Methodists (1791), New Connexion (1797), Independent Methodists (1806), Primitive Methodists (1811) and Bible Christian (1815), are just five examples of how Methodists separated from each other, with at least six other movements developing prior to 1907.²⁹⁵ My experience suggests that these contrasting perspectives remain as part of the varied inherited church tradition in which presbyters operate today, where, for example, the culture of 'Primitive', 'Wesleyan' or 'Independent' is, quite literally, carved into the stonework. The difficulty for the Methodist Church rests in balancing unity over uniformity and conformity over the freedom to adapt and respond appropriately to local context. To what extent should church members identify with John Wesley and the Methodist tradition that developed towards 1932, and to what extent should they identify with the (partly) unified Methodist Church after that point, when the Deed of Union was signed?

²⁹⁵ Tabraham, *Methodism*, 63-74.

Foreword to Chapters Three and Four

Animate and Messy Church

Chapters three and four began as two separate studies that explored the formation, practice and oversight issues raised by firstly Animate, a fresh expression of Church in Riverhead, and secondly, Messy Church in the Maltings. Whilst these two fresh expressions were the subject of a sustained period of ethnographic participation-observation, I was also able, in each centre, to visit and observe what was happening in other local projects. As the research progressed, it became obvious that a number of observations and findings were shared across multiple centres. These substantiated the central arguments of this thesis; that in many instances leaders had not fully understood, or were uncomfortable with the ecclesial intent of fresh expressions; that the Methodist construct of membership is inhibiting the mixed economy; and that the 'light touch' is too subjective a practice as to be workable.