

## Missing Generation Research

### Basic Information

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft Resolution</b>	The Council adopts the paper and recommends it to the Conference
<b>Alternative Options to Consider, if Any</b>	None

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	The paper describes the Missing Generation Research Project and the plans for discussion groups at the Conference
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The aim of the research</li> <li>• The role of the Conference</li> <li>• An outline of the research together with the literature review which led to the research</li> </ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Understanding Young Adults' consultation in 1999</li> <li>• Young Adults Consultation in 2002</li> <li>• Resolutions passed by the 2007 Conference and the Team Focus Report</li> </ul>
<b>Consultations</b>	None

### Summary of Impact

<b>Standing Orders</b>	None identified – but some may emerge as the research progresses
<b>Faith and Order</b>	Possible implications depending on the result of the research
<b>Financial</b>	The cost of the research has been included in the 2010-11 budget
<b>Personnel</b>	0.5 FTE Research Assistant will be recruited for 12 months
<b>Legal</b>	None identified
<b>Wider Connexional</b>	It is hoped that this research will offer insights which would have a major impact throughout the Connexion
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	The results of the research could impact some Local Ecumenical Partnerships
<b>Risk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable case studies are not forthcoming</li> <li>• The research is inconclusive</li> <li>• Insufficient resources to widely communicate the research findings</li> </ul>

## Missing Generation Research

### Background

1. The issue of the so called missing generation<sup>1</sup> has been raised at various times in past at the Conference, and the Projects, Research and Development Cluster of the reconfigured Connexional Team was asked to explore this further. The result of a literature review on the subject was undertaken during 2009 is shown in Appendix 1.
2. After reflecting on this literature review, a 12 month research project was developed and approved by the leaders of the Connexional Team. This project has the following aims:
  - 2.1. *To establish what can be learnt from Methodist congregations that have a relatively smooth demographic profile over the full age range, and from this to provide guidance for other churches in their mission to the whole of society.*
  - 2.2. *To explore the attitudes of the 25-40 age-group towards the Methodist Church a) from practising Methodists, and b) from Christians who have previously worshipped in a Methodist context.*
3. This research project has only recently started. It will continue into 2011 and report its findings to the 2011 Conference.

### Why research the Missing Generation?

4. The initial motivation for this research project was a directive of the Methodist Conference<sup>2</sup>, which could be viewed as a reaction to the steady decline in Methodist members, and a significant bias of the Church's membership age profile towards the older generation. However, it is also extremely relevant to the theme of discipleship which has been adopted as the motif for the work of the Connexional Team. As the Church seeks to make and nurture whole life world changing disciples, the Missing Generation must be a key target group within the wider Methodist context.
5. This issue is also one that affects the wider ecumenical community. The 25-40 age group is the hardest demographic for any church to reach because it consists of Generations X and Y who have had the least church contact. Therefore, we need ask the question 'is there a distinctly Methodist approach to resolving the Missing Generation issue so that the trend of a skewed age demographic is reversed?' If there is not, how can the Methodist Church best approach the issue in collaboration with its ecumenical partners?

### The Role of the 2010 Conference

6. A major part of this research is to identify Methodist congregations that include a reasonable proportion of generations X and Y; identify what can be learnt from their experiences and discern whether there are lessons that could help other churches. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are many such churches in the Connexion, and it would be a great benefit and encouragement for the Conference to hear some of these case studies and have the opportunity to reflect on them. It would also be a great benefit or the research work to have these case studies clearly written up, together with the Conference's reflections on them.
7. The Conference will break into groups for one of its sessions. Each group will be allocated a case study from a booklet of about 20 which will be given to all Conference delegates. The

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'missing generation' refers to the generation(s) of church goers who have been identified as largely absent from congregations. Aged 20-40 (or even 50 in some research), they are Generations X and Y in sociological terms.

<sup>2</sup> Para. 2.10.4 'Reconfiguring the Connexional Team: Team Focus 2005-08', Report to 2007 Conference

groups will be asked to try to identify elements of church life and structure in their case study, which appear to support this inclusive age profile, and identify and reflect on lessons which may be helpful for other churches which do have a missing generation. The Conference Business Committee has also arranged that in the same session, the groups will discuss issues from the Youth Assembly, and ways to maximise the synergy with these two themes are being explored with the Children and Youth Team.

8. Each group will have a facilitator and a reporter. The notes from the discussion will be fed into the research study, and the case studies will be published on the Methodist Church website after the Conference.
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## **An Outline of the Research**

### **For Aim 1:**

*“To establish what can be learnt from Methodist congregations that have a relatively smooth demographic profile over the full age range, and from this to provide guidance for other churches in their mission to the whole of society.”*

9. The first step will be to identify some Methodist churches in Britain that fall into the following three categories:
  - (i) Churches which do not have a Missing Generation
  - (ii) Churches which do have a Missing Generation
  - (iii) Churches which have previously had a Missing Generation, but who in recent years have changed their congregation’s demographics.
10. Churches will be identified via a variety of means, and the sample will be managed to ensure even representation across districts; congregation size; location and geographical context.
  - 10.1. From Statistics for Mission:
    - (i) churches with significant numbers of members on the assumption that larger churches should have a greater chance of attracting the Missing Generation (and for those that do not, it would be interesting to explore the reasons why);
    - (ii) growing churches on the premise that growing churches may be congregations that have overcome (or are in the process of overcoming) the Missing Generation issue;
    - (iii) churches with high numbers of children, on the basis that their (young) parents may also be members of the congregation. The new Statistics for Mission questions on Youth Participation would be an indicator for suitable congregations.
  - 10.2. From direct contact with Superintendents: this will be managed to select a sample quantity with an even spread across the Connexion.
  - 10.3. Other research methods may be used if the above does not give sufficient data.
11. After the churches have been identified and categorised, a pilot study using interviews and focus groups will be carried out on a small sample to enable the methodology to be tested and modifications to be made.
12. When the research is rolled out beyond the pilot sample, data will be extracted from each group of churches, via face-to-face interviews, focus groups and possibly a questionnaire, information will be gathered from a sample of churches in order to get a picture of what is happening across the whole connexion. The stories which are heard, both via this research and through the groups work at the Conference, will be analysed to establish themes, trends and common characteristics.

**For Aim 2:**

*“To explore the attitudes of the 25-40 age-group towards the Methodist Church a) from practising Methodists, and b) from Christians who have previously worshipped in a Methodist context.”*

13. Research will also be conducted into the Missing Generation itself to explore the attitudes of the 25-40 age group towards the Methodist Church, incorporating at least two distinct groups of people. This would provide an integrated package in which the Aim 1 facilitates Aim 2. The target groups will be:
  - (i) Practising Methodists aged 25-40
  - (ii) Christians aged 25-40 who have previously worshipped in a Methodist context.
14. This would enable the Church to discover both positives (what attracts this age group or makes them stay) and negatives in its relationship with this key demographic.
15. Subjects for this study would be found via the following methods:
  - 15.1. Use of the connexional directory (using previous MAYC contacts who would now be in the Missing Generation age bracket, or links with student groups such as MethSoc).
  - 15.2. Methodists, aged 20-45, who are members of congregations identified in the first part of the research project.
  - 15.3. Facebook could also be a valuable in locating subjects – especially if a questionnaire is used. Whilst there are important caveats to bear in mind when using social networking sites in research, it is still a viable and valuable means of finding subjects and obtaining data.
16. It is proposed that information for this part of the project be gathered via focus groups (up to three in total) and face to face interviews. Good quality data could also be obtained via an online questionnaire.
17. Once churches had been identified for the first part of this project (Aim 1), participants would be identified as outlined above. An online questionnaire could be used initially to establish key themes and issues, followed up by focus groups (separating the two ‘types’ of participant) enabling deeper discussion.

**Outputs:**

18. There are at least two outputs identified for this research. Firstly, a research paper that will outline the results; secondly, the rolling-out of a project for the whole church that will apply the research findings to congregations in a practical way, enabling them to respond positively. It is important to note that this research is intended to be a positive piece of work – not highlighting negatives about the Church, but identifying positives that can be shared and applied elsewhere.
19. The roll-out project that puts the research findings into practice – embedding them within the strategy and policy of the Church – would have the discipleship theme central to its purpose and could include issues wider than just simply the Missing Generation. A detailed plan of what this project would entail will depend upon what results from the research, so this cannot be hypothesised at this time. Also, it is important to recognise that this project may raise key strategic issues for the Connexion.

## Appendix 1

### **The Missing Generation: A literature review and proposals for future research and project work** (Liz Clutterbuck, June 2009)

#### **1. Introduction**

##### **1.1 What is the 'missing generation'?**

**1.1.1** The term 'missing generation' refers to the generation(s) of church goers who have been identified as largely absent from congregations. Aged 20-40 (or even 50 in some research), they are Generations X and Y in sociological terms.

**1.1.2** This age group is also one which has had the least church contact of recent generations. More 20-40s are 'unchurched' as opposed to 'dechurched'<sup>3</sup>, and have little Christian heritage to draw from. Recent Tearfund research<sup>4</sup> showed that the highest number of 'closed non-churched' (people who had never been to church and were against the idea of going) was found in the 16-24 age bracket. The number of 'closed de-churched' (those who had left the church and were against returning) was also lower amongst the under 40s.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that fewer had been to church in the first place, as only 35% of those aged 16-44 declared themselves to be regular churchgoers.<sup>6</sup>

**1.1.3** This generation is used to having choices, having grown up in a consumer driven society. As a result, the church needs to be able to cope with their expectations in order to spark enthusiasm and interest.

##### **1.2 Is the Methodist Church the only denomination to have a 'Missing Generation'?**

**1.2.1** The short answer is "no". Other denominations have realised that this age-group is a problem area. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) conducted research in this area in 2000 and concluded that 'the church appears to be failing to sufficiently reach or involve this age group'.<sup>7</sup> As part of this research, the author of 'Reconnecting with a Missing Generation', Revd Norman Hamilton, was contacted to see what impact (if any) this report had had upon the PCI – the results are highlighted later in this paper.

**1.2.2** The research published by Tearfund in 2007<sup>8</sup> established that regular churchgoing is more prevalent amongst the older generation. Those attending regularly rises from 10% of 16-24 to 26% 75>.<sup>9</sup> Regular churchgoers are also less likely than all UK adults to be aged 16-44 (35% versus 49%).<sup>10</sup> This data confirmed what the major denominations have accepted as a reality for some time. Reports like *Mission Shaped Church*<sup>11</sup>, published by the Church of England, show an awareness that existing 'ways of being church' aren't necessarily the best way of meeting the needs of all areas of society.

##### **1.3 What might the consequences be if the Missing Generation issue is not addressed by the Methodist Church?**

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<sup>3</sup> Unchurched' in this context refers to those who have had no previous contact with church, as opposed to 'dechurched' – those who have left the church.

<sup>4</sup> *Churchgoing in the UK – A research report from Tearfund on church attendance in the UK*, 2007

<sup>5</sup> p. 9 Graph: Church attendance and experience in the UK, by age *Churchgoing in the UK*, 2007

<sup>6</sup> p.15 *Churchgoing in the UK*, 2007

<sup>7</sup> p. ? *Reconnecting With a Missing Generation*, PCI, 2000

<sup>8</sup> *Churchgoing in the UK*, 2007

<sup>9</sup> p. 9 *Churchgoing in the UK*, 2007

<sup>10</sup> p. 15 Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Mission Shaped Church*, Church House Publishing, 2004

**1.3.1** Specific aspects of the Church will be particularly affected by a continuing missing generation, for example, Presbyters and Deacons. Anecdotally, the Church is already aware that a large number will retire within the next ten years, worsening the stationing situation. Stations are already left unfilled each year, but their number will rise unless younger people feel called into the ministry of the Methodist Church.

**1.3.2** If the Missing Generation continues to be under-represented within the membership of the Methodist Church, there is an actual risk that the Methodist Church in Britain will die out. Increasingly aged congregations will not be replenished by younger generations becoming members or taking on leadership roles. Whilst this might sound extreme, this is the harsh reality of the 'Missing' generation never appearing. With below average representation (compared to society in general) within a key age-group, the Methodist Church will struggle to remain relevant to wider society.

## **2. What work has the Methodist Church done relating to the Missing Generation in the past?**

**2.1** Reading through reports on the issue of this age group over the last 50 years reveals that this is in no way a new problem for the church.

The 1965 Young Adult Commission Report noted that: *'there are no statistics of attendance at worship, but there are many Churches where young adults are certainly notable more for their absence than their presence'* and asked the question: *'Is there a place in the church for the young adult? If so, what is it and how can the Church make it plain to him?'*<sup>12</sup> Fifteen years later David Winwood's report 'Before It's Too Late' carried a warning that there was a major need to see this age group incorporated fully into the life of the church.<sup>13</sup>

**2.2**<sup>14</sup> Over the last decade, the issue of the Missing Generation has been returned to on a number of occasions, but such work has not yet resulted in new initiatives that would enable the Connexion to increase its interaction with that age group. These work areas have included:

- i. 'Understanding Young Adults' consultation in 1999.
  - The focus of this consultation was the 18-25 (30) age group, not the 'missing generation' as this paper defines it.
  - John Buckeridge presented a paper on the understanding of the Missing Generation in a wider, ecumenical context, illustrating the successful initiatives that had begun around the UK.
- ii. Young Adults Consultation in 2002 - a group drawn from a range of areas of the Church's work including MAYC, Student Link and those responding to an article in the Methodist Recorder.
  - This resulted in series of meetings and a piece of research involving members of the Church within the age bracket culminating in a report to the 2005 Conference.
  - The project did not come up with policy recommendations for dealing with the issue of declining membership of 20-40s, but it did flag the issue for consideration within the Team Focus process.

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<sup>12</sup> p.3 [Young Adult Commission Report](#), Methodist Youth Division, 1965

<sup>13</sup> [Before It's Too Late](#), David J. Winwood, Division of Education and Youth, 1980

<sup>14</sup> Section 2.2 opening paragraph and clauses i and ii have been reworded for accuracy since the Council meeting.

- Although part of its purpose was to explore why those who had grown up within Methodism no longer worshipped in Methodist Churches, the focus groups consisted solely of those attending Methodist Churches.
  - It provided a good overview of what the 120 participants' views on various issues were, but provided no suggestions as to how the Methodist Church might increase membership within that age-group.
- iii. Resolutions passed by the 2007 Conference in response to 'Enabling Work with Under 19s' report:

*'The missing generations: Children and young people do not live in isolation! The church must develop more effective mission and ministry amongst people aged 20-50 so that parents and families are supported and so that credible role models of adult discipleship are available for those growing up in the faith.'*<sup>15</sup>

Recommendation 8.6 passed by the Conference:

"That there also be a related project to explore effective engagement with the so-called 'missing generations.'"

This is what has resulted in the Missing Generation Project within the Projects Cluster.

**iv. Team Focus:**

The 2007 report to the Conference, 'Reconfiguring the Connexional Team: Team Focus 2005-08', stated that:

*"In particular, work will begin early in 2007/8 to bring together the best available thinkers and practitioners within the Church to respond to the Conference's repeated direction (most recently in Resolution 37/12, Daily Record 8/49/2 of 2006) for the Council to report on the vision and strategy for work with the missing generation."*<sup>16</sup>

**Due to the demands of Team Focus, this work did not take place in the 2007/8 connexional year, but is now part of the work plan of the Projects Cluster for the year 2008/9.**

**3. What do we want the Methodist Church to look like?**

**3.1** This is a very important question in terms of both Missing Generation and Equalities and Diversity. When we say that there is a generation 'missing' from our church, do we simply mean that they are missing from Sunday morning congregations? Is it still realistic to expect a church's Sunday morning gathering to reflect the diversity of the community it is based in? Should we therefore concentrate on who is involved in the life of a church community over the course of a week? The triennial statistics published in 2008<sup>17</sup> show an increase in midweek attendance of services, a time that is possibly more accessible for those in their 20s and 30s. In 2007, 10% of adult weekly attendance was midweek (an additional 22,000 people compared to 2006).<sup>18</sup>

**3.2** One report<sup>19</sup> has suggested that a reason why Methodist congregations have such a high average age is down to the Homogeneity Principle<sup>20</sup> – basically, that like attracts like. If a congregation

<sup>15</sup> Para. 7 'Enabling Work With Under 19s', Report to the 2007 Methodist Conference

<sup>16</sup> Para. 2.10.4 'Reconfiguring the Connexional Team: Team Focus 2005-08', Report to 2007 Conference

<sup>17</sup> Statistics for Mission, Report to the 2008 Methodist Conference

<sup>18</sup> Section 12 Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> p. 21 Church Life Profile 2001, 2002

<sup>20</sup> This theory was first put forward by D.A. McGavran in 'Understanding Church Growth' (1960), as a missiological theory. People are attracted to churches that understand and reach out to their particular community and states that 'people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers'.

contains older people, other older people will be attracted to it. Conversely, younger people are less like to join because there is no one in the congregation who they identify with. People are also attracted to churches that understand and reach out to their particular community – but this community is no longer 'geographical'; but one of age, interests or social groupings. This is an issue facing the church that was picked up on in the Mission Shaped Church report, which argued that ancient parish boundaries were no longer the most relevant way to divide the population.

**3.3** Are we therefore looking for ways in which Methodist congregations can reach out to the missing generation in non-conventional ways? In ways that may not mean this age group is present at every church on a Sunday morning, but is involved in the life of the church. The Sanctuary at Westminster Central Hall is an example of such an outreach. A well-attended mid-week community, those involved are not necessarily present at the church's main Sunday morning service. Does that make their fellowship any less valuable to the church's community?

**3.4** Alternatively, we may be looking at pooling resources so that the same (difficult to reach) age group is not being 'competed for' by several churches. This may mean that a circuit designates one church as one that will develop a ministry to the missing generation, supported by the resources of the whole circuit. Or, it may mean joining with the other denominations locally, to develop something together, possibly looking at whether there is a church nearby that is successfully attracting 20-40s.

**3.5** However, there is an argument that suggests that the church should reflect the whole community in terms of gender, race, age and socio-economic background. 'If our purpose is to deliver the message that men are reconciled to God and to each other and to affirm the creation of a new people, then we must refuse to separate people into homogenous groups and stop assuming that this is the best way to minister to our people.'<sup>21</sup> If the Methodist Church is to achieve this, then much more work is needed to be done to make its structures and style more accessible to those that are currently under-represented within its membership.

### iii. Data conclusions:

**4.1** There is little concrete evidence of exactly what the statistical situation is with regard to the 20-40 age group and the membership of the Methodist Church. Statistics for Mission has never collected demographic data and therefore the data that this research is based upon is drawn from a variety of sources.

**4.2** The most recent (entirely Methodist) data available is from a survey conducted by the Revd Liz Childs (DEE Lincoln & Grimsby District) as part of the Mapping the Way Forward process. This shows that just 8% of the District's membership is under the age of 40, whilst 74% are over 60. Obviously, this data is localised, but it would be safe to assume that a similar picture is reflected across the connexion as it is supported by findings from the 2001 Church Life Profile.

**4.3** The 2001 Church Life Profile provided specific data relating to the Methodist responses it had received. It concluded that 'there is a lower proportion of Methodist attenders, compared to the national population, in all groups ages below 55'.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, in comparison with other denominations, the Methodist Church seems to have significantly fewer attenders in the 25-44 age bracket - 13% versus 24% - and significantly more in the 65-84 range – 43% versus 31%.

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<sup>21</sup> 'Post Community', Geoff Holsclaw, from: [emergingchurch.info](http://www.emergingchurch.info) - <http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/geoffholsclaw/index.htm>

<sup>22</sup> p. 5 [Church Life Profile 2001: Denominational Results for the Methodist Church](#), Christian Research, 2002

**4.4** Both the Lincoln & Grimsby District survey and the 2001 Church Life Profile show that the majority of those who are members and those who attend Methodist Churches are above the age of 40 (if not 60), and that the number of those aged 20-40 is small in comparison.

**iv. Existing Methodist work relating to the Missing Generation:**

**5.1 Fresh Expressions (FX) Programme**

**5.1.1** Various projects launched by churches/circuits aiming to reach those in this demographic. The FX website currently lists 168 Methodist and Ecumenical fresh expressions of church.<sup>23</sup>

**5.1.2** Some 'successful'<sup>24</sup> FX projects include:

- The Sanctuary at Westminster Central Hall
- Tubestation in Newquay, Cornwall

**5.1.3** Some key questions include:

- What are the characteristics of those that have succeeded and those that have not?
- How do we make these projects self-supporting? Currently many Fresh Expressions rely heavily upon external funding. If these projects are destined to become the future of the church, how will the Church survive economically?

**5.1.4** Further research areas relating to FX have been highlighted in a recent paper by Graham Horsley and this will feed into proposals made at the end of this paper.

**5.2 Venture FX - Pioneering Ministries Project**

**5.2.1** Beginning in 2009, this aims to accelerate the Fresh Expressions work of reaching the unchurched by using the gifts of leaders identified as 'pioneers'. It also aims to 'add a strategic dimension to what is happening through a connexional scheme that will encourage new forms of church to emerge with young adults with no Christian heritage as they receive the Gospel and grow in discipleship'.<sup>25</sup>

**5.2.2** However, these are designed to sit outside the usual parameters of mainstream Methodist congregations and worship and therefore will not change the make-up of typical Sunday morning attendance.

**5.3 Youth Participation Strategy (YPS)**

YPS is a radical programme designed to integrate young people (up to the age of 23) directly involved with the leadership and policy development of the Methodist Church. Whilst still only in its first year and initial stages, its success should mean a stronger commitment to the church from those entering the 20-40 age bracket. However, it would be important to ensure that they are not immediately lost once they are beyond the age-limit of YPS, there would need to be something to support them in the next phase of their spiritual life.

**5.4 Cliff College**

The college has a strong reputation for evangelism and mission, as well as developing young church leaders. Perhaps a stronger connection could be developed between the college and the Church as a whole.

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<sup>23</sup> [Methodist Objectives from Fresh Expressions Phase 2](#) – Graham Horsley, 2009

<sup>24</sup> The definition of 'successful' would be a project that is on its way to becoming self-supporting; is attracting consistent numbers of the target demographic; and has met the criteria set out when the project was first established.

<sup>25</sup> Para. 2 [Connexional Pioneering Ministries Scheme](#), Report to Methodist Council (MC08/83)

## **v. Ecumenical initiatives and other movements:**

**6.1** Fresh Expressions is of course an ecumenical scheme, run jointly with the Church of England. In addition, there are cross-denominational movements such as Emerging Church which have a high level of involvement with the 20-40 age group. Pioneering Ministry within the Church of England is a little different to the Methodist model, focusing on church planting and new ways of training, but still largely focuses on the unchurched within the Missing Generation.

**6.2** It is also important to note the high level of success that the more charismatic or 'new' churches have had in this area. The 2005 English Church census showed that the lowest average age within 'churchmanship' (e.g. Anglo-Catholic, Liberal, Evangelical etc) was within the 'charismatic evangelical' bracket, with 'mainstream evangelical' having the second lowest – 38 and 42 respectively<sup>26</sup> – thus illustrating that this style of church may be the most successful at reaching out to 20-40s (although there is a question to be asked about their drop-out rates). Movements such as the Vineyard and New Frontiers also have congregations in which the majority of members fall into this age group<sup>27</sup> and their style of worship is primarily charismatic evangelical in focus.

## **vi. What could be done to address the Missing Generation issue?**

### **7.1 Education:**

**7.1.1** Raise awareness of the Missing Generation amongst local churches and encourage them to make it a priority in their congregations/circuits.

**7.1.2** The PCI built upon its research of 2000<sup>28</sup> on a congregational (as opposed to centrally determined) basis. Churches looked at the make-up of their local communities to assess which social groups they were not attracting. Norman Hamilton (the author of the research) employed three simple techniques with his own congregation:

- (i) Ensuring those welcoming people into the church reflect the social groups the church is looking to attract.
- (ii) Talking to visitors before the service begins.
- (iii) Shaping what the church already has in order to make it accessible – tone at the door, through the door, during the service and afterwards.

Hamilton also saw the importance (particularly regarding the Missing Generation) of helping people find a real sense of belonging – something that Generations X&Y lack. He asked the questions:

Who is caring for the Missing Generation in their frenetic lifestyle?

What can the church offer this generation?

**7.1.3** This has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of 20s and 30s attending his church, and in other PCI churches who have used the same approach. Such an approach may have some success in the Methodist Church (and could be applied to groups other than the Missing Generation), however, it is important to note that Northern Irish society is still very focused around Christian traditions. Sundays are widely accepted to be for church (for example, shops don't open until 1pm), therefore the PCI's main focus is the Sunday morning service – this may not be as successful in Britain.

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<sup>26</sup> p.5.7 Table 5.7.2 'Proportion of Churchgoers by Age and Churchmanship, 1989-2005', UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends No.6 2006/7, 2007

<sup>27</sup> This is based upon anecdotal evidence as neither group has a system of membership from which data could be drawn.

<sup>28</sup> Reconnecting With a Missing Generation, PCI, 2000

## **7.2 Work with others:**

**7.2.1** Collaborate with successful ecumenical or other denominations' initiatives. This could mean putting more emphasis or energy into Fresh Expressions and Venture FX. Or, it could involve supporting Methodist Churches in their relationships with other churches in their area – resourcing ecumenical work that connects with the Missing Generation.

**7.2.2** Ensure that at a grass-roots level people are aware of the various movements (e.g. Emerging Church and charismatic churches) that are attracting increasing numbers of this age-group. This is partly because they may learn something from them, but equally, there may also be a gap to fill for those in the Missing Generation who are not attracted to such movements.

## **7.3 Changing attitudes:**

As well as education, churches (and those who lead them) may need to change their attitude towards various issues, such as what constitutes 'church' and 'congregation'. There are several questions to consider:

- (i) Is the Sunday morning congregation 'the church'?
- (ii) Can mid-week worship offer something that's not found on a Sunday morning, and attract a different group of people?
- (iii) How can churches use the varying skills/talents/gifts of the Missing Generation – encouraging them whilst at the same time not over-burdening them with tasks?
- (iv) What are other churches (or other denominations) doing in the local area that is attracting the Missing Generation? Can lessons be learnt or could they get involved?
- (v) Does it matter which denomination a 20-40 year old attends as long as they're in a church where they can belong?
- (vi) Who is going to be leading the Methodist Church in Britain in twenty (or even ten) year's time, if this age-group is missing?

### **vii. Possible next steps in terms of research or policy:**

- 8.1 The purpose of this research project was to review the Missing Generation situation with regard to the Methodist Church in Britain and other denominations, with a view to establishing whether or not a Missing Generation connexional project was required in order to focus attention on resolving the issue.
- 8.2 What this initial research has shown is that the Missing Generation issue connects with many different areas of the work of the Connexional Team as well as being a key priority for Districts, Circuits and local congregations. Therefore the first priority for taking this work forward is to hold a Think Tank involving members of the Team whose work area relates to this issue and who can identify the relevant networks and individuals that will need to be involved in a consultation process. This Think Tank will also help determine the strategic direction regarding the Missing Generation, particularly whether or not it becomes a connexional project.
- 8.3 As this research has shown, there is very little concrete evidence that illustrates the actual situation in terms of statistics, therefore it would be foolish to recommend a project without such a basis. It is recommended that whatever the next step is regarding the Missing Generation, the gathering of such data should also be considered. This would be best achieved within the context of a wider survey, possibly using the Church Life survey model which is currently available to the Methodist Church. Such a survey is currently the focus of a separate research proposal.
- 8.4 Results from such research would not be available for at least a year, therefore it might be worthwhile to continue gathering information on what else is taking place in the Methodist

Church in order to have examples that can be supported by the statistics (once available). This could include:

- (i) Case studies of successful initiatives that involve the Missing Generation.
- (ii) Face to face interviews with those aged 20-40 (within Methodism, in other denominations, unchurched, dechurched).
- (iii) Large scale survey across whole connexion.

8.5 Some of this work could be carried out in the context of research required by the Fresh Expressions initiative.

8.6 It would also be valuable to treat the Missing Generation as a key demographic group in terms of connexional policy and strategy development, perhaps even adding it to the Equalities & Diversity agenda, noting that this particular age-group has its own needs and is very much in the minority, numerically. This could build upon the current Presidential initiative of inspiring, resourcing and networking 'emerging leaders' aged 20-40 and the event held on April 18th 2009.