

## 38. Missing Generation Research Project

### Basic Information

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Draft
<b>Action Required</b>	Information
<b>Draft Resolution</b>	38/1. The Conference receives the Report.

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	The paper provides an update on the Missing Generation Research Project and indicates how the research will be used following its publication and during the 2011/12 connexional year.
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Findings of research project</li><li>• Areas for recommendation/further work</li><li>• Indication of activities required in 2011/12</li><li>• Summary of project and methodology (in Appendix)</li></ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	Methodist Council papers MC/11/35 and MC/10/64 Missing Generation report to the 2010 Conference Case Studies used at the 2010 Conference – <a href="http://www.methodistchurch.org.uk/missinggeneration">www.methodistchurch.org.uk/missinggeneration</a>
<b>Consultations</b>	Churches across the Connexion – their congregations and leadership.  British Methodists and non-Methodists aged 25–40

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### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Conference paper contains the findings of the Missing Generation<sup>1</sup> Research Project, together with some suggested potential areas for action which might be addressed within work planned to follow up on this research. Whilst it presents essentially the same data as the Council paper presented in April this year, it also contains some changes and additions which benefit from further data gathered and consultation carried out after the Council paper was completed. It includes quantitative data from the questionnaire survey<sup>2</sup>, which back up the findings of the qualitative data from the case studies of churches. A fuller report on the research will also be made available separately and will contain more detail in relation to the case studies.

1.2 The 'Missing Generation' (referred to as the MG in the following) was taken to include those within the age range 25–40, but the research also included material relating to people a little older and a little younger, since many of the issues seem to relate to them as well; obviously there is no sudden cut-off point above which or below which there are different issues at play. A full methodology of the research project can be found in the appendix to this paper.

1.3 It is important to note that the brief for this research project related specifically to the Methodist Church. While it is true that the Church in Britain as a whole is lacking those in their 20s and 30s, this project only had the resources to explore what this issue meant in a Methodist context – and to establish if there might be a uniquely Methodist approach to dealing with it. It did not have the resources to explore issues relating to the MG who are unchurched or very dechurched<sup>3</sup>, with only a minimal contact with the Christian religion, but some conversations were held with those working in a missional way among this group of the MG, in order to get a feel for issues which are key to them. These are referred to in section 14 below and included amongst others, the VentureFX programme and the Fresh Expressions initiative.

1.4 The findings presented here derive from the data gathered through this project. However, some of the findings have implications more widely, in an ecumenical and indeed wider societal context, and some more general points are therefore also made.

### 2.0 Belonging to a Methodist congregation

2.1 Members of the MG attracted to a Methodist church appeared to

<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> See Appendix 8.1

<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.

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be attracted largely because of a church's individual character, not because it was 'Methodist'. They tended to focus, in other words, on belonging locally, and not on belonging to a wider worshipping community – the Methodist Church.

2.2 It appears to be Methodist churches which have succeeded in developing a distinctively individual character, with consistency in preaching and in worship and a clear vision of who they are and where they are going, which have been the most successful in retaining and attracting members of the MG. They tackle the need for consistency of preaching by finding ways of overcoming factors that can reduce consistency – such as the circuit plan bringing a variety (in terms of quality and theology) of preachers to lead worship at the church. We found that individual churches apply conditions to their involvement in the preaching plan to avoid these problems. Individual churches which are successful with the MG also develop their worship. This has tended to involve nurturing and drawing on the skills of Worship Leaders<sup>4</sup> with the aim of ensuring worship of the right type for the congregation as well as consistency of worship style. Both strategies have contributed to maximising individual churches' ability to develop and maintain their individuality.

2.3 Many members of the MG emphasised the importance for them of having a sense of belonging in relation to a local church. Most churches related this to the importance of having sufficient numbers of people 'like them' within a certain congregation for them to have a peer group, and this was expressed by members of the MG too; but many also expressed the desire for there to be people who are different from them, particularly in terms of age. This emphasises their sense of the congregation as a 'family'; families consist, after all, of people of different ages. Another major issue which came out was the desire of members of the MG to take on responsibility and leadership (see section 13 below), and this too relates to 'growing up' within a family. The complex nature of what it means to 'belong', the relationship of a congregation (at whatever level) to a family, and the implications of this, tended not to be explored in any detail but appeared to be tackled by churches on a reactive level.

2.4 The fact that members of the MG have been drawn to individual churches and not to the Methodist Church was reflected in their views on the Methodist Church. In the context of their focus on the importance of belonging, and the idea of the ideal local congregation as a 'family', it was

<sup>4</sup> To avoid confusion with 'worship leaders' who lead the congregation in music, the following will apply: Worship Leader (capitalised) – someone qualified in the authorised ministry within the Methodist Church; worship leader (non-capitalised) – a musician leading the congregation in sung worship.

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striking that there was a relatively undeveloped sense of the wider Methodist Church as a congregation or family among the MG. This seemed to be related to a loss of focus on or interest in denomination among the MG. Those who did find a spiritual and social home in Christian churches seemed to find this more through affiliation to a specific congregation, rather than through a sense of affiliation to a denomination. This was reflected in the survey – where, when asked what the most important factor in choosing a church was, ‘denomination’ was only the fourth most popular amongst those currently attending Methodist churches. Style of worship, theological outlook and fellowship all ranked more highly.

- 2.5 We found little understanding or appreciation among younger people who are associated with Methodist churches of the meaning, the ‘DNA’, of Methodism. An understanding of what Methodism might mean seems to have come through to them indirectly, through observing the structure and functioning of the Church, rather than explicitly and overtly. This was particularly true of those who are not ‘cradle Methodists’, but even applied to those who were born into Methodism.
- 2.6 The functioning of the Methodist Church often seemed to younger people to have no rationale; the rooting of the stationing process and the circuit organisation of the Church in an intention to create

a Connexion which supports and upholds all churches and holds the Church together was not appreciated. The difficulties generated by this kind of functioning tended to be clearer. The relationship between the egalitarian and inclusive ideology of the Methodist Church and Church structure was not clear to members of the MG to whom we spoke, who were confused by this structure, with some seeing the Church as too structured and some as not structured enough, and confusion over the hierarchy of the Church and who is ‘in charge’.

- 2.7 This relates to questions around what a ‘congregation’ might mean in the modern world, which in turn relate to the ways in which the sense of ‘belonging’ is constructed and develops on the part of the MG. A congregation may be defined as a worshipping community. As such, it does not exist only at one level, but at several. The entire Christian community is, at the highest level, a worshipping community. Christian denominations like the Methodist Church are worshipping communities, which, to stay together, need to have a sense of ‘belonging together’ (to use a term which is currently being used for another project within the Methodist Church at the moment, focused on understanding and growing links between different ethnic and cultural groups within the Church). There are well-grounded social and spiritual reasons for developing a sense of ‘belonging’ at a supra-local level through a

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denomination, and, because of its social aims, this might be argued to be particularly true of the Methodist Church; however, these are little appreciated by the MG (despite their interest in social action – see section 3 below). It is the local level on which they tend to focus – the level at which contact takes place at a physical level between people.

2.8 At the local level, congregations can also be said to exist at different levels, either *de facto* or through deliberate facilitation on the part of the church. Groupings founded in both social and worship often exist within a local church based on age, ethnicity, social class, or worship preference.

2.9 Questions were raised often during this research about what should be the relative importance and emphasis on different levels of congregation, and how to achieve these, mostly related to local churches but also in relation to the wider Methodist Church. Two major questions arose: a) what the right balance should be between 'growing' distinctive congregations within a local congregation associated with a particular church building, within a Circuit, and/or ecumenically and ensuring the unity of the congregation, at whatever level this is conceived; and b) what the significance is and could be of a sense of belonging to the wider Methodist Church as a wider congregation. These two questions

are related, of course; in general, the Methodist Church, as a broad Church, aims to bring together people who are different and 'grow them together' as it were.

2.10 The message that comes across from this research is that it is important to emphasise both the intimate relations between people within local churches and relations between people and churches through the Connexion; both are important, but neither should be allowed to dominate.

### 3.0 Methodism and social action

3.1 Social action was seen as being part of their spiritual life and part of being a disciple of Christ by many people in the MG within the churches on which we focused. The need to address inequalities in society and the needs of the deprived and disadvantaged was widely seen as important. The importance of social action as a value which churches ought to embody was visible amongst survey respondents from both Methodist and non-Methodist churches – ranking fourth out of a list of nine values that could be chosen.

3.2 Those members of the MG who were aware that Methodism has as part of its DNA a focus on social action were very appreciative of this, but many were not aware of this or were only vaguely aware of the history and values of Methodism in relation to this.

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3.3 Social action was being undertaken by many of the more successful churches, for example through setting up day centres for the homeless; setting up chaplaincies for specific groups; facilitating and encouraging members of the church to speak, campaign and/or take visible positions on social issues; partnering voluntary sector organisations in social action; and simply having the church open to anyone in need for as much of the time as possible.

3.4 Some members of the MG said that they were happy with the fact that the Methodist Church is 'not the state church'; as such, it can take up positions which are aimed at bringing about social change.

### 4.0 Theology

4.1 Members of the MG to whom we spoke were often unsure of the theology of the Methodist Church, even if they are associated with a Methodist Church. The open and inclusive theological approach which is Methodism's DNA, with its core focus on the fact that God loves everyone, was often unclear to them in any detail. There is an inherent but veiled tension between an 'evangelical'<sup>5</sup> and a 'liberal' position within the Church broadly, and it is

often unclear how the theology of the church an individual belongs to fits into the broader Methodist Church – and hence what the theology of the Methodist Church actually is.

4.2 The nature of theological concern among members of the MG arguably needs more investigation. They expressed little interest in debating the difference between 'evangelical' and 'liberal' positions. There seem, broadly, to be two strands to the direction of spiritual travel in which members of the MG who are or have been associated with the Methodist Church are going. One is exploratory and questing; some of those to whom we spoke told us that they do not want to be told what to believe, or that they consider that certainty is not possible in spiritual terms, but rather saw their spiritual life as a journey of discovery. The other is towards more certainty and clarity; 'evangelical' ministers and youth leaders told us that they believe that younger people need theological clarity, although this was not explicitly mentioned by any of the members of the MG to whom we spoke. It seems likely that many younger people feel a pull in both directions, feeling drawn both to clarity ('*absolute ideas are addictive, full stop*', as one person put it) and to exploration.

<sup>5</sup> In this context the term 'evangelical' – which may be used with a variety of meanings – is used to refer to an approach to Christianity which has often emphasised the need for personal conversion, a more conservative approach to Scripture, and the importance of evangelism. The term 'liberal' refers to an approach to Christianity which has traditionally attached a greater degree of provisionality to truth claims and prefers to think of salvation as more akin to a journey of exploration rather than a conversion event.

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### 5.0 Worship and discipleship

- 5.1 Worship may be broadly defined as communication with God/praise of God and was seen as including one or more of the following: song (to God or about God), including traditional hymns, more contemplative singing such as Taizé or Iona and worship songs; silence; reading sacred literature; paintings and crafts; dance and movement; poetry; entertainment such as Bible magic; sharing food; and play (including Messy Church and Godly Play). The context of worship was demarcated in different ways by different members of the MG to whom we spoke, and ranged from the statement that “*all of life should be worship*” to the view that worship is the singing of worship songs, choruses and hymns during a service on Sunday.
- 5.2 Christian discipleship overlaps with worship, and could even be seen as coordinate with it in the sense that worship is defined as relating to the whole of life. The statements that many members of the MG made about feeling that they want church to be relevant to the whole of their life reflects what can be seen as a commitment to whole-life Christian discipleship.
- 5.3 In relation to the more restricted definitions of worship, the significance of worshipping with others in church as opposed to worshipping individually is clearly important to consider in the context of church membership and engagement;

although this is not usually explicit, it would seem that communal worship is important to most people. The distinction between worship and a church service is worth considering here. Although this was not true of all, a number of members of the MG, as well as younger people, expressed the view that the main point of a service is the worship – by which they meant the singing. They felt that the teaching/preaching was of less significance. Older people, and ministers, placed more emphasis on the preaching, with some ministers seeing this as the core of the service.

- 5.4 We found that members of the MG – and many older people too – were generally not happy with traditional Methodist worship, although some said they valued it as being more personal and less standardised than a traditional Anglican service. However, many saw it as too standardised and needing more flexibility. The survey results showed that in fact, within Methodism, churches were generally offering the styles of worship preferred by members of the MG worshipping within them. The most preferred styles (most popular first) were: All Age, Traditional ‘hymn sandwich’, Messy Church and Alternative Worship; the most frequently offered services (most common first) were: Traditional ‘hymn sandwich’, All Age, Messy Church and Alternative Worship.
- 5.5 The main message was that there is a strong desire on the part of younger people for an experiential

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style of worship (which here overlaps with prayer); they want to feel that they are in contact with God. There was discontent with traditional hymns, which were seen as not (or no longer) Spirit-led and as being too obscure in wording and unexciting in music. Experiential worship can include a variety of styles, ranging from silent contemplation to song and dance. Within Christianity, experiential worship has deep roots and it has been very important within Methodism. However, the perception among younger Methodists included in this research as well as among those who have left the Methodist Church is that it has almost entirely been lost within the Church.

- 5.6 A very important type of experiential worship nowadays among younger people is through worship songs. Worship is increasingly led, within both Methodist churches and other churches, by worship leaders, who plan and orchestrate worship songs, and sometimes the service in general, and who may respond to the 'feeling' of the congregation and alter the order of the service as planned. There is limited scope for this within a Methodist church, however, and this was seen as problematic by many, since they feel that this detracted from the experiential nature of the worship.
- 5.7 There is an association nowadays between experiential worship in the form of worship songs and an 'evangelical' type of Christianity, both within Methodism and more widely

in Christianity. However Methodists, both younger people and ministers, who took a more 'liberal' theological position suggested to us that there was no reason why experiential worship should be confined to churches which are more 'evangelical'. It seems important to disassociate the desire for experiential worship from any inclination on the part of younger people towards an 'evangelical' theology. The two do not appear to be seen as linked by members of the MG.

- 5.8 The fact that different people prefer different forms of worship, and a knowledge that younger people like worship songs rather than traditional hymns, had been addressed within Methodist churches which we visited in different ways. Some included different styles of worship within one service, in an attempt to satisfy everyone to some degree; some had different services for different groups. This relates to an issue raised in some churches: that if different services are set up it divides the congregation. However, some churches have separate services with different styles at the same time, which introduces the possibility of moving from one context to another and means that people are able to mix with each other – and experience different styles of worship.
- 5.9 A number of members of the MG interviewed expressed a liking for quieter, more contemplative or meditative worship, including silence.

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It seemed that there may be scope for broadening the provision of this type of worship, including experimentation with different forms of it.

### 6.0 Innovation

- 6.1 Innovation in general was perceived as often very difficult to implement by many ministers as well as many members of the MG. There was a widely held perception that the 'old guard' would not want to change. However, this was mitigated by the fact that many churches, and many existing members of Methodist churches, really wanted 'fresh blood' and were trying very hard to bring it in. Those churches which did have a significant number of members of the MG clearly very much appreciated this; it was seen as highlighting and strengthening the nature of the congregation as a (multi-generational) 'family'. Whilst older people do often have difficulty in accepting change, the vigour and vision which members of the MG often have was widely appreciated; it seemed likely that older people often had both a realisation of the need for change and innovation and, at the same time, a fear of it which they (might even know they) needed to overcome.
- 6.2 Innovation in worship is challenging and requires courage and strength of sustained vision. It can divide the congregation and needs effective

leadership and the support of the broader Church. It was pointed out that it can also be 'old wine in new bottles'; and that lack of preparation can also masquerade as openness to the Spirit.

- 6.3 Despite the difficulties of innovation in worship, it has important advantages: a) it opens a church up to a wider potential congregation, responding to preferences and needs and putting new attenders on the same footing as cradle Methodists; and b) many members of the MG argued that an innovative approach to worship allows people to be responsive to the Spirit and open to experience of it in new ways; and it allows for the creativity of different people.
- 6.4 We found that the perception that older people are not open to innovation in worship appears to be questionable as a generalisation; what we did find was that most did not like 'worship songs' but preferred quieter forms of worship. Innovation *per se* is therefore not necessarily an issue for older people.

### 7.0 Preaching

- 7.1 The relationship between preaching and worship, including musical worship<sup>6</sup>, is one which needs some thought in the context of innovative worship styles and a new format

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that although 'worship' usually means the act of worshipping – eg a Sunday service – for many interviewed, it refers to times of praise and sung worship within a service.

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for 'being church' (see section 14 below). Traditionally the sermon is central to the Methodist service, but some members of the MG were clear that for them it is the sung worship that is central. Many were not happy to be 'talked down to' and a more collaborative co-teaching co-learning format may be more appropriate. The traditional Methodist service is quite highly programmed, linking the sermon carefully with the hymns, and this is difficult to transform into a more fluid, open format.

- 7.2 However, it is also true that many members of the MG, as well as older people, said that they really appreciated good preaching/teaching. There was a mixed message from ministers and members of the MG themselves as to whether there are specific sermons or kinds of sermons which are appropriate for this group. The length of the sermon was raised by some, in the context of the fact that people in the MG are believed to have short attention spans and to be accustomed to multi-tasking, which they cannot do while listening to a sermon in church. Visual aids were mentioned by many as important, but in many churches these are not very sophisticated.
- 7.3 The traditional sermon is not followed up by discussion on the part of the congregation, although children and teenagers will discuss the question preached on in their junior church. This is something which some people mentioned as

problematic, since they would appreciate a chance to discuss the topic. This links to the importance of small groups (see below).

### 8.0 Outreach

- 8.1 In order to make people aware of a church, it needs to become visible and to create a 'bridge' between church and members of the MG in the community. The intent of this is likely to be pre-evangelistic although without this being too overt. Churches have found that a 'bridge' is often most effectively created through providing for practical needs.
- 8.2 One way in which the church can become more visible and become part of the life of the MG in the community is through setting up a cafe or a shop. Particularly in city-centre areas, this has been found by some churches to be very effective. Another way is through setting up social activities which are attractive to individuals who are not members of the church. Given that members of the MG are often parents, a common and effective way of building bridges with them has been found to be to set up a playgroup and/or children's clubs, which often draws parents into trying out church. Regular contact with schools is also effective.
- 8.3 Tackling the needs of individuals who are in need with a pre-evangelistic intent is another way of linking with the MG in the community. Some churches had tackled this through

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initiatives like Street Pastors, by providing debt advice and through setting up drop-in centres focused on specific problems. Such initiatives had sometimes been set up in partnership with non-church organisations or ecumenically.

- 8.4 Some churches had taken on a paid worker whose job is to engage with outreach and this is seen as very valuable and very important. However, most such workers have been primarily taken on with the aim of working with the age group 18–25 and there has been less attention paid to the need to take on someone to work specifically with the MG, although in some instances those working with 18–25s have also engaged with older people.
- 8.5 Outreach with students – the future MG – is seen as important by churches in university towns, but with varying success. There is a tendency for certain churches to attract all the students – and these are not usually Methodist churches. Students are likely to ‘go with the herd’ to a degree perhaps greater than older people, regardless of whether a church fits their worship or theological inclination. Because of a liking for experiential worship in the form of worship songs, students often end up at ‘evangelical’ churches (which are likely to engage in ‘charismatic’ worship and to have good, up-to-date worship songs) despite the fact, mentioned by a number of people, that students are particularly likely to

have enquiring minds which might be drawn to a more ‘liberal’ theological position. MethSoc provided a ‘liberal’ spiritual home for many students in the past, but has become a rare presence in universities nowadays – with only five societies remaining. Students are attracted by material benefits, and free lunches and other food are an important offering which churches make to them to bring them in – and keep them in.

- 8.6 Providing contexts for worship which suit potential new attenders and members is extremely important in relation to outreach. In relation to the MG, this means consideration being given to developing distinct services/acts of worship, and decisions about the relationship between these and the broader church. Some of the churches we visited had done this within existing services, and others had introduced separate services. Some had also developed Fresh Expressions, which are specifically intended to draw in people, particularly members of the MG, who are not members of any church. In these contexts, traditional forms of Methodist service are widely seen as incomprehensible to many people, and innovative forms of worship are particularly important.

### 9.0 Becoming a part of a Methodist church

- 9.1 The initial welcome which people who first enter a church building find is obviously very important. Factors

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mentioned included the need for the building to be welcoming and to have good facilities; that the welcome needs to be genuine and not a 'hard-sell'; and that it needs to be quickly clear that the church is likely to prove able to provide for practical, community and spiritual needs.

9.2 Certain points came across as key in terms of allowing newcomers to learn more about a church and become part of it: a good welcome team, a system for introducing newcomers to other people (this was seen as particularly effective through food); providing opportunities to explain Christianity and Methodism, including through courses; and providing contexts in which people can create social and spiritual bonds with others, including through social events and small groups.

9.3 There is a question over the nature of membership – how it is viewed by those within the congregation and how ministers draw them into membership. For some ministers becoming a member is a key component of Methodist discipleship. In other churches 'becoming a Methodist' was seen as less of a priority than 'being a Christian'.

### 10.0 Enquiry courses

10.1 Individual ministers took a range of approaches to introducing newcomers to membership, and the degree of stress on the nature of

Methodism seemed to vary between churches.

10.2 There are a number of Christian enquiry courses available (of which the most well-known is Alpha), although this project did not have the remit to investigate these or the ways in which they are used. However, it does not seem that there is a course which introduces people to Methodism and which gives them an idea of what they might be joining if they join a Methodist church rather than joining another denomination.

10.3 The effectiveness and effects of using different approaches to introducing newcomers, particularly newcomers from the MG, to Methodism is an important area to understand but at the moment this has not been researched. Enquiry courses would appear to be an important way for people to move into church membership, allowing people to get to know each other and allowing them to be fed into small groups subsequently. However, the most effective form of enquiry course, the relationship between such a course and other means of introducing newcomers (such as preaching), and the most effective combinations for the MG (bearing in mind that there are many sub-groups within the MG) is not clear at this point.

10.4 As a general point, it would seem important that an enquiry course

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be available regularly, that the quality is sustained and that it be held at times of day which are accessible to people with different lifestyles.

### **11.0 Creating and sustaining social and spiritual bonds: pastoral care and mentoring**

- 11.1 It is important that a church be more than a community which meets for worship on Sunday. Because there is no automatic social linkage between people – particularly members of the MG – who come to a church, as there was in the past, this has to be created. Social activities, interest-based groups and outings are important parts of this. Churches which have been successful with the MG have facilitated these, and linked them to spiritual engagement with each other.
- 11.2 Pastoral care and mentoring are an important part of the creation of a social and spiritual community. Pastoral care was mentioned by many people as basic to Methodism but as not being done well any more. Over 91% of Methodist responses to the survey indicated that their church had a system of pastoral care and overwhelmingly it was indicated to take the form of pastoral visitors.
- 11.3 One-to-one mentoring was not allowed for formally in any of the churches but was seen as important

and often occurred through informal channels. An important form of this is inter-generational mentoring relationships, which were mentioned by many people as something they have really valued or would really value but which were not provided for adequately within their church. Mentoring in some instances was being set up to cascade within the church and this was seen as having potential. Mentoring is a skilled activity and training for mentoring is therefore important. This is not common, but in one church it was beginning to be planned for.

- 11.4 The classic mechanism for pastoral care within Methodism has been the 'class' system. This still exists to some degree in most churches but its function and functioning has become variable and consequently the role of the system has become somewhat unclear. It has also come to have a negative connotation and many churches said that they describe classes as cell groups, midweek groups or fellowship groups or families instead.

### **12.0 Small groups**

- 12.1 Small groups, in whatever terms – including 'class' – they are described, were seen as very valuable indeed by many people, both by those who are already in them and by those who would like to be in them. Over 50% of survey respondents indicated that they belonged to a small group and of those that did not, 68% would have

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- liked to but various factors prevented them from doing so.
- 12.2 The mix of aims they have was found to be variable, with fellowship and Bible study/spiritual exploration being a common and successful mix. The relationship between pastoral/mentoring and small groups was variable and sometimes inherent rather than explicit. When asked in the survey what qualities of a small group were most valued the top three (in order of popularity) were: an opportunity to discuss the Bible, theology and ethics; belonging to a close-knit community; and it being a safe space to share life with.
- 12.3 There were seen to be advantages to setting them up based on various different criteria – age, interest, geographical factors – with no clear conclusion that any one of these is best. Some churches made specific efforts to mix different ages/social classes with a view to bringing people together; some members liked this, others found that this created problems.
- 12.4 Small groups were seen by many as being complementary to attendance at a church service, providing a lower-level sense of spiritual and social engagement. They appear to be fundamental to setting up a growing church nowadays, which achieves social and spiritual fellowship and community, support and discussion.
- 12.5 Small groups were seen as having great potential to bring people into closer engagement with the church and to draw the church together. Those churches with the strongest small group system were considered to be the most ‘successful’ by a number of people. However, it also needs to be recognised that some small groups are made up of members of different churches, and some people said that they belong to a small group at one church and attend church services at another. For example, 11.8% of Methodist responses to the survey indicated that they belonged to a small group that was not connected to their local church, but circuit or similar group. What is clear is that small groups are a very important way in which people set up spiritual and social bonds with each other.
- 12.6 There are a number of areas which came through as needing some thought in relation to the functioning of small groups: the right role of the church leadership in directing and organizing small groups; their optimum size; the role of the leader and that of other members of the group; the right venue for meeting; the right way of introducing newcomers to a church to a small group/setting up new small groups for newcomers; the importance of adequate and appropriate study material; the relative importance of cohesion on the one hand and the difficulty of ‘getting into’ established

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groups on the other; the difficulty of travelling to meet in small groups for gathered congregations. A particular issue relating to the MG is the decision as to whether small groups should be set up specifically for them or for mixed ages – or perhaps both.

### 13.0 Leadership and responsibility

13.1 We found that the role of the minister as ‘first among equals’ was, in general, supported. The view was expressed that she/he should facilitate the developing vision of the whole church; represent the congregation vis-a-vis the general community; and develop leadership among others within the congregation. In achieving these aims, she/he should draw on her/his own particular gifts and work in areas where others are not so strong. Where a minister showed an inclination to become dictatorial this was not appreciated. On the other hand, the minister does seem, particularly in big city centre churches, to have a role which goes beyond that of ‘first among equals’, and this seems to be related to the importance of effective preaching in such churches.

13.2 The fact that ministers are regularly moved in the Methodist Church was seen as presenting problems both by ministers and church members;

it makes it difficult for a church to develop and maintain its own distinctive identity, which is (as pointed out above) important in attracting and retaining members nowadays.

13.3 Taking on responsibilities was expressed as important in becoming part of a church. While a number of ministers pointed out that many members of the MG see church as something they ‘consume’ rather than something they co-create, and emphasised the importance of getting them to take on responsibility, many members of the MG themselves said that they want to be able to take on more responsibilities and that they are often not given this opportunity. Only 58% of survey respondents indicated that they held any kind of role<sup>7</sup> within their church community. They expressed the need to be specifically invited into church structures. In some churches the importance of ensuring that members of the MG are within church structures was overtly recognized, as encouraging other members of the MG both as attenders/members and as potential leaders.

13.4 The MG see themselves as having specific skills and gifts which they could bring to the church, such as the ability to work with children.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Role’ could include: authorised ministries, lay employees, stewards, church council, youth leaders, member of prayer ministry team, involvement in worship groups and leading junior church.

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They see themselves as able to bring in other younger people, acting as mentors, because they are more inclined to discuss ideas rather than imposing them. Involving the MG more in leadership requires careful thought in terms of structuring their involvement, such as in relation to setting up teams and hierarchies. It also requires thought in terms of ensuring that they are not overcommitted.

- 13.5 The relative gender equality which exists within the Methodist Church was a sub-text throughout the research. The fact that gender rarely surfaced as an issue appears to express a widespread acceptance of the Methodist position. It was clear that there was a widespread appreciation and acceptance of the fact that both men and women are able to take on leadership roles. Among the MG, where there is a much stronger tendency to assume gender equality as the ideal in society (if not always the norm) the position of the Methodist Church in relation to gender resonates very well.

### **14.0 New expressions of church: extending discipleship**

- 14.1 An overarching theme which came out in this research was the fact that, even among those who are members of a Methodist church, conventional church was perceived not to fit easily into modern life, either socially or spiritually. This

came out even more clearly in interviews with those working with the dechurched and unchurched.

- 14.2 The need to develop new models of what 'church' might mean is particularly highlighted by missional work among these groups, such as VentureFX and the Fresh Expressions initiative. Those working with the unchurched to whom we spoke made the point that there is a need for a high level of creativity in reaching the unchurched. Those members of the MG who have no – or little – experience of conventional church, since they have dechurched parents or even grandparents, have very little patience with conventional church, which seems bizarre and irrelevant to many of them. Among the dechurched there are many similar issues. If the Methodist Church is to continue to provide for spiritual and social needs of those in the MG age group, it is important that it address the question 'what is church?' as a fundamental one.
- 14.3 The Fresh Expressions initiative has highlighted the vital importance of making contact with members of the MG age group where they are – to go to them, rather than expecting them to come to conventional models of church. Forms of church which need to be developed to suit the MG age group may not be at all similar to the model which currently exists. While in the past social (and often work) networks and church

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networks tended to be coordinate, networks nowadays are increasingly wide-ranging. This points to very different potential models, incorporating not only physical contact but also 'virtual' contact via online social media.

- 14.4 Particularly in work among the unchurched and dechurched, but also among Methodist Church members, there is a clear sense of a desire to extend Christian discipleship beyond the confines of the church doors, through means ranging from social action to new monasticism. This strengthens the argument for new models of church. Current models of church can arguably be described as often tending towards a 'fortress church'; members are safe within but have a limited interaction, on a spiritual level, with those outside. Whilst venturing outside is difficult, Christian discipleship dictates this on all levels. We found that this is something about which members of Methodist churches to whom we spoke often expressed concern, even if they also feel a personal reluctance to face the challenges involved.
- 14.5 Within the work done under the Fresh Expressions initiative, it has been found that there are challenges in relation to the potential for incorporating or linking new forms of church to existing church structures. For the Methodist Church, it is likely to be necessary

to think of ways of developing linkages between new churches and between new churches or networks of them and existing church structures in creative ways, which allow for both autonomy and interdependence. This needs to be informed by an awareness of the value of linking churches and of Connexionalism more generally. Currently, there is little space for new ways of 'being church' within Methodism, which expect new churches to fit into existing structures.

### 15.0 Some key conclusions

- 15.1 The history and nature – the 'charisms' – of Methodism are not visible to members of the MG in the present day. For those who are not yet members there is no clear means whereby they can find out about these. For those who are members, there is no easy means whereby they can become involved in exploring and developing these charisms for the present day and the future.
- 15.2 The nature of their potential or actual Christian discipleship within the Methodist Church, on a personal and a collective level, is not clear to members of the MG. Those who are associated with the Church are frustrated at the difficulties of developing roles as leaders within the church. They do not see how the Church is going to develop a clear missional role in current society.

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15.3 Members of the MG have available to them, nowadays, a wide range of media and a stimulating environment in terms of entertainment and creativity. This is a different world to that which they find within the Methodist Church. They expect experimental and creative worship, with the use of a range of media, and they do not find this within the Church. In particular they yearn for experiential forms of worship, which they do not find in the traditional 'hymn sandwich'.

15.4 The model of church which is the norm within the Methodist Church is one which does not necessarily suit the MG's lifestyle, and which is limited in its capacity to extend the Church outwards into society as it is today, allowing a missional approach and a full form of Christian discipleship involving the whole of life. What is not clear is what kind or kinds of models need to be developed, and to what extent these will differ radically from current models. Work on developing new models of church and tweaking current models to make them more appropriate needs to come into the centre of the Church rather than remaining at the margins. Currently those who are working in these areas struggle to find funding in a context where the majority of funding goes on 'maintenance' work. The Methodist Church arguably needs to go back to its roots, creating a creative and missional focus which may mean revolutionary change in

its structures and priorities, with the aim not only of engaging more fully with the MG but of fulfilling its own original, missional, aims and objectives.

### 16.0 Taking the research findings forward into action

16.1 This project has provided a consideration of what appear, from the data gathered, to be the major issues relating to the MG within the Methodist Church. Its findings now need to be taken forward, implementing initiatives intended to tackle the issues identified, but at the same time continuing to check and investigate the progress and findings of initiatives. In order to do this, funding is included in the 2011/12 budget for a part-time Connexional Team post.

16.2 The issues which this research has tackled are central for the Methodist Church in the present day. This makes it important that the findings of this small research project, which has necessarily been limited in scope, are seen as the beginning of a journey rather than a final word on the issues raised. It will be important to be flexible and open in implementing initiatives, and it will be important to prepare to alter course where necessary. This means that an *action research* approach (including further research and evaluation) needs to be taken in following up on the findings and suggestions contained here, with

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reflection and reconsideration built into the work.

- 16.3 The areas listed below are suggested as possible areas for action which could be taken up to begin on this journey. They will all need thought and development at all levels of the Methodist Church before the exact form they should take is decided upon and the journey starts.
- 16.4 One suggestion is that a conference/meeting takes place in the first half of 2012, which will provide a forum for brainstorming and thrashing out the issues raised and deciding on concrete ways forward. This would build upon the conference held for Emerging Leaders in 2009.
- 16.5 It should be borne in mind that there is the possibility that some areas for action would benefit from being approached ecumenically.
- 16.6 Different initiatives will need to be linked in creative and effective ways, with shared membership of steering groups where appropriate, back-to-back conferences or meetings, and sharing of work and findings between those responsible for different initiatives.

### 17.0 Potential areas for action

- 17.1 An enquiry course could be set up for those interested in the

Methodist Church and Methodism. Some areas to be considered here are as follows.

- a. The degree of focus on Christianity and on Methodism needs discussion; this relates to b.
- b. Whether there should be different versions of the course for the completely unchurched and for those who are semi-churched or come from another denomination.
- c. Who should take the lead in developing a course or courses and who should be involved in developing it/them; and how it/they should be piloted and finalised.
- d. Should such a course or courses be held at local churches, by Circuits, nationally or a mixture of these.
- e. Whatever format the course should take; it seems important that Methodism should come across with an accessible, human, living face, and one possible model or element within a course might be similar to that used in Quaker Quest<sup>8</sup>, where individuals talk to their own personal experience and spiritual journey.
- f. The possibility of linking an advertising campaign to such a course.

- 17.2 An internal conversation could be established within the Church about

<sup>8</sup> A programme of events run by Quakers to inform people of their way of life and worship. (<http://www.quakerquest.org/>)

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the charisms of Methodism, and how to live as a Methodist in the world as it is today (how to be a Methodist disciple), led by a group of individuals from the Missing Generation. Some areas to be considered here are as follows.

- a. It will be important for the conversation to involve the Church at all levels, through key individuals in different structural positions including the academic world, Connexional Team and local churches.
- b. It will be important for the conversation to be accessible and open to all members of the Church, as something ongoing and relevant to the lives of all, both individually and in local churches.
- c. It might well be useful for the conversation to be visible to enquirers, so that they see Methodism as something living and appropriate to today's world. In this context, there might be the possibility of incorporating an element of the conversation within enquiry courses.
- d. One aspect of the conversation might progress in a lively and visible manner through groups set up at different levels and in different places, and could occur partly through events linking such groups, physically or virtually, stimulated by video, art and other creative media.

17.3 A 'Creative Worship Collective' could be created in the form of a group of members of the Missing Generation which acts as a think tank around the nature of worship and provides expert advice to local churches on innovative forms of worship. Some areas to be considered here are:

- a. The expressed need on the part of members of the MG to incorporate new forms of worship within acts of worship: worship songs, silence, etc.
- b. Resources and materials which already exist will need to be collated and made available; and new materials developed and made available.

17.4 Means could be sought for successful practice to be shared and disseminated between churches (besides what is suggested in 17.3 above), including in particular the welcome to church, pastoral arrangements and small groups, and the 'visioning' process for churches. Some areas to be considered are as follows.

- a. Resources for sharing good practice need to be developed and made available.
- b. Pairing and grouping arrangements could be set up to link churches, either to help one church learn from another or to share thoughts on developing good practice, drawing on resources together.
- c. It is important to note that the 'visioning' process needs to be something which is developed

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as a living – and permanent, ongoing – process, not only the codification of a form of words.

- d. Some resources developed under this initiative will feed into Superintendents' training.
- e. There are already some initiatives which could be drawn on in developing some areas. In relation to small groups, the Inspire network<sup>9</sup> developed by the Methodist Church provides a good basis for one kind of small group.

17.5 A national group of Missing Generation leaders could be formed and facilitated so that those leaders relate regularly to each other. This should include those who are taking the lead in 17.1, 17.2, 17.3 and 17.4 above. The Emerging Leaders

day held in 2009 provides a basis for setting up this group.

- 17.6 Web-based spaces (website; discussion group; Facebook page etc) could be set up to cater for the different needs of the groups and initiatives set up under 17.1–17.5 above. Some areas to be considered here are as follows.
- a. Some spaces will need to be private and available only to specific groups of people.
  - b. Other spaces will need to be accessible to all members of the Missing Generation within the Methodist Church and/or to all members of the Methodist Church.
  - c. Yet other spaces will need to be set up as overtly publicly visible, beyond the Methodist Church.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTION

#### **38/1. The Conference receives the Report.**

#### **Appendix – Previous Work and Methodology of Project:**

##### **Summary of Previous Work**

1. The issue of the so called missing generation<sup>10</sup> has been raised at various times in the past and the Projects, Research and Development staff were asked to explore this further. The results of a literature review conducted in 2009 can be found in the Appendix of a paper presented to the Methodist Council in 2010.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <http://inspire-network.org.uk/>

<sup>10</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>11</sup> MC/10/64

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2. After reflecting on this literature review, a twelve month research project was developed. This project had 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. The research project was introduced with an exercise carried out as part of the 2010 Methodist Conference. Conference Representatives were asked to identify churches which had a smooth age profile – ie churches whose congregations represented all age groups. Thirteen case studies were collated<sup>12</sup> and the Conference spent time in small groups discussing them.
4. The 2010 Conference also received the research brief<sup>13</sup> for the project, which formally began in July 2010.

### **Methodology of Project**

5. The methodology of the research differed slightly from the original proposal, partly owing to the fact that a recruitment freeze was imposed upon the Connexional Team in early 2010, meaning that the part-time post for the project was recruited five months later than planned.
6. Identification of churches for Aim 1:
  - 6.1 The first step was to identify churches amongst the case studies that could be used within a pilot exercise in which the methodology could be tested.
  - 6.2 Following the pilot phase, further churches were identified from the case studies, through responses to an open request distributed via Methodist e-News and the Chairs' mailing and recommendations from Connexional Team specialists for specific types of churches (eg those with ethnically diverse congregations).
7. Pilot and methodology for Aim 1:
  - 7.1 Two contrasting churches were identified from the Conference case studies on which a proposed methodology was tested. This proved to be successful and

<sup>12</sup> The case studies booklet presented to the Conference can be downloaded from: [www.methodist.org.uk/missinggeneration](http://www.methodist.org.uk/missinggeneration)

<sup>13</sup> Missing Generation Research, Methodist Conference 2010

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was subsequently used with other churches, varying slightly according to circumstances.

### 7.2 The process consisted of:

- (i) A questionnaire sent to the minister (or person identified by the church as the main contact point) to establish basic details – eg number of services held; demographics of congregation and local community; lay staff employed; and pastoral structures.
- (ii) Face-to-face meetings with the minister and other key individuals to discuss the questionnaire and to establish the best way in which to conduct the research with the church.
- (iii) Attending Sunday worship at each church, as well as attending other church activities as appropriate – eg where significant numbers of the missing generation were present.
- (iv) Conducting focus groups and interviews with representative members of the congregation and (where relevant) specific missing generation focus groups.

7.3 A range of churches were chosen, based upon some of the following factors: geographical location; ethnic diversity; theological outlook of church; economic status of local area and size of congregation, as well as varying numbers of the missing generation.

7.4 All information was gathered with the assurance that specific church and individual details would be anonymised.

7.5 Audio recordings of meetings were transcribed and then analysed using NVivo (a qualitative research analysis software tool).

### 8. Methodology for Aim 2:

8.1 An online survey was designed to be completed by anyone aged approximately 25–40 who had at some point attended a Methodist church on a regular basis. Slightly different questions were asked of Methodists and those not currently worshipping in Methodist churches, but covering the same themes.

8.2 The survey covered the following areas: relationship with the Methodist Church; church attendance; church involvement; church characteristics; fellowship; pastoral care and worship. Space was provided at the end of the survey to enable respondents to give a detailed reply on any of the themes, or on the issue more generally.

8.3 It was distributed via Methodist eNews; Twitter/Facebook; those who attended an Emerging Leaders day in 2009; as well as details of people formerly involved in

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MAYC activities. Many Districts/Circuits included it in their own newsletters and over the 6 weeks in which it was open, nearly 250 people completed it.

- 8.4 Responses to the final, qualitative question were analysed using NVivo in the same way as data for Aim 1.
- 8.5 Further analysis is currently needed on the quantitative data from the survey and it is hoped to conduct some further focus groups consisting of those who responded.

### **Current Status of Research:**

- 9.1 At the time of writing (late April 2011), the fieldwork and survey had been completed and analysis conducted in order to identify the key themes that have appeared during the research. Initial areas for further work have now been identified and consultations are taking place with various areas of the Connexional Team and the wider Connexion in order to establish the best way forward.
- 9.2 The final report from the project will be published prior to the 2011 Methodist Conference.