

Basic Information

Title	Missing Generation Research
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Status of Paper	Final
Resolution/s	The Conference receives the report

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The paper describes the Missing Generation Research Project and outlines how the discussion groups at the Conference will feed into this.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The aim of the research• The role of the Conference• An outline of the research together with the literature review which led to the research
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Understanding Young Adults' consultation in 1999• Young Adults Consultation in 2002• Resolutions passed by the 2007 Conference and the Team Focus Report• Methodist Council paper MC/10/64

Summary of Impact

Impact	It is hoped that this research will offer insights which would have a major impact throughout the Connexion
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The research is inconclusive• Insufficient resources to communicate widely the research findings

Background

1. The issue of the so called missing generation¹ has been raised at various times in the past at the Conference, and the Projects, Research and Development Cluster of the Connexional Team was asked to explore this further. A literature review on the subject was undertaken during 2009 and was included as an appendix in a report to the April 2010 Methodist Council (MC/10/64).
2. After reflecting on this literature review, a proposal for a 12 month research project was developed and approved by the leaders of the Connexional Team (see Annex 1). 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 Conference², 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 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 was felt that it would be helpful for the research to have the Conference's reflection on their stories.
7. For one of the sessions, the Conference will work in small groups. Each group will be allocated a case study from a booklet which will be given to all Conference members. Each group is asked to try to identify elements of church life and structure in their case study which appear to support the inclusive age profile, and identify and reflect on lessons which may be helpful for other churches which do have a missing generation.

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.

² Para. 2.10.4 'Reconfiguring the Connexional Team: Team Focus 2005–08', Report to 2007 Conference

8. The Conference Business Committee has arranged that in the same session the groups will also discuss an issue from the Youth Assembly. The details of this will be finalised in due course and the Conference given further guidance in the Order Paper.
9. 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.

Recommendations

10. The April Council adopted the report outlining the Missing Generation Research and the process of group discussions, and recommended it to the Conference. It is proposed that the Conference engage in group discussions on the topic in workshops.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 18/1. The Conference received the Report.**

Annex 1
Research Outline
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.”

1. 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.
2. 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.
 - 2.1. 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.
 - 2.2. From direct contact with Superintendents: this will be managed to select a sample quantity with an even spread across the Connexion.
 - 2.3. Other research methods may be used if the above does not give sufficient data.
3. 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.
4. 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, and 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 group 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.”

5. 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.
6. 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.

7. Subjects for this study would be found via the following methods:
 - 7.1. 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);
 - 7.2. Methodists, aged 20–45, who are members of congregations identified in the first part of the research project;
 - 7.3. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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

10. 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.
11. 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.