



The **Methodist** Church

The Missing Generation and the Methodist Church

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The Missing Generation research project

The issue of the so-called Missing Generation¹ (referred to as the MG in this report) has been raised at various times in the past. Whilst this is an issue which is rooted in societal trends affecting Christian churches in general, there are likely to be certain of these which are specific to the Methodist Church, and it was decided that a research project should be set up looking at these, and providing some pointers regarding the future direction of the Church.

A literature survey was conducted in 2009². After reflecting on this literature review, a twelve month research project was developed which aimed to look at the attitudes of those currently worshipping in a Methodist Church and at those of Christians who have previously worshipped in a Methodist context. The project aimed 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.

The methodology of the research project is described in the Appendix. It 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 – i.e. churches whose congregations represented all age groups. Thirteen case studies were collated³ and the Conference spent time in small groups discussing them. The 2010 Conference also received the research brief⁴ for the project, which formally began in July 2010 and was completed in May 2011. This included qualitative interviews with members and leaders of eleven churches, most of which had self-identified as relatively successful with members of the MG, and a questionnaire survey administered online, to which over 200 people responded, including members and ex-members of Methodist churches.

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 dechurched⁵, 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. This included, amongst others, the Venture FX programme and the Fresh Expressions initiative, referred to further later in this report (for more discussion of issues important here, see bibliography for details of selected books relating to the spirituality of the MG and younger people, including the unchurched and dechurched as well as those within mainstream churches).

Our definition of the MG was those within the age range 25-40, but the research carried out 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.

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.

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 The results of this can be found in the Appendix of a paper presented to Methodist Council in 2010, MC/10/64. (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-18-missing-generation-160211.pdf>)

³ The case studies booklet presented to Conference can be downloaded from: www.methodist.org.uk/missinggeneration

⁴ Missing Generation Research, Methodist Conference 2010 (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-18-missing-generation-160211.pdf>)

⁵ '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.

Church and modern life

An overarching theme which came out in this research is the fact that conventional church does not fit easily into modern life, either socially or spiritually. New ways of helping people to engage with each other in ways which are both spiritual and social – new models of ‘doing’ or ‘being’ church – are needed.

‘I think people are drawn towards spiritual things, but not necessarily Church.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘Contemporary church life should ... explore the connections between different aspects of people’s lives to build people’s relationships with God and others in a more holistic way’ (MG response to questionnaire survey)

‘I think church just hasn’t adapted to the modern day.... It doesn’t appear to be real – if you go into a church it is just so foreign and alien to people.... If you look at the way churches would do things in terms of meetings and publicity and stuff like that, it is decades out of date. I think God’s people should be taking a lead in pulling society forward in the right direction rather than dragging it back to what they want to be... Stone cold building, stone cold people, it feels like dead bodies... It is foreign and difficult to us, we found it very hard in the Methodist church, it has been really hard for us.’ (Couple, members of case study church, previously members of a ‘house’ church in another town)

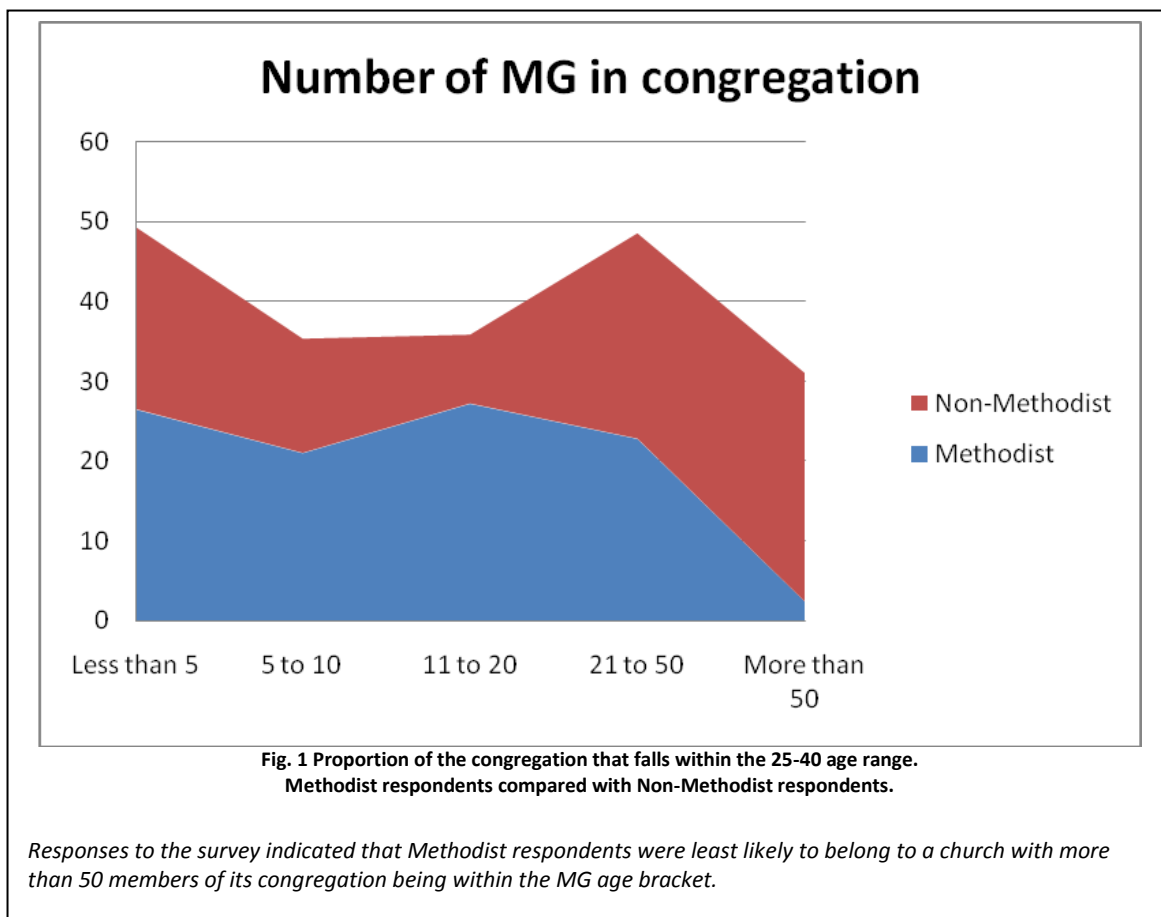
Belonging to a Methodist congregation

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

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 Leaders⁶ 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.

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 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.

⁶ 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.



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 striking that there was a relatively undeveloped sense of the wider Methodist Church as a congregation or family among the MG, although it should be noted that many people were appreciative of the fact that the Methodist church is good at creating a sense of community. 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.

Important factors when choosing a new church

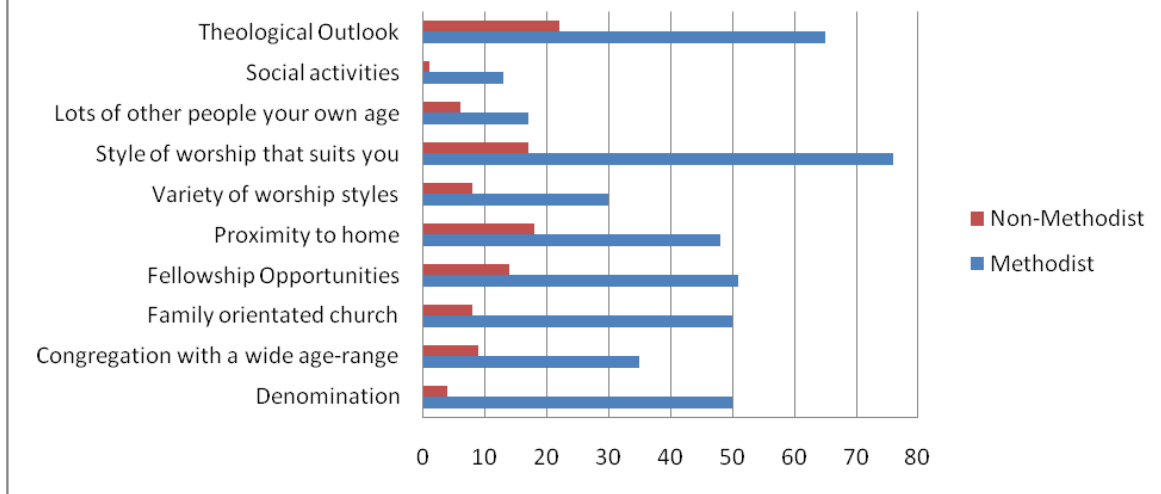


Fig. 2 Important factors when choosing a new church

Survey respondents were asked to choose up to three factors that affected their choice of church from a list of options. The results illustrate the fact that style of worship, theological outlook and fellowship are higher priorities for both Methodists and non-Methodists than the denomination of the church.

What is Methodism?

We found that many members of the MG had little idea of what Methodism means.

'...to market it to a youthful generation is very, very difficult. And to get across what Methodism is actually about and why is Methodism different to other denominations is very, very difficult. Yes.' (Steward of case study church)

'...when I went to the Methodist church, I got that feeling that I belong there and that's why I stayed there...but I don't know what Methodist means, to be honest, and I would like to know.' (MG member of case study church)

'I just want to know [what Methodism is], and I was just looking for someone who can explain to me...' (MG member of case study church)

'I mean from what I understand, there's quite a lot of people at (this church) that don't even know what Methodist is. And the other week, I did a service at another church... I hit them with Wesley - I got out one of his sermons and they'd not even heard this stuff before. And the superintendent was there! ... One of the supernumeraries came to me after and said "We never hear anything about Methodism, what it is, what it's all about". I think if you were to take the church, take the average person, they wouldn't know.' (MG local preacher at case study church)

'...there are a lot of other people who probably aren't that aware of what Methodism is and just enjoy [the church] for what it is - and they'd probably be the majority if you were to do a survey.' (MG leader at case study church)

'The Methodist Church's theology is important but it finds trouble expressing it compared to those churches with an

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. To the extent that members of the MG did appreciate what Methodism means, one of its most important characteristics, for them, was that it involves a journey of faith, and that it is an open approach to Christianity, open to new ways of doing things and open to all people.

Spiritual Learning and Methodism

The nature of Methodism as a 'journeying' faith, one that is open and inclusive, was pointed to by members of the MG interviewed.

'I think Methodism is very much about journeying....this is the brilliance of the Methodist church, or should be – "Let grace abound and have faith for the rest". That it is a journey that people join at different levels; and it's all about journeying.' (MG local preacher at case study church)

'I grew up in [a Methodist] church... I wasn't aware of any 'types' of Methodism...in the Sunday school, the groups that we had... you definitely knew that it was okay to ask questions, and it was a combination of teaching but exploring together...and that was very helpful; and then when I came to college, I found MethSoc...it was absolutely, definitely a way for you to explore. You didn't have to sign up to anything...we'd also have speakers from different faiths...and we'd have speakers from other denominations... Then you could explore it and discuss it and there was no sense that you had to believe in any particular thing... I would say that was one of the most fundamental, most instrumental events in leading me to where I am now.' (MG Minister at case study church)

'I want a more questioning faith, I want to explore issues, not just to be told what is right...' (MG member of case study church)

'...our young people...I think they value the kind of Christianity they find here, which is open, which is almost like a fellowship of controversy as Donald Soper put it. And they expect nothing but that sort of engagement.' (Minister at case study church)

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'.

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 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, although many of those to whom we spoke expressed a deep commitment to social action. It is the local level on which they tend to focus – the level at which contact takes place at a physical level between people. This is interesting in the context of the fact that social media are very important among members of the MG, and highlights the importance of looking at the relationship between physical contact and the use of social media.

The Methodist Church - building community

MG members of Methodist churches were very appreciative of its ability to create a community and liked its lack of formality and the fact that everyone could have a role in the church.

'Methodism seems a lot more welcoming, I think. It's without all the pomp and circumstance.' (MG member of case study church)

'I think I settled at [the Methodist church I belong to] because it was such a community... I think that was what I was looking for within my kind of, spiritual life as it is, and that was what was missing. So I think that was what really made me settle here.' (MG member of case study church)

'The biggest part of church for me has always been fellowship... the welcome of the congregation to me as a new person, and the welcome for me to share my talents as part of their family and being missed when I'm not there like a family member, and welcomed back'. (MG response to questionnaire survey)

'I have tried other denominations...however [nothing] can replace the fellowship and warm welcome of those in the Methodist Church.' (MG response to questionnaire survey)

'The fact that we are not the state church, we have a little bit of freedom perhaps, (more) than Church of England has - so [this]... is a strength.' (MG member of case study church)

'...whereas in the Church of England they robe up, it's more traditional, the Methodists are more open, freer. It's said prayers, written prayers in the Church of England, whereas at the Methodists, it's more from the heart.' (Steward of case study church)

'I like the fact that there isn't the hierarchy here, everybody can get involved, and just put their hand up and say 'yes, I want to do that'; you have the opportunity to make it your church.' (MG member of case study church)

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. 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.

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.

Methodism: positive and negative perspectives

We found that many of those interviewed felt very positively about Methodism. A number of people commented on the strong sense of community which can be generated within the Methodist Church, which they perceived to be greater than that generated within other Christian churches. They valued its lack of hierarchy, its inclusivity, and the separation between the Methodist Church and the state, giving it the freedom to criticise government actions and act on behalf of the poor. They also valued its nature as a faith which values the different 'faith journeys' of individuals.

On the other hand, many of those interviewed felt that Methodism has lost its way, and was no longer relevant to the modern world or to their lives and in particular is no longer relevant to the

MG. Some people pointed to the fact that non-Methodists don't know what it is they are 'buying' if they enter a Methodist church. The fact that the preaching plan means that the quality and nature of a service can vary a good deal from week to week was pointed to by a number of people, who felt that this would put people off.

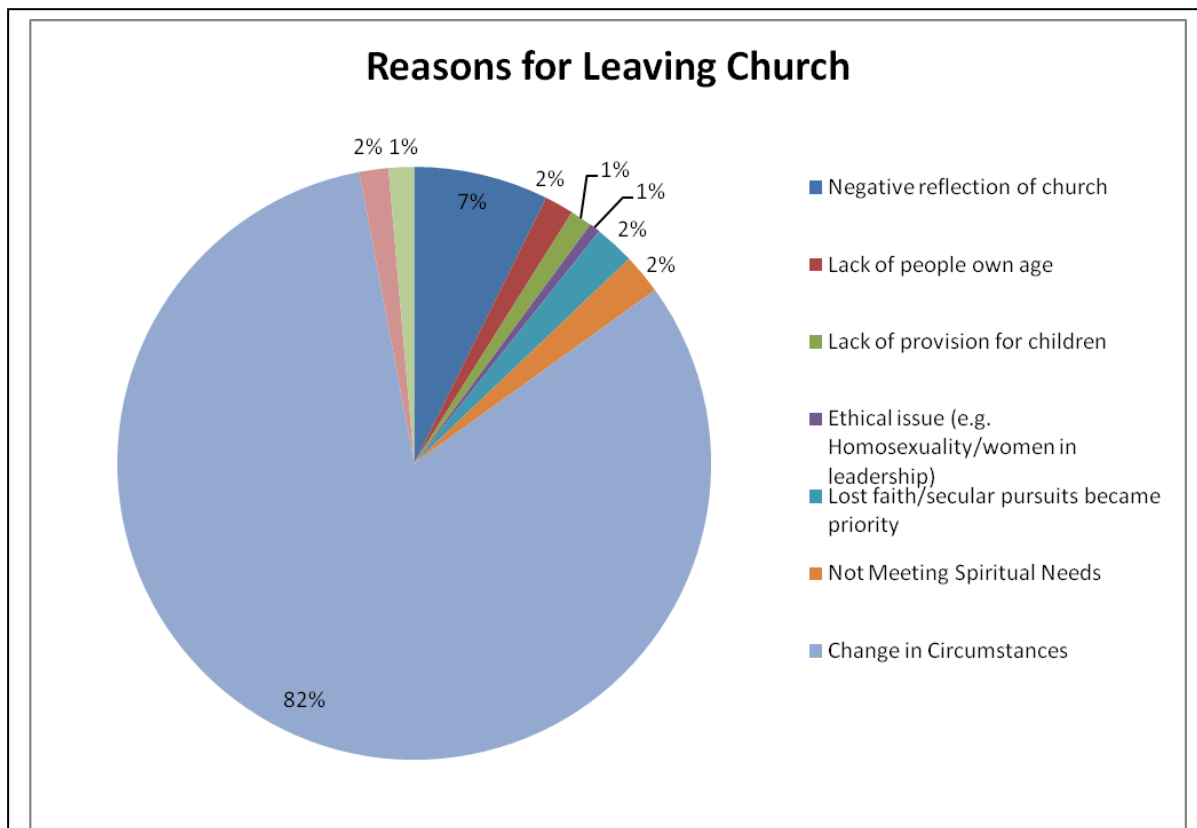


Fig. 3 Reasons given for leaving church*

Survey respondents were asked to list the churches they had attended on a regular basis since the age of 13. A reason as to why they had left was requested for each church they no longer attended and these responses were collated within the broad categories/themes shown above. The chart indicates that the main reason for people changing the church they attend is usually not a negative one – with most people moving on owing to a change in their personal circumstances.

** NB: It is important to recognise that all of the survey's respondents currently attend church regularly.*

Gender

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 among members of the Church. 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.

Has the Methodist Church lost its way?

Many members of the MG to whom we talked – and older people too – expressed the view that Methodism has lost its way, and is no longer relevant to the modern world. It was seen as not projecting a clear identity. The research also found that most churches are perceived to be continuing with ‘business as usual’, which caters for the needs of existing, older members, but not those of members of the MG. However, some churches had sought answers, looking at the needs of the MG and catering for them in innovative ways.

‘...the average Methodist church down the street just isn’t scratching where people are itching.... They’ve become fossilised and de-contextualised I think from life, from most people. It’s like a little retreat that we go to that will keep going until we die. And it doesn’t touch anywhere in society or other people at all. It’s just like a foreign colony.’
(Member of case study church)

‘Methodism is distorted and has lost the plot of what Wesley was all about.’ (Minister of case study church)

‘...the people that fund the Methodist Church, the people that in many ways run the Methodist Church, aren’t in this generation...so it’s bound to fit in more with the generation that is inputting into the Methodist Church.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I don’t think it’s as relevant as it could be, the Methodist Church. I think it could be more counter-cultural than it is... the Methodist Church was something very important decades ago.’ (MG local preacher at case study church)

‘...congregations just do not know which way they’re going. You know, it’s like a brand. If you go to a Starbucks you expect to have a certain sort of style of coffee. You know...[then] you go there and it turns into a Wimpy bar or something. And I think that’s one of the problems that Methodism has....’ (Minister at case study church)

‘...it can be quite random what you get on a Sunday morning and it can be from very good to very poor, and if you happen to be a young person turning up on a day when it’s a poor preacher preaching something which is unintelligible and quite alienating, I’d be surprised if he ever came back again.’ (MG member of case study church)

Methodism and social action

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 list of nine values that could be chosen.

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.

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.

Theology

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 arguably Methodism’s ‘DNA’, with its core focus on the fact that God loves everyone, was often unclear to them in any detail, although they welcomed it to the extent that they understood it.

There is an inherent but veiled tension between an ‘evangelical’⁷ and a ‘liberal’ ‘theological’ position within the Church. It is often unclear how the theology of the local Methodist church an individual belongs to fits into the broader Methodist Church – and hence what the theology of the Methodist Church actually is. The fact that the tension between ‘evangelical’ and ‘liberal’ is veiled – something which is arguably implicit but also deliberate, and is related to the inclusive aims of the Church – feeds into the difficulty for individuals of understanding Methodism’s theological position.

Methodism and Theology

While more evangelical ministers within the Church interviewed expressed the view that the certainties of evangelical theology are appealing to the MG, others emphasised the importance of inclusivity; and members of the MG interviewed also tended to emphasise the inclusive nature of Methodism. Most expressed more interest in the form of worship in a given church than in its theological position. Some members of the MG, who see themselves as having a liberal theology, expressed the view that experiential forms of worship do not need to be associated with evangelical theology.

‘I think if you looked at the growing churches in the Connexion, the vast majority of them, if not all of them, are ones that have some form of what I would term an evangelical theology behind them... I’m a Methodist Minister first and foremost and my call as a Methodist Minister is to be alongside people and to bring them into an understanding of God... I think the way that I can do that is by being – I was going to use the word evangelical – but sort of an evangelical model, a Minister. And going out and reaching out, and going out into the community and accepting people as they are.’ (Minister at case study church)

‘...if we believe in the four alls of Methodism we don’t specialise theologically, everybody’s welcome...we have a huge range of theological viewpoints... One of the great gifts of this church, I think, is to hold them all together.’ (Minister at case study church)

‘I didn’t know you could be in different places theologically...’ (MG member of case study church)

‘Absolute ideas are addictive. Full-stop. And so I’ve always preferred...the questioning theology that I’ve received mostly from Methodist churches...while I enjoy the evangelical music from more lively churches...I couldn’t cope with some of the theology I was hearing in evangelical churches. This is why I returned back to the Methodist base.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I long for charismatic worship with liberal teaching.’ (MG response to questionnaire)

‘I think it’s a real shame that the lively hymns are associated almost entirely with evangelical churches. Because that’s where there’s lots of people who are writing in that style. And that’s why the theology that is in them tends to be from that direction. And then the people from the other end of the church don’t feel comfortable with just singing those because it doesn’t express what they want to say, even if they enjoy the style of the music and the singing of them.’ (MG member of case study church)

The nature of theological concern among members of the MG arguably needs more investigation, and the relationship between this and their spirituality. There seem, broadly, to be two strands to the direction of spiritual travel in which members of the MG to whom we spoke 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, often related to working out ‘how to live’. ‘Evangelical’ ministers and youth leaders told us that they believe that it is theological clarity that younger people need, but this was not explicitly mentioned by any of the members of the MG to whom we spoke. It seems likely, in fact, that many members of the MG feel a pull in both directions, feeling drawn both to a certain degree of clarity and to exploration, seeking a balance between the two. They do not, in this context, see a tension or

⁷ 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.

contradiction between clarity and exploration or necessarily associate them with two theological options ('evangelical' and 'liberal'), which are contradictory one with the other. For them, the issue is their own developing spirituality, not a rigid theological position.

Worship and discipleship

Worship may be broadly defined as communication with God, contact with God or praise of God. It can be seen as occurring in a focused sense at 'acts of worship' – church services. It can also occur on a personal level, at home or in sacred places including churches. 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.

In the broadest sense Christian discipleship can certainly be seen as overlapping with worship, and even 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. This was felt to be very important by many of those interviewed, coming out in a variety of statements.

A commitment to Christian discipleship as worship relates closely to a commitment to social action. This is central to Methodism as a faith, and has been so since its beginnings. It is rooted in the inclusive approach with Methodism has taken, particularly focusing on the material as well as spiritual needs of those who are on the margins of society.

Many of the churches on whom we focused in this research were involved in social action, and this was valued by the members of the MG in those churches as well as by older people. It included such things as providing assistance to the homeless and soup runs, as well as providing mother and toddler groups and other contexts in which members of the wider community can meet. These were seen as part of the mission of the church. They were viewed not purely as proselytization, with the aim of bringing people into that church, but as simply providing for needs. There was a perceived overlap between providing for physical needs and providing for spiritual needs – for example through Street Pastors, who give physical help but are also available to give spiritual support if this is requested.

Worship as the whole of life: discipleship, social engagement and action

Many members of the MG, as well as older people, emphasised how important it is to them that their Christian faith extends throughout their life, particularly through social action and an inclusive approach, and pointed out that this was a founding principle of Methodism. Many were very happy with their own Methodist church in this respect; but some told us that they feel that their church does not live out this principle fully.

'...Sunday for me is not the be-all and end-all of my faith, it's just one thing I do. I gather on a Sunday with other Christians and that's part of it, but my life should be worship and you know, Sunday's just kind of the icing on the cake really.' (MG member of case study church)

'I don't see the Sunday service as my place principally where I get to encounter God and find God's presence...my aim is that I worship God in everything. That's hard to do, but that's what my intention is. And I think that's part of my role with young people... one thing that I do struggle with in some large churches, in that they see the importance as all around how many people gather on a Sunday, and then well, what's the rest of the week?' (Youth and MG leader at case study church)

'We are pursuing the same thrust as Wesley is, as I see it. Through the scripture, though evangelism in the many different ways you can, through prayer, through caring for people in as many situations as we can. Pure Methodists.' (Member of case study church)

'...it is Methodism's plain-ness and impact on social justice and of how religion and life are one that I love.' (MG response to questionnaire)

'I think the teaching of Methodism for me...there's less focus on the rules and rather on living out Jesus' love. And that sort of seems to me to resonate as well in the roots of Methodism as being something which reached out to mining communities... And there's just such an emphasis on really acting through with what we're being told and go for charitable works and involvement with the people who really need it. And not being a religion for people who have time for it and have the money not to worry about how much time they're spending at church or whatever else. That comes through in the sermons, that comes through in the ethos, for me, of Methodism and I've absolutely loved it. It's just been so helpful for me.' (MG member of case study church)

'I like the social work projects that go on at [my church]. I think that's a really important thing for a church to be involved in.' (MG member of case study church)

'I was talking to two girls last night who were visiting the church for the first time...they found [the church I attend] basically through searching all churches in London and found this church because it was the most involved in the communities, and through action for the homeless. And I like that a lot too. So I'm involved with the homeless work here, and yes, that was an important factor for me.' (MG member of case study church)

'I'm an ex-Baptist minister and when I compare the Baptist churches where I've worked with (this Methodist church), (it) really stands out as a church... [which] really, really, really does what the word inclusive really means... Having been in an evangelical Baptist church and having heard my fellow colleagues talking, these [ministries with transgender people] are the kind of ministries that, if they had them, it'd be to bring people back to their way of thinking. It's not affirming where they are at, supporting them, which is what [this] church does, which to me is just phenomenal and which, for me, is one of the reasons why they are so positively appreciated within the local community. It's really affirming...which I think is just great. I really think it's amazing what this church does.' (MG youth leader at case study church)

'I am desperate for deep and meaningful discipleship and accountability.' (MG response to questionnaire)

Focused acts of worship

Worship in church within a service, or by individuals in church or elsewhere, was seen as covering a wide range. This included 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). 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 and younger people (18-25) to whom we

spoke 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.

Experiential worship

Those we spoke to saw Methodism as essentially an experiential religion but members of the MG in particular lamented the fact that, in most Methodist churches, they do not experience God; services are primarily focused on structure and sequence.

‘...why I am very happy to be a Methodist is the whole thing about the genuine encounter with God. That’s the whole ‘heart strangely warmed’ thing. It’s...just having a denomination that listens to the Holy Spirit.’ (MG local preacher at case study church)

‘I have experienced the Holy Spirit at Methodist churches, but it’s not very often...it’s not anything compared to what I’ve experienced in other places. So I think, yes, just flowing in the Holy Spirit is really, really important...the only excuse for that not happening is that it doesn’t fit in with the order of worship and the things that we have to cover. I think, in my opinion, that’s not good enough.’ (MG local preacher at case study church)

‘...a sense of the presence of God, a supernatural intervention that I think Methodism’s generally lost, i.e. most people come to church and don’t really expect God to turn up. They expect to go to church. They don’t expect to actually encounter God.’ (Minister at case study church)

‘...you know that programme, the series that Dermott McCulloch did, on the History of Christianity...when he was talking about Methodism, and the birth of Methodism he talked about Wesley and his heart strangely warmed, and he ... mentioned that this was not where many Methodist Churches are today but that we see the same experiential faith in other places, and he cut to Spring Harvest or something of that kind, and I was just very aware then that the spirit of Methodism is alive and well, but not necessarily in Methodist Churches.’ (Minister at case study church)

‘I do think that experiential worship is very valuable to a lot of people and I think that some people feel that Methodism can be a bit structured...’ (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

‘...the sort of creative aspect ...sometimes we’re painting as our method of prayer sometimes, or doing whatever else, so that’s just really different and nice.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘...for me, I feel personally that God speaks to me through music. Both secular and Christian music. And, for me, that is most important. I like to be immersed in music and if it means I repeat a chorus five million times then I will...’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I think what they [many young people] are seeking is the worship...the experience of worship. What is preached doesn’t matter really in that sense, if it’s not too whacky, too out of bounds. They have transformed the place of worship really, they don’t have a communion table in the centre, they don’t have a worship leader. What you have is a band that is leading worship, and they sing and sing and sing.’ (Minister at case study church)

‘...that’s quite a big thing for me, just the fact that the music is more modern...they’re not stuck in a rut, they’re not really stuck in a rut like other places have been that I’ve been in. That’s the best.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘...it’s very, very important that the Methodist Church, or any church, starts encountering God in a very genuine way... I used to preach to a bunch of 70/80-year-olds every Tuesday...and they were mad for it...at prayer time they’d all be like praying out loud and really getting into it. And that was very, very traditional and God was obviously there. But...each generation’s got different personalities so the Church needs to move with that. And I don’t think the Methodist Church has.’ (MG local preacher at case study church)

‘What I liked about [the Methodist congregation I attend] was...that this was a group of people that were seeking a personal experience with God. And were... wanting to see what God would do; it wasn’t the same every week, you know; it was like there was freedom for God to express himself – because, you know, we programme God out of the service – 10 minutes for this, 10 minutes for that, [you’re wondering if God is] thinking ‘when are they going to invite me in!’ That’s what I get from [the congregation I belong to]. It’s like living worship; seeking God; room for growth; that’s what I still like about it, there’s room for growth there.’ (MG member of case study church)

In the questionnaire survey, the styles of worship were ranked in the following order (most popular first): All Age, traditional ‘Hymn Sandwich’, Messy Church and Alternative Worship. This fits quite

well with the frequency with which different modes of worship were reported as offered. The most frequent was reported as being traditional ‘Hymn Sandwich’, with All Age worship second, Messy Church third and Alternative Worship fourth. However, in the interviews we carried out, many members of the MG – and many older people too – told us that they were not happy with traditional Methodist worship. Although some said they valued it as being more personal and less standardised than a traditional Anglican service, many saw traditional Methodist worship as too standardised and needing more flexibility. A really key message that came through in the interviews was that many people valued a range of worship, not just one. It seems likely that members of the MG who had been brought up with the ‘hymn sandwich’ did value this type of worship but felt that it should be complemented by a good dose of other modes of worship. The interview data suggest that we should interpret the questionnaire data as indicating that while members of the MG feel the need for other modes of worship, particularly experiential modes of worship, as well as the traditional ‘hymn sandwich’, this is not being provided by the ‘alternative worship’ available at their churches. There appears to be, in other words, a gap which is not being filled at present in Methodist churches.

This gap appears to relate to the provision of experiential modes of worship. Another key message from the interview data is that there is a strong desire on the part of younger people for an experiential 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.

Variety in worship

Members of the MG expressed an interest in a variety of worship styles.

‘...we try [in Multiplex] to be much more informal and flexible in what we do and we just say to people you do what you want, you take as long as you want or as short as you want, be formal or informal... sometimes it is two hours of praise and worship, sometimes individual stations, sometimes it is reflective, sometimes it is traditional - it could be anything, Godly play, special interest speakers – just rich variety.’ (Minister, case study church)

‘I think Multiplex is a way of producing variety so that people can be in situations where they do meet God.’ (Member of case study church)

‘...in the worship you’ve got a nice mixture of songs, you’ve got some of the more up-beat praise and worship and the more traditional hymns, so it is nice cos there is something for everyone here.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I enjoy many different styles of worship, not just one...many (people) enjoy a variety of styles, but with one style perhaps dominant.’ (MG response to questionnaire)

A very important type of experiential worship nowadays among younger people is 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 felt that this detracted from the experiential nature of the worship.

There is an association nowadays, in practice, 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, and indeed there is no reason why they should be.

Methodist hymns and modern songs

Members of the MG expressed difficulty in understanding old-style Methodist hymns, and some expressed the view that they were about God rather than communicating with God.

‘...in church the other Sunday...we were singing a hymn and the words of the second line are “extol the stem of Jesse’s rod”. Now if I’ve gone away and thought that through...yeah, Jesse was David’s Dad, so extol his worship, so Jessie’s rod is probably something to do with lineage, so yeah, maybe it’s about Jesus, but as I am singing that, I wonder - what is that, what does that mean, you know? So what I think that we could do here is actually help people to understand what they sing better. (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

‘I don’t like a lot of the...hymns [we do at our church] because I don’t know them really. They just do some really obscure ones.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I think what I’ve found is a lot of the older hymns tend to be songs about God, so it’s declaring who God is, what we know about him. Yet the more modern stuff is kind of songs that we’d sing to God.... I think if you can get that balance right.’ (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

‘I think sometimes the tunes often, to some of the songs, make it, the hymns make it hard sometimes. You’ve got great words, and I sometimes think these are great words but it’s like a dirge – the music doesn’t add to it...’ (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

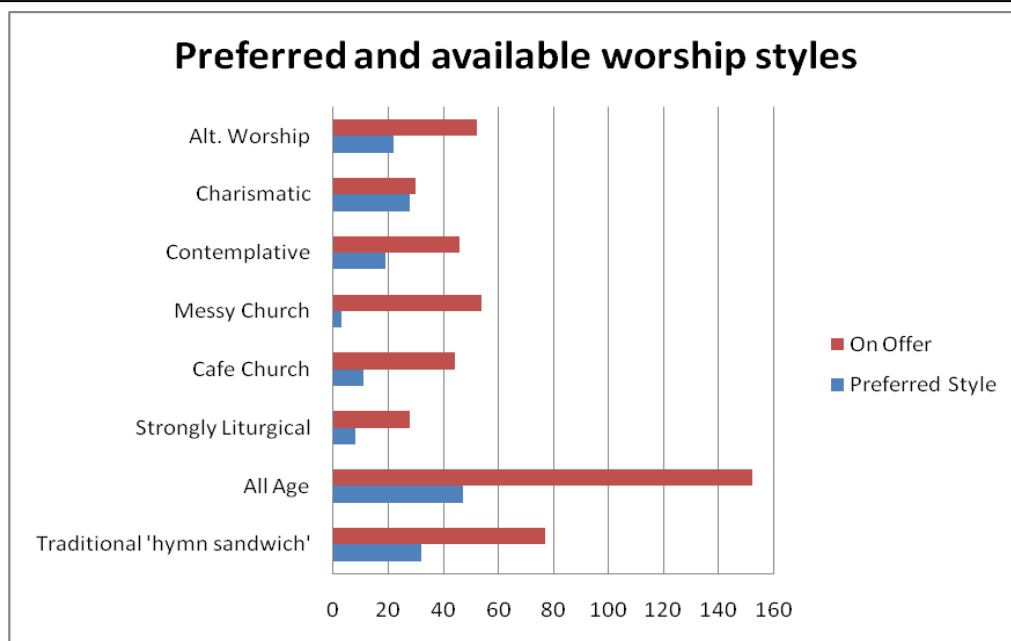


Fig. 4 Comparison of preferred and available worship styles

Survey respondents were asked to choose which worship styles (listed above) their church offered and which styles of worship they would prefer to attend – if all styles were available. The results indicate that people appreciate a wide-range of styles and that, despite an impression that Methodist worship is predominantly of the ‘hymn sandwich’ variety, many who answered the survey were offered a variety of styles at their local church.

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.

A number of members of the MG interviewed expressed a liking for quieter, more contemplative or meditative worship, including silence. It seemed that there may be scope for broadening the provision of this type of worship, including experimentation with different forms of it. It is important to take into account the fact that most members of the MG – and indeed older people too – would probably welcome having access both to this and to other forms of experiential worship, at different times and contexts.

Innovation

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 realization 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.

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 also pointed out by some of those interviewed that it can also be ‘old wine in new bottles’; and that lack of preparation can also masquerade as open-ness to the Spirit.

Innovation

We found a readiness to accept innovation and change among many people in the churches we studied, including among many older people, and a perception that this was important in bringing people into the church.

‘I think it’s important like, as a Church, to sort of grow and sort of develop with, like, changing times, because you can’t just stay doing the same old thing, because you know people change and things change and you know a Church should change.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘...they have a lot of ideas and, in general, those ideas come to fruition as well. So they’re not stuck in a rut, they’re not really stuck in a rut like other [churches] have been that I’ve been in.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I think one of the things that’s attracted people here to [this church] is that there has been a conscious effort to bring things more up to date.’ (Minister of case study church)

‘...I am one of the older ladies... [but] there was a phrase that my great aunt used to use - “I have been away” - meaning that I have lived somewhere rather than [this town]...also, I think, on a personal level, I had the benefit of a very tolerant father, and he used to say “if the Lord had wanted us all to worship in the same way, he’d have made us all alike!”... [and]...“it’s like spokes in the wheel, we are all moving into the centre, but we all started from different places”...it’s a very good analogy...’ (Older member of case study church)

Despite the difficulties of innovation in worship, it has important advantages: 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 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.

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. In fact, several of the case studies provided evidence of older congregations adapting well to changes that were part of the church's vision.

What is a Methodist service?

Most members of the MG were not happy with the traditional Methodist service, at least not as the only form of service available. They liked a variety of forms of service to be available. The classic notion of a service, as a set sequence, was seen by members of the MG as lacking in the Spirit. The role of preaching, and that of communion came out as topics which seem to require some consideration. Preaching was seen by most ministers as central to the service, but members of the MG did not all agree.

'...the whole kind of reading from the hymn book, sitting up, standing up. I don't know. I just find it quite tedious and I get – I find myself quite irritated... I think it's the rote-ness that I don't like.' (MG member of case study church)

'I find ceremony a complete turn off. I don't find it helpful at all. My own personal belief is that people should be natural...' (Member of case study church)

'...the traditional forms of service can be alienating in a way... I think younger people, it doesn't resonate with them, they don't get it really... I think it always being the same, can make it...not my words...but – boring.' (MG member of case study church)

'I just feel this [all-age] service is alive. You can feel the spirit in it.... I feel as though I can invite other people to it, other families, whereas I couldn't, every week, regular weeks... I've had potential people coming for baptism come in, stand at the back, when a preacher's been preaching, and just gone, "That's not for us." So I've said, come back, and come to the all-age worship.' (MG members of case study church)

'[at nearby church popular with young people] because they have a worship leader...they gauge the feeling, so they will go...ah, actually, I don't think we need to sing that jump up and down song, we need to sing a quiet reflective song... They have a plan...but they feel...they can just change it.' (MG members of case study church)

'I actually think that the communion, if we have it twice a year that's once too many... I think the love feast is far more effective...a sharing of our spiritual experiences.' (Minister at case study church)

'...at the moment we are just kicking about in our head the possibility of trying to provide something which is far more laid back in terms of worship. So it might be sitting round at tables and that kind of thing but still centred on the preaching of the word. So, for me, that is absolutely crucial, so biblical expositions, crucial.... Methodist churches were preaching places, that's why the pulpit's always central.' (Minister at case study church)

'The preached Word is still there and we still do the Bible studies, and we enjoy that, but the sung worship is a more important thing to our age group.' (MG member of same case study church)

'I'm a local preacher...because I'm still training people comment a lot about what I'm doing... and if I miss something out of the service, so if I miss out the Lord's Prayer or if I miss out an ingredient of the service, people freak out and go "This wasn't in"... And it's not even so much about the formula but I worry about how it works in their heads and in their hearts when they've got almost like a tick-list saying "I need to do this, I need to do this". Rather than going "OK, I just need to go to church because I just need to encounter God".' (MG local preacher at case study church)

Preaching

The relationship between preaching and worship, including musical worship⁸, is one which needs some thought in the context of innovative worship styles and a new format for 'being church'. 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'

⁸ It is important to note that although 'worship' usually means the act of worshipping – e.g. a Sunday service – for many interviewed, it refers to times of praise and sung worship within a service.

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 can be difficult to transform into a more fluid, open format.

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 age 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.

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, and it links to the importance placed on small groups, one of whose functions is this kind of discussion.

Outreach

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.

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.

Providing for the needs of individuals with a pre-evangelistic intent is another way of linking with the MG in the community. Some churches had tackled this through 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.

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.

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.

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.

Bringing people into the church

The importance of the right kind of welcome was pointed to by many people to whom we talked. The importance of using practical assistance – such as mother and toddler groups – as outreach was underlined. There were differences of opinion on the importance of formal membership.

‘...especially the 25 to 40 age group are not used to going to...or don’t find appealing buildings that are not very nice. And so many Methodist churches, churches of all denominations, you go into them and there are standards that you wouldn’t expect anywhere else...that might sound very irrelevant really, but actually it’s quite a big deal. You go into any shopping centre now the toilets are tiled, attractive, low-level flush...not a thing that you pull a chain up here. And all these things say things.’ (Member of case study church)

‘...when you come in it’s quite hard...to kind of break in...no-one talked to me the first couple of times, okay, for starters, so...you know...’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I think probably what drew me in was the outreach side, because I had young children. So I guess my first introduction to the church was probably through [the mother and toddler group in this church]... You know; it’s open to all - it’s not outwardly a faith group. And through that...me and my husband decided to do an Alpha course...’ (MG member of case study church)

‘Many people in their 20s/30s enter the church complex as part of its programme of community events, but very few come to worship.’ (Member of case study church)

‘... a lot of people are bit surprised when you say to them ‘Do you want to become a member?’ They think... but I come regularly...it is surprising the number of people who call it ‘their church’; who just come high days and holidays...!’ (Members of leadership team at case study church)

‘...it’s a strange thing these days, people don’t seem to want to commit. And this is the problem we have... we’ve had some... coming five/six years now and yet they can’t see – [they say] “Why do I need to become a member?”’ (Minister of case study church)

‘...it’s a sort of semi-detached group of young people...[and] whilst the church may feel we need to be flexible about membership, I think it’s not a bad thing to say to people, “Hey, the time has come to nail your cause to the mast. You need to belong”’. (Minister of case study church)

‘... we try and provide lots of entry points for people and we’re trying to be sensible about the speeds at which people want to travel. It depends on me and other people building a relationship with them so they don’t think, “Oh, this is a Methodist church, it’s going down the pan” and all that. They begin to think, “Hey, it’s all right, this.”’ (Minister of case study church)

‘I know some Methodist Ministers say “unless they’ve been through a membership class they’re not Methodists”. Well I think that’s nonsense actually.’ (Minister of case study church)

‘...everybody goes through a discipleship course before they become a member, and that’s led by (the minister), and he goes through what the Methodist Church believes and what it doesn’t believe and explains it to everybody so that they know exactly what is required and what to expect.’ (Steward at case study church)

Becoming a part of a Methodist church

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

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.

The question of the role and meaning of membership came up in a number of churches. 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'. The issue of membership was also seen as relating to the issue of commitment; some ministers and older people said that members of the MG are often likely to be 'consumers' of church, rather than taking responsibility for it. However, members of the MG themselves often expressed considerable interest in taking on responsible roles, seeing this as part of being valued.

Enquiry courses

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.

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, there is no 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.

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.

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

Creating and sustaining social and spiritual bonds: pastoral care and mentoring

It is important that a church be more than a group 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 to a greater extent in the past when people were more likely to stay in the same place geographically, 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.

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. Pastoral care and mentoring are an important part of the creation of a social and spiritual community. However, pastoral care was mentioned by many people as basic to Methodism but as not being done well any more.

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.

Learning through preaching and learning through discussion

Both preaching and learning through discussion, in small groups, were seen as important by those interviewed.

'I think our strength or some of our strength lie in the fact that preaching is still very important in the life of the Methodist Church... Generally if you go into a Methodist Church, you should hear a pretty solid sermon that is relevant to life today but brings in some theology into it.' (MG member of case study church)

'I've learned a lot more from a small group than I ever learned from going to church' (Member of case study church)

'For me, [the small group I belong to] is really important, actually, because I always liken your worship on Sundays to be a bit of a spectator sport.' (MG member of case study church)

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.

Small groups

Over 50% of survey respondents indicated that they belonged to a small group and of those that did not, 68% would have liked to but various factors prevented them from doing so. 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.

The mix of aims small groups 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.



Fig. 5 The qualities valued in small groups

The survey results indicate that 42% of respondents identified 'Opportunity to discuss Bible/Theology/Ethics' or 'Biblical Teaching/Explanation' as valued qualities, demonstrating the significance of small groups in developing theological perspectives and knowledge of the Bible. A strong desire for community was also evident, with respondents valuing 'close knit community' and 'safe space' highly.

The importance of small groups

A structure based on small groups, in the form of classes, was seen as a particular strength and heritage of the Methodist Church. One of the strongest messages that came across through the research was the importance of small groups. Where a church does not have a strong system of small groups, this was experienced as a significant problem by members of the MG.

'I think the class system is a superb system and it has been picked up by a lot of the independent growing churches... some sort of mid week group [is] really important, some sort of cell group which enables people to grow and find their feet and explore their gifts and get deeper into all sorts of things with one another.... Whether we call it a class system or cell groups or midweek groups or whatever... I think the churches where there is a strong cell group system are usually churches that are stronger, full stop...' (Minister at case study church)

'When you've got 70 to 80% of the congregation actually involved in weekly house study groups, that's like being back in the early days of Methodism with cell groups and it is a very, very strong powerhouse...' (Minister at case study church)

'I think that small groups are really important as well, so I try and encourage the young people that I'm around to be part of a small group, where they meet, separately, in a more intimate setting, if you like..the thing about church is that you can turn up at 11, leave at 12:30 and not talk to anyone; you might be really hurting about something but you don't talk to anyone about it unless you go looking for that ... And I think increasingly, people are seeing the merits and benefits of that. And as a church, we're looking at ways we can encourage people to be part of small groups...this goes back to Wesley and his class systems and the bands...' (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

'The class and pastoral system really in my view guarantees the survival of the church.' (Minister at case study church)

'I was moving to (this area) and I did a bit of an internet search for different churches and I saw this had stuff on, like house groups and stuff, and I thought it sounded like a good place to visit.' (MG member of case study church)

'...it's through this house group that I've got the relationships that if I'm going through a tough time I know exactly who I can go to. Even if it's just going for a coffee or going to the pub and having a natter over a drink. It's that relationship and it's that sharing together and it's in that small group where it's easier to share. Because you can't share with a whole congregation, whereas in a small group you can share together. And we've had some really profound moments ...So, for me, the fellowship in the small groups is really, really important.' (MG member of case study church)

'I think it's difficult, in a church of this size, to keep track of who is and who isn't around and people can fall off... people who are in a house group or home group are being cared for within that group.' (Minister of case study church)

'I think it would help me grow more spiritually; if I were in a group.' (MG member of case study church)

'I think that the lack of class meetings or house groups is a failing of our church and that single young adults rarely stay.' (MG response to questionnaire survey)

There were seen to be advantages to setting small groups 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.

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.

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 recognized 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. 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 to a circuit or to a group formed on some other basis.

The role and functioning of small groups

The relationship between the different roles of small groups, and the best way of constituting them, came through as an area needing explicit thought and attention.

'... a mixture of Bible study and prayer and discussion and eating meals together ...they're probably the four most usual things that [small groups] do.' (MG Youth and MG leader, case study church)

'...we've had Bible studies and fellowships and such, but nothing at the moment, there's only the class meetings. They don't go very deep, do they, usually? Because they're just a range of people, with a range of where they are in their faith; you know.' (Member of case study church)

'...the leaders... [are]... given free rein... and once every three months... the [church leaders] will gather all the house group leaders together just to see if there's any issues.' (MG Youth and MG leader, case study church)

'And we get a variety of house groups in the church...the kind of groups that emerge, we try to support, try to encourage... things kind of emerge and evolve and we are obviously keen to encourage all of that.' (MG Youth and MG leader in case study church)

'I believe for some men in particular, they are better at opening up to other men than perhaps if they are in a small group set up with their spouse for instance.' (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

'...there is probably a good reason to have a 20s group at the moment [in our church]. But does that mean that I think that every group should be an age group? No, not particularly. Sometimes geographical groups, sometimes thematic, sometimes age groups.' (Minister at case study church)

'...our intention is that they are mixed classes. Everybody learns from different experiences and shares different experiences...' (Minister of case study church)

'... even within a certain age range, there's a variety; and those different experiences are very helpful.' (MG Youth and MG leader at case study church)

Small groups and ecumenical links

The fact that small groups could often bring people together from different churches was pointed to by several members of the MG interviewed.

'I think [small groups are] enormously important...it wouldn't necessarily have to be this church. It could be - it could be a home group made up of people from different churches.' (MG member of case study church)

'...we joined a local small group because we find it a little bit difficult to maintain fellowship in central London ... it's actually a New Frontiers church...so we are doing a bit of a mix - different churches.' (MG member of case study church)

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 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.

Ministers and lay leaders

The role of the minister and that of lay leaders and preachers within Methodism was a topic of concern to many. The problems resulting from the stationing process were particularly underlined. The relative significance of ministers' and lay people's views was an area of some tension.

'...one of the families we lost, weren't from a Methodist background at all. And they never got used to the fact that it wasn't always the minister preaching.' (Member of case study church)

'...seems to me one of the things the Anglican church have over us, and Baptist as well I suppose, is that they develop their own individuality whilst belonging to one another. And you can't build up a church if you keep changing the ways of thinking every week or every five years.' (Member of case study church)

'...I think that, because of ... certain policies that are coming down from on high, there's a tendency now not to be so fellowship, community orientated...and [ministers] seem to be a bit more dogmatic than used to be the case in the past. When you get to a church council meeting... what the minister says, goes... it's lead from the top. And I'm afraid that dictates that come down from time to time...are used for the minister to push forward a case and as a result disregard whatever's coming from the membership. So whilst the membership is willing to participate, it's frequently being suppressed by objections that come from the other direction...the system is becoming more and more centralised rather than being delegated out.' (Member of case study church)

'...that is what destroys most Methodist churches, to be honest. Confusion of ministry and preaching... Methodism is an itinerant church and so therefore ministers are supposedly this interchangeable thing that you can put anywhere.... seems to me one of the things the Anglican church have over us, and Baptists as well, I suppose, is that they develop their own individuality whilst belonging to one another. And you can't build up a church if you keep changing the ways of thinking every week or every five years...' (Member of case study church)

'...you will be aware, that, in some people's perceptions, suggestions made by the minister are worth more than suggestions made by the people. Do you know what I mean? So if the minister says, 'You know what? I think this would be a really good idea,' people tend to say 'Oh, yeah, that would...' But if Mrs Brown says it, it's "Oh.. oo-er. I'll have a think about that".' (Minister at case study church)

'I think the task of a minister, besides the pastoral, preaching, teaching etc. is to create leaders.' '...accepting ideas as well; being open to suggestions as well...' 'I think another good thing is for him to be allowed to use the gifts that he has been given.' (Members of case study church)

'I believe strongly that ministers need to stay longer than five years...there should be an organized system saying okay, let's look where to go, rather than everybody having to shift around. I just think that's chaos. And it needs to change, I think, if we're going to build the Methodist Church up.' (Circuit minister in circuit to which case study church belongs)

'Having a great minister who understands real life is great' (MG response to questionnaire survey)

'...the lay leadership in a church is where the church stands or falls, on that leadership. I think in that respect, we're authentically Methodist. Ministers come and go. If you haven't got spiritually-minded lay leaders, who actually know they have the authority to step in and sort out the things that go wrong or awry, it just doesn't work. And that's one of my hobby horses.' (Minister of case study church)

Growing young leaders

The importance of nurturing young leaders was an issue which had been of concern in many of the case study churches. The challenge posed by 'consumer Christianity', leading to young people being reluctant to take on responsibilities, was mentioned by some; but others were emphatic about how many young people do want to take on responsible roles. The importance of having role models was pointed to. Inter-generational relationships were seen as important, but delicate.

'I don't feel that we value the skills and gifts of our 25-40 year olds; often they feel patronised, brushed aside, or made to 'bide their time' because the more senior members feel they 'know best'. At other times, I love being in a multi-generational congregation and benefitting from the fellowship and wisdom of all ages' (MG response to questionnaire survey)

'...encouraging young adults to assume responsibility within the church and not simply consume what is provided is key in our strategy.' (Minister at case study church)

'...when we contemplated who [to bring in as stewards], we did try to get younger people involved, because I think it's very important... when younger people see that younger people get involved with this, they will kind of be influenced as well... there are lots of younger people that we could really get involved.... We have elected some younger people to be on the Church Council now.' (Stewards at case study church)

'The fact that two of the church stewards are aged 22yrs and 31yrs also encourages other potential young leaders to come forward.' (Response to initial church survey)

'...it's about just trying to identify potential leaders and then selecting them and empowering them to go and lead, really... People have been armed with the responsibility – 'go away, give it some more thought'. And come up with a way forward, really.' (Youth and MG leader at case study church)

'...you know there is an interesting transition, I think, as a person begins to belong, they begin to feel their worth really; they've got something that is worth contributing, and begin to offer that. So initially they come as consumers, but as they get drawn into the fellowship and get to know other people and all this we talk about, the gospel begins to make sense to them. Then they begin to feel; 'I'm receiving, but I want to give something back to this... when people catch this thing that people call the gospel, I do think that they begin to feel almost instinctively, 'Whereas I was a consumer in society, I now have a responsibility for others.' (Minister at case study church)

'I think that a lot of young people are really passionate about getting more involved in their own churches... [both] locally and...nationally, and they want to be enabled to do that and to feel that they are valued. And I think that probably boils down to the biggest issue facing young people in the Methodist Church. And some places do that really, really well and other places are sort of just starting to try things out.' (Youth and MG leader within case study church)

'I would get the young people together and say, you know we want to share our ideas with the rest of the church, how do you think we should do it and actually get them to give their ideas...it's about getting young people together in a context that they enjoy so one of the things that we do is we have a group where we watch films and have pizzas and things like that and it's quite laid back.' (Youth and MG leader within case study church)

'...in the Upper Room that we have our church you do get a mix of young people and old people. You get a mix of ages in there and I think that works really well...it used to be just young people that went there but a lot of older people have actually started getting involved and have been really interested because actually there are a lot of people that like the discussions and sort of wrestling with issues ...that's not an age related thing, lots of people like that.' (Youth and MG leader within case study church)

Leadership and responsibility

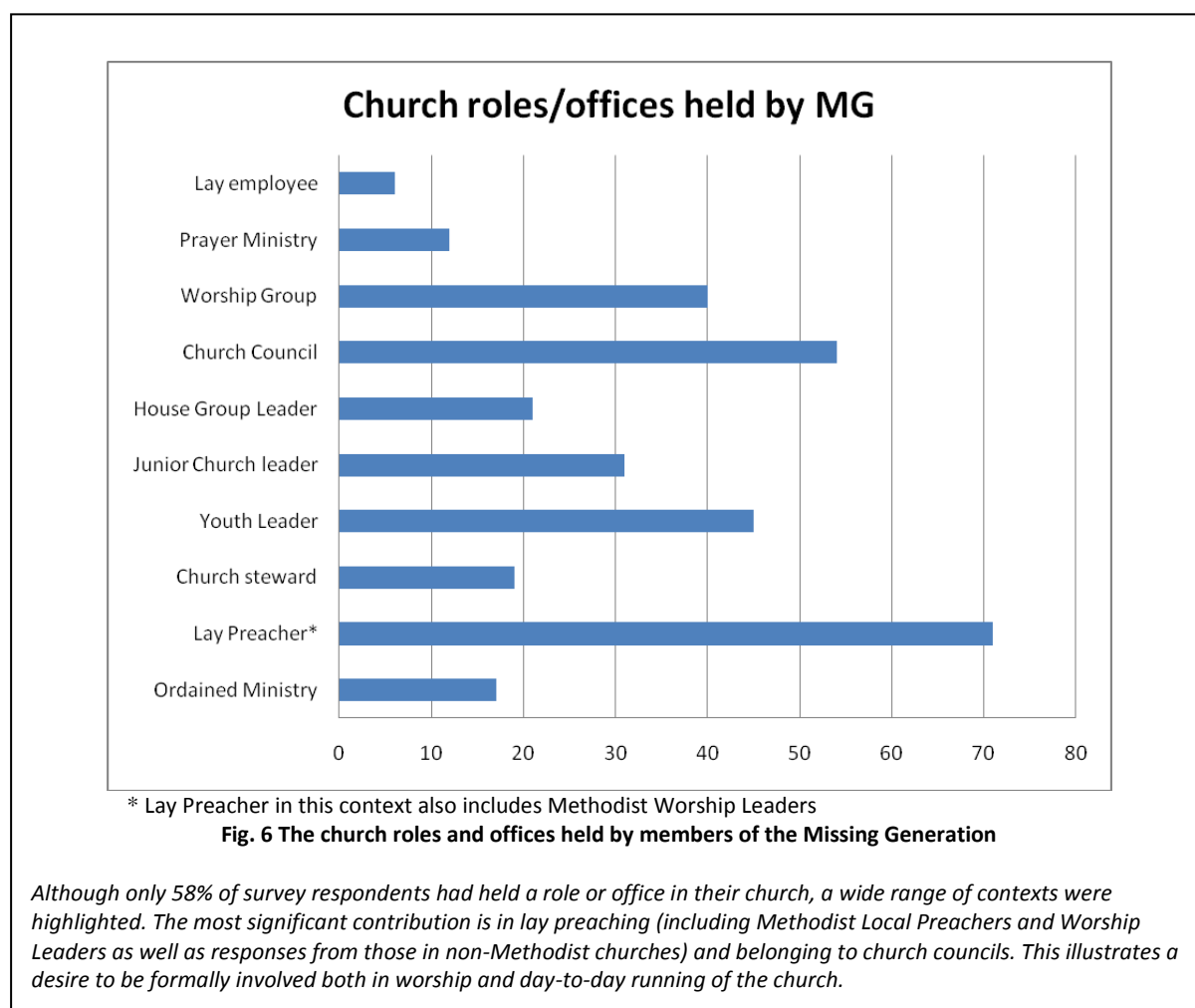
We found that the role of the minister as 'first among equals' was, in general, supported. The view was expressed that she/he should facilitate the developing vision of the whole church; represent the congregation vis-a-vis the general community; and develop leadership among others within the congregation. 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, which was valued highly by members.

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.

Young leaders

Taking on responsibilities was expressed by members of the MG 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 role⁹ 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.



⁹ ‘Role’ could include: authorised ministries, lay employees, stewards, church council, youth leaders, member of payer ministry team, involvement in worship groups and leading junior church.

Members of 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. 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.

New expressions of church: extending discipleship

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.

The need to develop new models of what 'church' might mean is particularly highlighted by missional work among these groups, such as Venture FX 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.

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 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.

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' (for a recent discussion of 'new monasticism', see Cray, Mobsby and Kennedy 2010). 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.

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 or 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.

Some key conclusions

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.

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.

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’.

Taking the Methodist Church into the future

Both members of the MG and older members of Methodist churches interviewed all recognized that there needs to be radical change in the Church. They felt that this would involve a delicate balance between change and continuity with the past. Some were very positive about stirrings within the Church which could be built upon, and emphasised that these might be at the periphery of the Church rather than at its heart.

‘...say you don’t have many young people in your church, you can look at other churches to see what they’re doing kind of thing, what’s attracting the young people there. So you can like change to do those things but I don’t think you should change like completely.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘I think, like, if you’re going to experiment you should not, like, radically change anything. Like experiment in one area and see how that goes and then move on to another thing, not try and completely change everything straight away. So you’re seeing like “Does this work?” If not, change it back. And then try something different somewhere else.’ (MG member of case study church)

‘... [it’s] about picking up the trends...surfing the waves of what’s happening, rather than waiting...’ (MG member of case study church)

‘...if Methodism generally isn’t interested in the supernatural, the supernatural will not be interested in Methodism. So, you know, the whole of my life has been almost terminal decline going on all around... Now I think, in a sense, the very disastrous nature of the decline has been God’s way of opening us up to doing things differently, which is why Fresh Expressions is important, why there’s a lot of younger Ministers who’ve got terrific vision and drive and aren’t worried about the old issues. So I’m quite encouraged at the moment but it’s only been for the last few years I’ve been encouraged.’ (Minister of case study church)

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.

The way forward

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.

The findings of this small research project, which has been necessarily been limited in scope, should be 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, learning 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 reflection and reconsideration built into the work. It should be borne in mind that there is the possibility that some areas for action would benefit from being approached ecumenically.

It seems clear that the issue of the MG brings out deeper issues about the future of the Methodist Church. It is suggested that this prompts the setting up of an internal conversation within the Church about 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 MG. It is suggested 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.

In carrying such a conversation forward, it will be important to involve the Church at all levels, through key individuals in different structural positions including the academic world, Connexional Team and local churches. The conversation must 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. 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

This touches on the importance of making the nature of Methodism visible to the wider world, including enquirers. It might well be useful for this 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.

In order to help to communicate the nature of Methodism, it is suggested that an enquiry course be set for those interested in the Methodist Church and Methodism. This will require consideration of the degree to which such a course focuses on Christianity on the one hand and the specific nature of Methodism on the other. Consideration will also need to be given to whether there should be different versions of such a course, or different courses, developed for the completely unchurched and for those who are semi-churched or come from another denomination. Thought would need to be given to who should take the lead in developing a course or courses and who should be involved in developing it/them; how it/they should be piloted and finalised; whether it/they should be held at local churches, by circuits, nationally or a mixture of these. The format will need careful thought, in order to ensure that Methodism comes across with an accessible, human, living face. One possible model or element within a course might be similar to that used in Quaker Quest¹⁰, where individuals talk to their own personal experience and spiritual journey

¹⁰ A programme of events run by Quakers to inform people of their way of life and worship. (<http://www.quakerquest.org/>)

A key area which has come out as central to the relationship which the MG is types of worship. Members of the MG (and some older people interviewed) have identified the fact that they like a variety of types of worship to be available to them, and that they particularly value experiential worship.

It is suggested, in response to this, that a 'Creative Worship Collective' be set up. This would be a group of members of the MG which acts as a think tank around the nature of worship and provides expert advice to local churches on innovative forms of worship. Resources and materials which already exist would need to be collated and made available; and new materials developed and made available.

It is clear that some churches are more successful than others with the MG, and it is suggested that means need to be set up to allow churches to share and communicate experience and practice. This relates to a range of areas including ways in which newcomers are welcomed, ways in which members of the church are brought together through small groups, and the 'visioning' process of churches. 'Visioning' is an important part of individual Methodist churches, and needs to be linked through the circuit structure to other individual churches. It is important to note that the 'visioning' process needs to be something which is developed as a living – and permanent, ongoing – process, not only the codification of a form of words.

It is suggested that pairing and grouping arrangements 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. Some resources developed under this initiative can feed into Superintendents' training. There are already some initiatives which could be drawn on in developing some areas. In relation to small groups, the Inspire network¹¹ developed by the Methodist Church provides a good basis for one kind of small group.

The MG relies heavily on web-based spaces for networking and communicating with each other, and the Methodist Church – and individual Methodist churches – have put little effort to date into taking this into account and feeding into it. It is proposed that web-based spaces (website; discussion group; Facebook page etc.) be set up to tackle this. Some spaces will need to be private and available only to specific groups of people. Other spaces will need to be accessible to all members of the MG within the Methodist Church and/or to all members of the Methodist Church. Yet other spaces will need to be set up as overtly publicly visible, beyond the Methodist Church.

In order to oversee and take forward the initiatives suggested above, it is proposed that a national group of MG leaders be set up, which is facilitated to relate regularly to each other. The Emerging Leaders day held in 2009 provides a basis for setting up this group. This should be linked to the internal conversation about the charisms of Methodism which is also suggested, which should provide the basis for constituting and planning the activities of this group. It should include sub-groups dealing with the different areas of work suggested. Both the overarching group and the sub-groups should be facilitated to meet regularly. 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.

¹¹ <http://inspire-network.org.uk/>

Appendix A – Methodology used in the Missing Generation Research Project

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.

There were two parts to the research. One was qualitative and involved visits to eleven churches chosen to be as representative as possible of different parameters relevant to the Methodist Church across the UK and including a number of churches which self-identified as relatively successful with the MG. The other part of the research was quantitative and involved a questionnaire survey administered online.

Qualitative research

In identifying churches for qualitative interviews, the first step was to identify churches amongst those which participated in the Conference survey that could be used within a pilot exercise, in which the methodology could be tested. Two churches were selected for this purpose. The methodology proved to be successful and was subsequently used with the other churches.

Following the pilot phase, further churches were identified from the Conference survey, 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 (e.g. those with ethnically diverse congregations). These became the case study churches for the qualitative interviews carried out with church members and leaders. 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 MG.

The methodology used consisted of:

- (i) A questionnaire sent to the minister (or person identified by the church as the main contact point) to establish basic details – e.g. 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 – e.g. where significant numbers of the MG were present.
- (iv) Conducting focus groups and interviews with representative members of the congregation and (where relevant) specific MG focus groups.
- (v) Audio recordings of meetings were transcribed and then analysed using NVivo (a qualitative research analysis software tool).

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

Questionnaire survey

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.

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.

It was distributed via Methodist e-News; Twitter/Facebook; those who attended an Emerging Leaders day in 2009; and using details of people formerly involved in 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.

Responses to the final, qualitative question in the questionnaire survey were analysed using NVivo in the same way as data for the qualitative interviews with case study churches.

Appendix B – Bibliography

Reports produced as part of this research project:

Missing Generation Research Project report to the 2011 Methodist Conference

<http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/44061/38.%20missing%20generation%20research%20project.pdf>

Missing Generation Research Project report to the Methodist Council, April 2011, MC/11/35

Missing Generation Research report to the 2010 Methodist Conference

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-18-missing-generation-160211.pdf>

Missing Generation Research report to the Methodist Council, April 2010, MC/10/64

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/coun-1064-missing-generation-040610.pdf>

Research Papers:

Christian Research, 2002, *Church Life Profile 2001: Denominational Results for the Methodist Church*

Christian Research, 2007, *UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends No.6 2006/7*

The Evangelical Alliance, 2009, *The 18-30 Mission: A Missing Generation*

<http://www.eauk.org/articles/upload/Executive-Summary.pdf>

Presbyterian Church of Ireland, 2000, *Reconnecting With a Missing Generation*

<http://www.presbyterianireland.org/pdfs/reconnecting.pdf>

Tearfund, 2007, *Churchgoing in the UK*

Books:

Beaudoin, Tom, 2000 *Virtual Faith: the Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*. Jossey Bass publishers.

Beaudoin explores fashion, music videos, and cyberspace concluding that his generation has fashioned a theology radically different from, but no less potent or valid than, that of their elders.

Collins-Mayo, Sylvia et al, 2010 *The Faith of Generation Y* London: Church House Publishing.

The findings of a research project conducted with a sample of c.400 young people aged 13-18 (the lower end of 'Generation Y' – people born after 1982). Explores what makes life meaningful for young people and how relevant the Church and Christianity actually is to them.

Cray, Graham et al, 2004 *Mission-shaped church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. London: Church House Publishing.

Cray looks at church planting within the Anglican Church and includes an overview of developments in church planting; descriptions of fresh expressions of church; a framework for effective, church planting; a look at where lessons can be learned; and recommendations.

Cray, Graham, Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy, 2010 *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church*. Norwich: Canterbury Press.

The combination of Fresh Expressions and the explosion of interest in monastic spirituality is resulting in the emergence of new monastic communities inspired by historic patterns of religious life, but reframed for the contemporary world. This worldwide movement is seen as a radical expression of ecclesial community and was named in Mission Shaped Church as one of the leading new forms of church that would help people reconnect with Christianity. A new monastic community may be a dispersed group of families and individuals meeting to share meals and worship, it might be a group connected virtually; it might be a youth group exploring monastic spirituality. In this book, leaders of traditional religious communities and emerging 'new monastic' communities tell their stories and reflect on how an ancient expression of being church is inspiring and shaping a very new one.

Creasy Dean, Kenda, 2006 *Practising Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. William B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Focusing on the theological resonance between the Passion of Christ and adolescents' experience of passion, the author develops a framework for youth ministry that draws on the historic practices of the Christian community as a "curriculum of passion".

Croft, Stephen and Ian Mobsby, 2009 *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*. Norwich: Canterbury Press.

Fresh Expressions conjures up children's clubs, cafe church and innovative youth work, yet this is not the whole story. Croft and Mobsby look here at how churches from the traditional wings of the church are being equally creative and imaginative, exploring alternative ways of worshipping and being Christian communities. Their place of encounter with God needs space and silence. Practitioners from such churches tell their stories and reflect theologically on the initiatives they are exploring. Contributors include Rowan Williams, Brian McLaren, Steven Croft, Stephen Cottrell, Richard Giles, Phyllis Tickle and priest missionaries from traditional Anglican parishes and emergent churches in the US.

Flory, Richard W. and Donald E. Miller, 2008 *Finding Faith: the Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation*. Rutgers University Press.

Flory and Miller develop a typology that captures four current approaches to the Christian faith and argue that this generation represents a new religious orientation of "expressive communalism," in which they seek spiritual experience and fulfillment in community and through various expressive forms of spirituality, both private and public.

Mason, Michael, 2007 *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia*. John Garratt Press.

Despite the prominence in the mass media of alternative spiritualities, reincarnation, horoscopes and Buddhism, this book argues that for the most part, young people are not active spiritual seekers, but instead have a highly individualistic and relativistic approach to life and spirituality, and are hardly familiar with religious traditions. Only a small percentage of Generation Y is actively religious. The religion of those young people who do belong to a denomination, is for the most part 'low temperature'. Is generation Y more interested in music than the meaning of life? More ready to surf the internet than search for the Infinite? Is their way through life but a shopping mall of choices about beliefs, values and hopes for happiness? The research behind *The Spirit of Generation Y* provides a rich source of information about the types of spirituality found in this generation, the range of beliefs they espouse, and the values that influence their lives as individuals and citizens.

Rankin, Philip, 2005 *Buried Spirituality: A Report on the Findings of the Fellowship in the Spirituality of Young People Based at Sarum College, Salisbury*. Salisbury: Sarum College Press.

'Buried Spirituality' is a report of the findings of the Fellowship in the Spirituality of Young People. It is the result of 3 years of conversations with young people in nightclubs, pubs, parks, on street corners, and in cafes all over the UK.

Richter, Philip J. and Leslie J. Francis, 1998, *Gone but not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning*. Darton, Longman and Todd Publishers.

Richter and Francis identified eight main reasons why people leave churches. The most important reason for leaving was said to be unfulfilled expectations. One of the major areas in which expectations were found to be unfulfilled is in worship and another was in levels or quality of pastoral care.