

Methodism's Hidden Harvest?

The story of the first fifteen
years of Methodist involvement
in fresh expressions



Introduction

The **Methodist** Church is called to be a growing, evangelistic, inclusive church of diverse people who speak of, listen for and live out the goodness of God – so that new people become disciples of Jesus Christ, and committed Methodists experience a deepening of faith.

How wonderful then that this report confirms what we had already thought but now see clearly: **the fresh expressions movement within the Methodist Church has been extremely successful in welcoming previously unaffiliated people into Christian faith exploration and participation.** Nearly two-thirds of the participants in the wide-ranging, contextually- and theologically-diverse Methodist fresh expressions are new to Christianity! I know of few other missional orientations that bear such amazing fruit.

That is one of the main reasons that, as part of our emerging Evangelism and

Growth Strategy, the Methodist Church is committing to start hundreds of New Places for New People in the years ahead. New Places for New People – which include fresh expressions, church plants, pioneer experiments, missional communities, etc. – are projects whose primary goal is to start, build, and reproduce new Christian communities among unaffiliated people.

We believe New Places for New People are the most effective means of connecting new people, new groups and new residents to Christian exploration and faith. In addition, they bring learning from

experimental 'research and development', identify and strengthen emerging leaders, and help the whole Church to reflect on and examine its calling.

To that end, I invite every local church and circuit to devote significant reflection,

prayer and resource to start one or more fresh expression as part of their Mission Plan for the next five years. Let's see what happens when we trust God and live out spiritual joy and holy risk!



For the Christ who makes us one,

Trey Hall

Director of Evangelism and Growth

The Methodist Church in Britain

This report provides a snapshot of how the fresh expressions movement has flourished within Methodism over the last 15 years.

During 2016-2017 we carried out research into fresh expressions communities around the Connexion. Our findings give real insight into the people new expressions are reaching, how they operate and the activities they carry out. It also provides learning for the whole Church about how incarnational mission impacts those with little or no connection to the historic church. Its findings about evangelism, discipleship and worship are especially timely, as the whole Methodist church is seeking to deploy increased resources into evangelism and growth.

- Fresh expressions of church have become a significant part of Methodist life in a relatively short time. When

the research was carried out, there were estimated to be over 1,000 fresh expressions complementing around 4,500 local churches (page 8).

- Their standardised weekly attendance is estimated at around 14,500, compared to around 200,000 in traditional local churches (pages 8-9).
- The overall community of those who are part of the fresh expressions community is estimated at 37,000, compared to 495,000 in the wider community for local churches. Both these measures suggest that around 7% of the Methodist community is found in fresh expressions of church (pages 8-9).
- Fresh expressions are evangelistically

fruitful: their leaders estimate that 24,000 (65%) of those attending fresh expressions had no recent involvement in church (page 19).

- Fresh expressions are successfully engaging with younger people: at least 38% of those attending fresh expressions are 16 or under (pages 11-12).
- Fresh expressions are highly relational. Their approaches to evangelism and discipleship formation focus on relationships rather than programmes (pages 22-23).
- 17% of fresh expressions are creating indigenous leadership and 7% have reproduced to form new fresh expressions (page 33).
- Fresh expressions are already demonstrating considerable longevity: at the time of the survey 63% were five years old or more (pages 27-28).
- Fresh expressions employ multiple, creative ways to engage with the Bible (page 15).
- 59% of leaders are lay and 46% are volunteers. 64% of the leaders are women (page 10).
- 90% of fresh expressions use existing church premises for some or all of their activities.
- Mature fresh expressions may be ecclesial communities, but only 0.5% have taken the formal step of becoming local churches (pages 14-15).
- 78% are projects authorised by Church Councils. However, only 6% are formally represented on Church Council/Circuit Meeting, whilst 12% are informally represented. (page 14).
- Over 2,900 new or renewed faith commitments are estimated to have been made. 19% of all reported new/renewed faith commitments involved baptism or confirmation (pages 24-25).

What is a fresh expression of church?



The Fresh Expressions Mission Agency adopted the definition of a fresh expression as:

A form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.

They will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.

They will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.ⁱ

More recently, the four criteria below have been added by the Fresh Expressions Team to complement the original definition. A fresh expression of church is:

- **contextual** – it is shaped by the needs and characteristics of a particular community
- **missional** – it seeks to enable men, women and children to become followers of Jesus
- **formational** – it empowers people to grow and mature in their discipleship
- **ecclesial** – it seeks to form a Christian community that lives out the four dimensions of ‘Our Calling’.ⁱⁱ

For our research, we sought to identify any initiative whose leaders saw them as being “a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church”. We then asked the leaders questions related to their fresh expressions of church’s

intentions, activities and reported outcomes.

On this basis, 68% of the potential fresh expressions that were contacted and were running at the time of the survey self-identified as meeting this definition, and then completed the rest of the questionnaire.

Of those who excluded themselves from the research when first contacted, the largest category – accounting for 79% – contained those whose activities were not primarily for the benefit of non-members.

Reflections

Mission projects that begin new activities for existing members may be worthy projects – particularly if they provide a spiritual home for those who might otherwise have drifted away from church. They are not, however, fresh expressions of church for the purpose of this research. Nevertheless, this sort of project may illustrate the way that fresh expressions practice is influencing the life and mission of existing church communities in other ways.

How many?



CHURCHES:
4,512



FRESH EXPRESSIONS:
1,029

The survey found 337 fresh expressions of church by surveying 116 Methodist circuits in the Connexion during 2016-2017 (around 31% of all circuits, with the sample taking into account the wide size differences between circuits). This equates to an estimated 1,029 fresh expressions in the Connexion overallⁱⁱⁱ; this can be compared to the 4,512 Methodist Churches at October 2016.

Leaders were asked to give an average attendance figure for each time their fresh expression met. Based on this,

approximately 37,000 people are estimated to be attending these fresh expressions.^{iv}

Comparing attendance levels to wider church attendance can be challenging, particularly given the varying frequencies that churches and fresh expressions may meet. For local Methodist Churches, a measure known as 'standardised weekly attendance' (SWA)^v is typically used for worship services to address this. Using this measure, SWA in fresh expressions is estimated at around 14,500

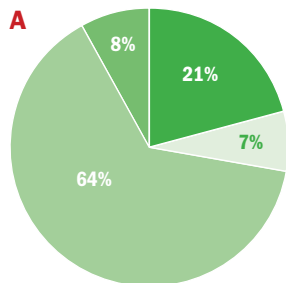
Reflections

The SWA figure for fresh expressions might be compared to a SWA figure for worship in the wider Methodist Church of 202,100. As a proportion, the fresh expressions SWA figure approximates to around 7% of the wider figure, although it is not clear how much of the fresh expressions attendance was previously reported for inclusion in the wider figure.

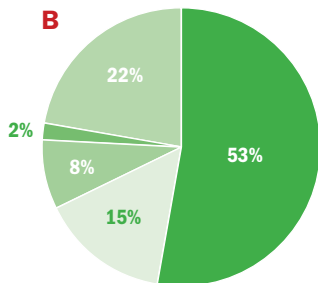
Many fresh expressions begin with incarnational mission, so the worshipping community may be the last piece of the jigsaw to be put in place as the fresh expression grows. This contrasts with more attractational ways of doing church, where the worship service is usually the main entrance point for people joining.

Similarly, the estimated 37,000 people attending a fresh expression could also be compared to the figure of 495,000 people involved in the wider life of the Methodist Church through the week, as reported through the 'Statistics for Mission' process. This proportion is also about 7% (although again note that it is not clear how many of the fresh expressions activities may already be recorded in the higher number).

When considered together, this 7% figure may therefore give a reasonable estimate of the numerical proportion of fresh expressions in relation to existing activity within the Methodist Church.



64% monthly
21% weekly
8% less than monthly
7% fortnightly



53% Church
22% Mixed
15% other church building
8% secular
2% house

How often do fresh expressions meet?^{vi} (A)

To meet the criteria established for the research, each fresh expression needed to be a current project that had the intention to meet at least monthly, so the 8% that meet less often are working at increasing the frequency of their gatherings. At 64%, the most popular frequency is monthly.

For those that do meet more regularly than monthly, weekly is three times more popular than fortnightly.

Reflections

This pattern of meeting may reflect the popularity of Messy Church^{vii} and Café Church^{viii} within Methodism. The creativity and preparation required for these forms of fresh expression makes it extremely demanding to meet more often than monthly.

Weekly meetings offer a consistent pattern

of meeting that is easily grasped. This makes it more likely that those who haven't previously attended will know the meeting is taking place and therefore be able to join in.

Where do fresh expressions meet? (B)

90% of Methodist fresh expressions meet for at least some of their activities on church premises (if the 22% meeting in 'mixed' venues are included).

Reflections

Given that substantial numbers of people are attending Methodist fresh expressions in churches or related premises, church buildings are not in themselves preventing people from attending. The research does not tell us, however, whether more fresh expressions meeting on secular premises might reach a different group of people for whom attending an event on church premises is a barrier.

When do fresh expressions meet? (C)

There is a wonderful variety about when fresh expressions meet. It seems that fresh expressions don't like Mondays and have a slight preference for Sundays, with Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday all popular.

Late afternoon is the most popular time of day, followed by morning.

Reflections

Messy Churches often meet late afternoon, which may explain the prevalence of afternoon activities.

How long have they been in existence? (D)

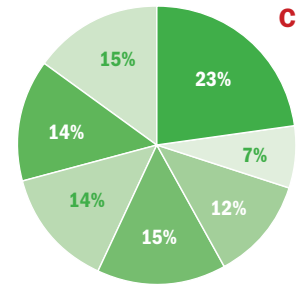
The graph overleaf shows that some fresh expressions have been in existence for a considerable length of time:

37% are under 5 years old; 46% are between 5 and 10 years old, and 17% are over 10 years old.

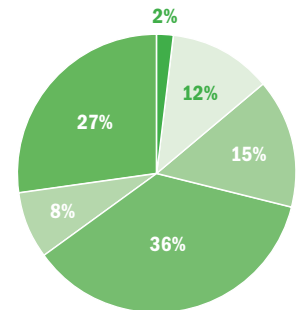
The research did not examine fresh expressions that had closed more than a year ago, so we have no data about the percentage of fresh expressions that survive/thrive versus those that fail. However, the fact that 63% were 5 or more years old demonstrates that they have the potential to be long-lasting.

How old are the people who attend? (E)

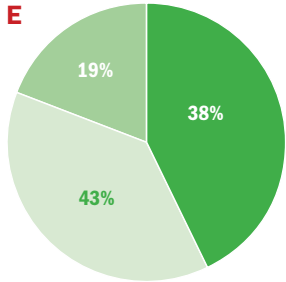
The age profile of the fresh expressions community is very different from that of the established Methodist Church. At least 38% are under 16 (this figure may be even higher: 19% of respondents didn't provide this information). This is not totally surprising given the popularity of Messy Church, but it's important to



23% Sunday
7% Monday
12% Tuesday
15% Wednesday
14% Thursday
14% Friday
15% Saturday



2% Breakfast
12% Early afternoon
15% Evening
36% Late afternoon
8% Lunchtime
27% Morning



43% Adults
38% Children under 16
19% Undefined

note that significant numbers of children and their families are engaging with the Christian faith through fresh expressions.

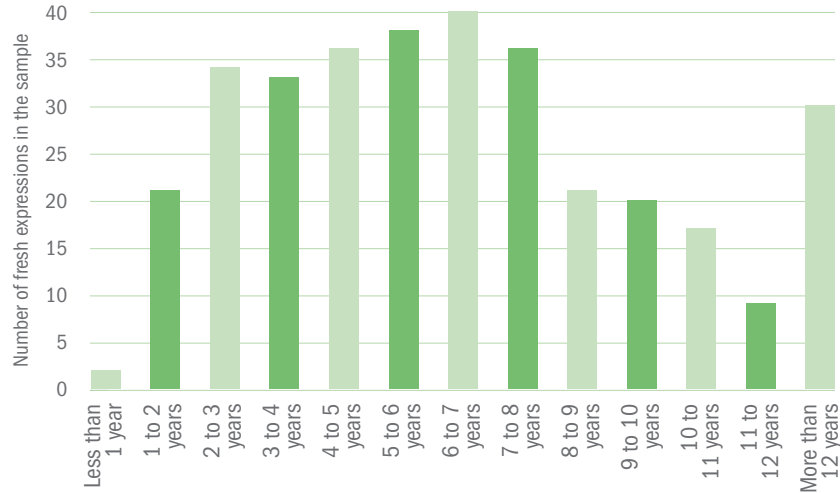
The latest Methodist Statistics for Mission suggest that standardised weekly attendance of children and young people in worship is 27,000, or 14% of the total worship attendance (though the total from Methodist Statistics for

Mission is for ages 0 to 19 rather than 0 to 16, so direct comparison is difficult).^{ix}

What sort of fresh expression? (F)

Leaders were able to place their fresh expressions in more than one category, so the numbers shown on the graph overleaf total more than the 337 fresh

D



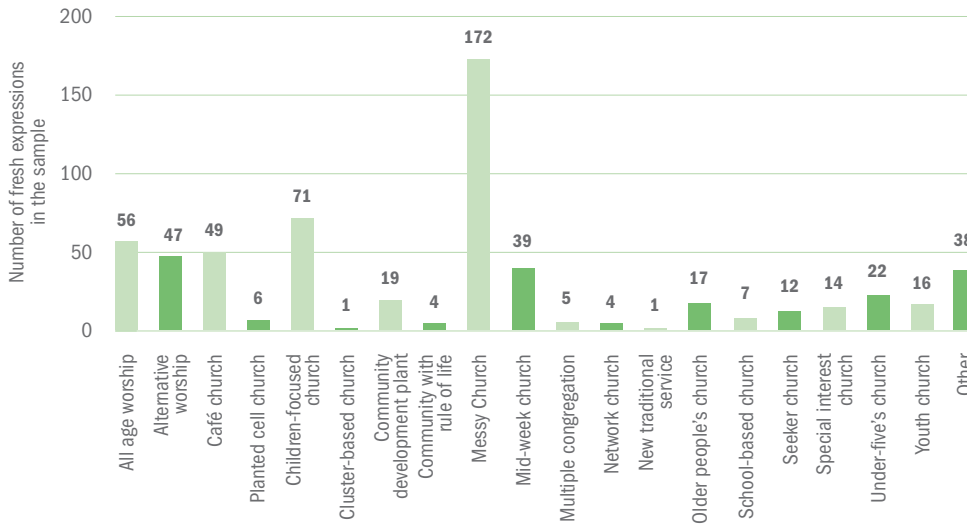
expressions whose leaders responded to the survey. Indeed, 50% were creatively combining different types within their own context.

Some of the categories are so small that it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the style of fresh expression and its effectiveness.

Reflections

Given the decline in children's and youth work outlined above, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Methodist Churches and circuits are keen to start projects that reach out to this demographic. It is encouraging that so many projects have been created successfully.

Café Church covers a wide spectrum



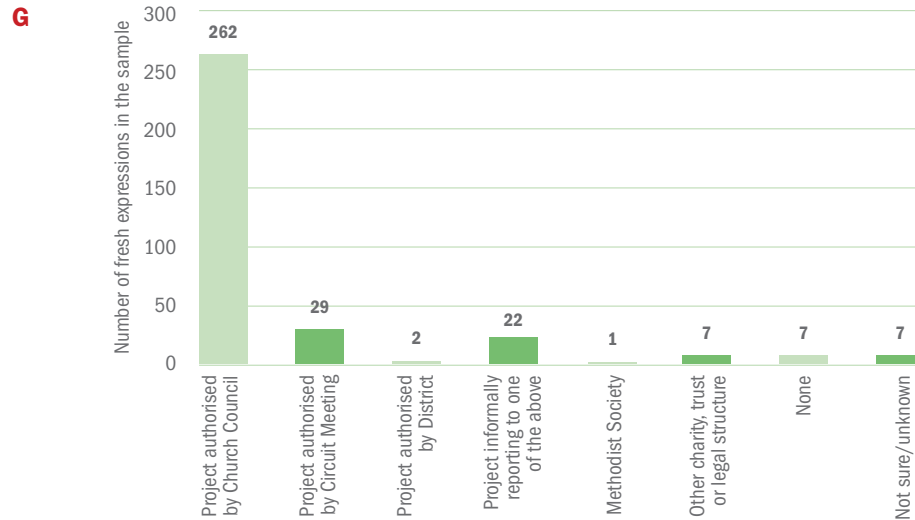
F

of events and they have many different components (not identified in the research). Anecdotally, many of them refer to food and fellowship going hand in hand, and a conversational approach as people talk together rather than being ‘preached at’.

Legal status (G)

78% of fresh expressions are projects

authorised by local Church Councils and 9% are projects authorised by the circuit – a clear indication that projects are normally set up, supported and held accountable locally. Although they are authorised, there is no facility within *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* for them to have any official status other than as a project.



Fewer than 0.5% of fresh expressions have taken the step of becoming a local church.

Reflections

The fact that fresh expressions are ‘projects’ of the local church, circuit or district offers considerable freedom as long as goodwill exists, but no protection for the fresh expression if goodwill is lost.

The definition of fresh expressions of church that underlies this research finishes with the sentence:

“They will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.”

It is becoming increasingly clear that the ‘mature expression of church’ that a fresh expression grows into is often quite different from church as it has traditionally been known. The last phrase, “for its

cultural context”, gives a clue as to why this might be. The conundrum of how these fresh expressions can be embedded into the life of our denomination is still unresolved.

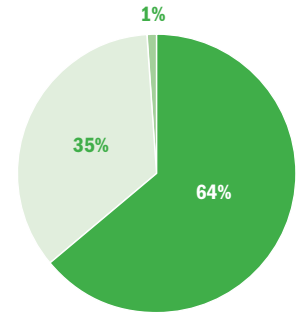
Leadership (including training and support) (H)

The next group of questions are around who leads fresh expressions and how they have been trained and are being supported. 349 leaders were reported for the 337 fresh expressions in the sample.^x

64% of fresh expressions leaders were women and 35% were men, with 1% selecting ‘other’ in response to this question.

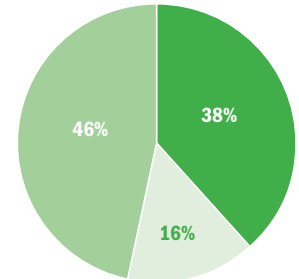
46% of Methodist fresh expressions leaders were voluntary/unpaid, 16% were locally paid and 38% were stipendiary.

LEADER: GENDER H



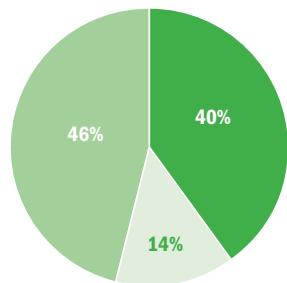
64% Female
35% Male
1% Other

PAID OR VOLUNTARY



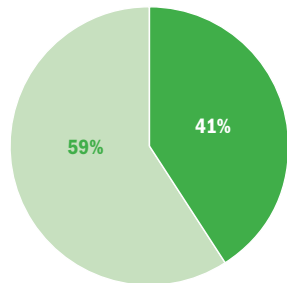
38% Stipend
16% Locally paid
46% Voluntary

H TIME COMMITMENT



40% Full-time
14% Part-time
46% Spare-time

ORDAINED OR LAY



41% Ordained
59% Lay

Reflections

A typical fresh expressions leader is a female unpaid volunteer doing this role in their spare time. At a time when vocational discernment is high on the church's agenda (not least because of the shortage of people candidating for ordained ministry), it's fascinating that a new group of leaders is emerging on the fringes of the church. The research doesn't explore how they understand their vocation, but it's a subject worthy of further consideration.

Training (I)

Leaders were asked to identify all forms of training that they had undertaken, so many of them gave multiple answers to this question (and no answer was given for six of the leaders). The survey only asked about training for the leader(s), so it's also possible that a wider group underwent some form of training.

Previous experience is described in the questionnaire as being experience of fresh expressions of church – this can be interpreted in a wide variety of ways. 53% of the leaders reported having previous experience.

There are a number of organisations doing training events – Messy Church, fresh expressions, districts and dioceses and many more – and almost a third of leaders (30%) reported having attended one.

17% reported having made the substantial (12-month) commitment to take part in a mission-shaped ministry course.

Mission-shaped intro^{xi} is a newer course, with only a small number (6%) having taken part so far.

Consultancy support covers a number of methods of ongoing support for

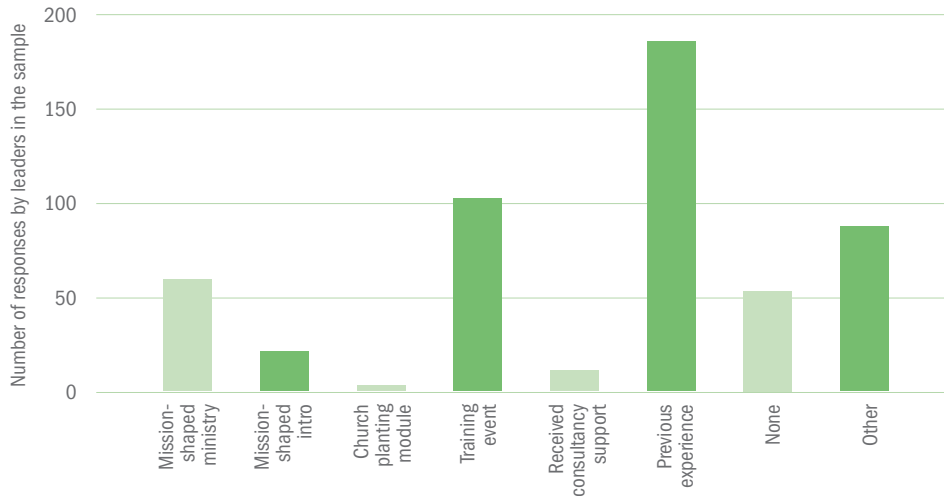
leaders (coaching, mentoring, mission accompanists, etc.). 3% of leaders had received this.

Only 1% of respondents had taken a church planting module during ministerial formation.

16% of leaders had no training at all.

Reflections

There are many training opportunities available and most of them are being used some of the time. The fact that 46% of fresh expressions leaders are volunteers (who may have restricted availability because of other commitments), makes it difficult to ensure that quality training is



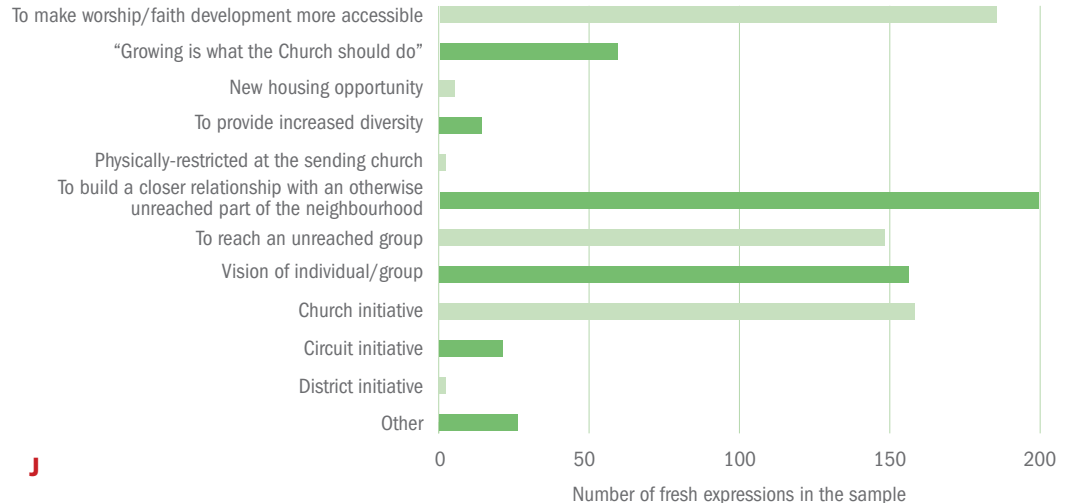
offered at the right time and in the right way to provide the maximum benefit, and that leaders are aware of the training and support that is available.

Motivation: Why did the fresh expression come into being? (J)

The leaders were asked to tick up to three boxes explaining why they began the fresh expression.

59% set out to reach an otherwise unreached part of their neighbourhood and 44% an unreached group of people. This is in line with the emphasis the fresh expressions movement has always placed on 'contextual mission'.

Vision also plays an important part, particularly at a local level. 46% were motivated by the vision of an individual or group and 47% by the vision of a local



J

church, with fewer as a result of circuit (6%) or district (under 1%) initiatives.

Making worship and/or faith development more accessible was also an important factor, with 55% choosing this.

The church being too full was a problem for fewer than 1%.

Are they involving people outside church? (K)

The leaders were also asked to identify those attending their fresh expressions of church in three categories:

1. Christian – people with a recent active involvement in a Christian church. This could include both the church that began the fresh expression and Christians from other churches who were attracted to the fresh expression.
2. De-churched – people who have a Christian heritage and have been involved in church at some point in

their lives. However, they have no recent active involvement in a church.

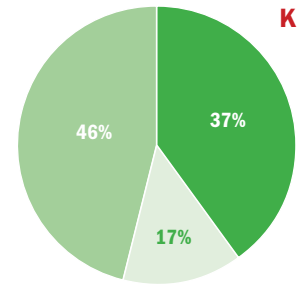
3. Non-churched – people who have not previously had any meaningful interaction with a church.

These categories were first used by Philip Richter and Leslie Francis in *Gone but not Forgotten*^{xii} and were adopted by the Church of England's Mission-Shaped Church report^{xiii}; since then, they have been widely used in missiological circles.

The numbers opposite are subjective. Leaders were asked to estimate percentages in each category, and no attempt was made to ask the individuals attending the fresh expressions how they would categorise themselves.

Reflections

The Church Army Research unit has conducted detailed research^{xiv} into the church background of people attending Anglican fresh expressions of church. It demonstrates that those



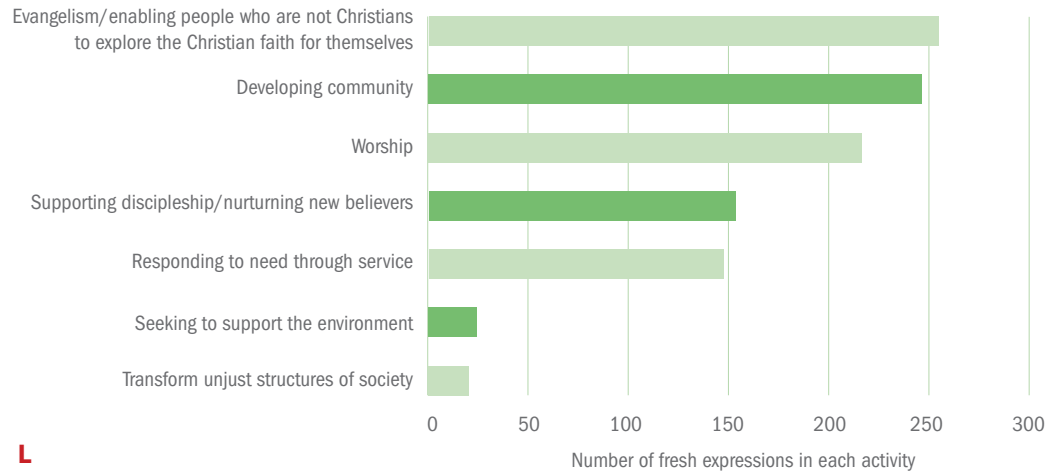
37% Christian
17% De-churched
46% Non-churched

attending fresh expressions may have complex histories of church engagement/ non-engagement and complex faith journeys, and that leaders' perceptions may not match the ways in which attendees would categorise themselves.

Whilst we only have the leaders' perceptions from our survey, fresh expressions are reporting substantial engagement with those

who are not regularly seen as otherwise attending church.

It would also be interesting to do further research with the Christians who are attending to explore their reasons for doing so. For example, are they attending to help run the fresh expression? Are they attending because they find the worship more accessible? Or even



L

perhaps because the fresh expression is providing them with a church they can remain engaged with when they might otherwise have left the church?

In light of the above, the distinction between non-churched and de-churched may not survive further scrutiny. However, leaders estimate that nearly two in three people (63%) attending fresh expressions are either non-churched or de-churched – more than 24,000 people newly involved in the life of the church.

Activities (L)

Leaders could select more than one of the categories listed above.

The most frequent response (included by 75% of the fresh expressions) was evangelism. Fresh expressions are prioritising helping people explore the Christian faith in the hope that they will

become followers of Jesus.

This is also complemented by the fourth most frequently-reported activity, supporting discipleship and nurturing new believers (45%).

Reflections

This is an area where fresh expressions can feed back their learning to help the whole Church to improve in this vital area of mission. We shall investigate below how they go about this. Increasingly evangelism and discipleship are understood as a continuum rather than two distinct activities. People may begin to engage in discipleship whilst they are uncertain about their faith, and this process helps them to become followers of Jesus. This contrasts with a traditional view that evangelism leads to a critical moment of conversion after which the discipleship process begins.

Developing community (73%), the second most frequent response, is also highly important. Worship is also cited as an important activity for 64% of the fresh expressions.

Fresh expressions also report engagement in other activities that have been historical strengths for Methodism, including serving specific needs within a community (44%), caring for the environment (7%) and seeking to transform unjust structures in society (6%).

Reflections

Further research would be needed to identify whether belonging to a community is an end in itself or is part of a longer process of helping people to belong so that they will come to believe and then be formed as disciples. However, its prevalence as a response further emphasises the importance of relationship-building within the practice of fresh expressions.

The survey does not ask directly for information about styles of worship, but the styles of fresh expression that are most popular – Messy Church and Café Church – offer a clear indication that the worship in fresh expressions is likely to be informal and interactive.

How do the fresh expressions engage in evangelism? (M)

This research demonstrates that fresh expressions prioritise forms of evangelism that are relational: dialogue, friendship, invitation, service and sharing stories.

Reflections

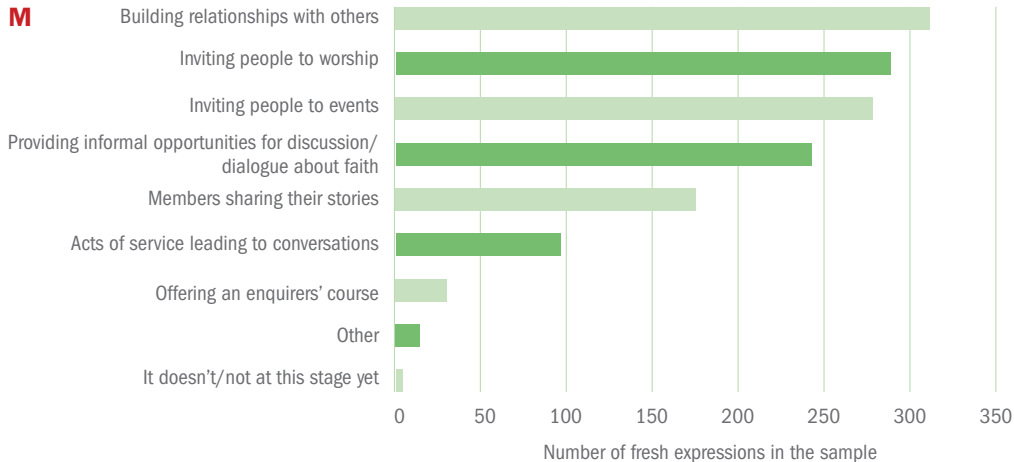
The popularity of opportunities for informal discussion as a means of evangelism points to another aspect of fresh expressions that is important for the wider Church – that dialogue and conversation is an essential way of sharing in spiritual journeys and

that teaching can happen through this as much as through more traditional didactic approaches. It is also important that members share the stories of their own encounters with God.

Given that many fresh expressions are led by lay volunteers, this further illustrates the importance of building strong relationships in a way that resonates with the context, and conducting dialogue in a way that it is easily

understood by the community in which the fresh expression is set.

The research did not identify whether different approaches to evangelism are used at different stages in the life of a fresh expression. For instance, it may be true that in the early days of a fresh expression, acts of service leading to conversation and building relationships are the only approaches possible, because there are



not yet any events or discussion groups to which people might be invited. This may be an area where further research will be helpful.

Having explored different approaches to evangelism, the research tried to identify whether the number of approaches had any significance on the likelihood of them being effective at making new disciples.

Generally, it seems to be true that those who adopted three or more approaches to evangelism were more likely to see people becoming followers of Jesus. Further research will be required to confirm this.

Offering different approaches to evangelism was constructive rather than confusing or overwhelming.

This reinforces the view that offering multiple paths to becoming followers of Jesus may help people to respond positively.

Are people coming to faith?

The research incorporated a number of measures of 'coming to faith'.

Traditional measures include baptisms and confirmations; the reported numbers of these in fresh expressions were relatively small (in our sample, there were 21 adult baptisms and 122 child baptisms, and 19 child confirmations and 24 adult confirmations). An estimated projected total of these formal faith commitments for the whole Connexion arising from these fresh expressions is approximately 554.

Leaders were asked to state how many people in their community had made some other form of new or renewed faith commitment; in the sample, this was 439 adults and 359 children respectively. An estimated projected total of these other new or renewed faith commitments for the whole Connexion is approximately

2,365. This information is not part of Methodism's normal Statistics for Mission survey, so there is nothing in the Methodist Church to compare it with.

In addition, an estimated projected total of 258 people transferred into the Methodist Church as a result of fresh expressions.

It is worth noting that the number of children being confirmed and making other faith commitments is almost equal to adult confirmations and commitments. Children are very capable of making these commitments whilst young.

Reflections

The number of people being baptised or confirmed and received into membership of the Methodist Church is relatively small when compared with the numbers of those being reported as making other new or renewed faith commitments.

There may be a number of factors that could be behind this; for example:

- It is not currently possible to become a member of a fresh expression (unless it has constituted itself as a local church). When the person making a commitment recognises the fresh expression as 'their church', why would they want to become a member of something else?
- Fresh expressions leaders may not prioritise encouraging people to become members of the Methodist Church
- People may actively resist becoming 'members' if their belonging is experienced differently (perhaps in a more organic relational way).

Perhaps the question that needs to be explored is not so much how do we persuade new or renewed Christians to become members? But rather: how do

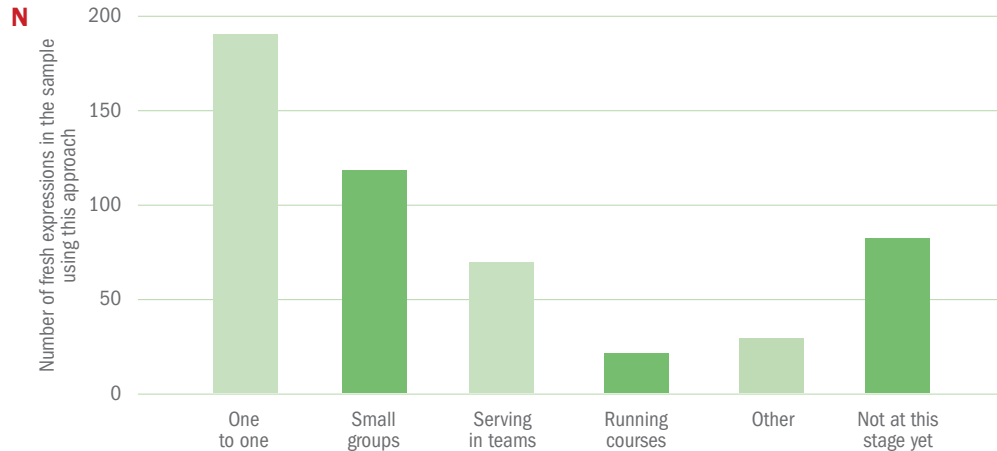
we measure discipleship and support new/renewed Christians in doing discipleship well?

Discipleship (N)

The research invited leaders to identify all the approaches they take to discipleship. Leaving aside those who were 'not at this stage yet', that's an average of 1.7 approaches to

discipleship per fresh expression.

The research shows very clearly that fresh expressions approach discipleship in a relational way. Of those fresh expressions using at least one approach to supporting discipleship, one-to-one approaches are used by 75% and small groups are used by 46% (when excluding those 'not at this stage yet').



27% of fresh expressions engaged in discipleship-focused activities involved people serving in teams: 'discipleship by doing'.

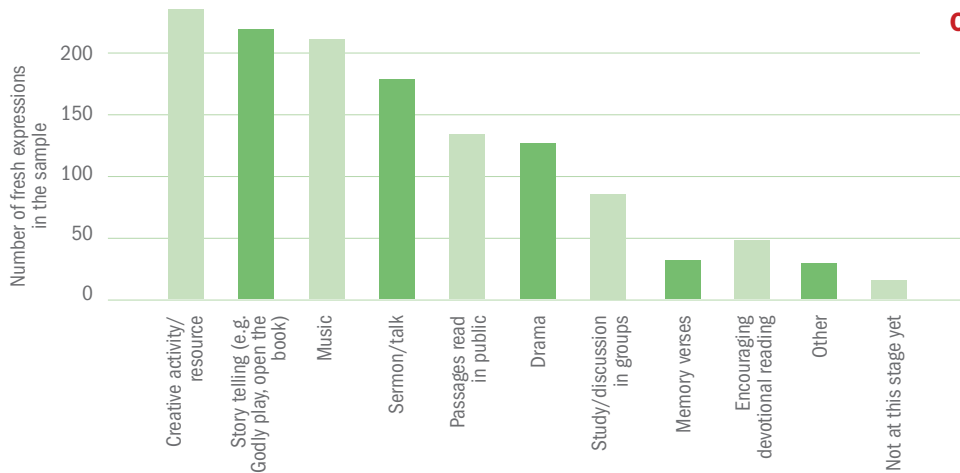
Reflections

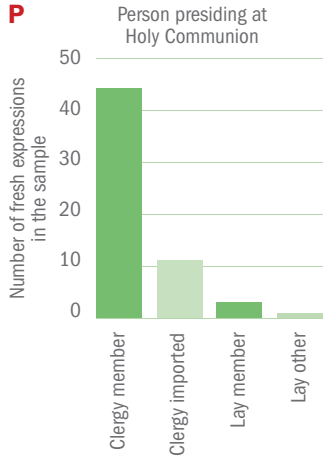
There may be a correlation between the number of approaches to discipleship and the number of new faith commitments. Further research will be required to

clarify this. If it is confirmed that multiple approaches to discipleship encourage new faith commitments, this will be an important finding for the whole Church, not just for the fresh expressions movement.

The Bible (0)

Fresh expressions were asked how they engaged with the Bible; leaders were encouraged to select as many answers





as apply. The approaches most used are at the creative end of the spectrum, although traditional approaches to scripture such as sermons, memory verses and encouraging daily devotional reading all feature.

Only 4% reported not yet being at the stage where they engaged with the Bible. The others averaged just over four different approaches each. Based on this evidence, it is clear that Methodist fresh expressions engage with the Bible in numerous and creative ways.

Fresh expressions and the sacraments

Although Holy Communion and baptism are regarded as important indicators of ecclesial community in inherited church settings, they are not happening very often in fresh expressions.

Fresh expressions and Holy Communion (P)

Only 56 fresh expressions of church in our sample (17%) reported offering Holy Communion.

Those fresh expressions that share Holy Communion are mostly presided over by a clergy member who is in their leadership team.

Reflections

Since 2012, the Methodist Conference has allowed lay authorisations to preside at Holy Communion on the grounds of missionary opportunity in addition to the traditional basis of deprivation (*The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, Vol. 2, Book VI, Part 3, section 3*).

The potential for lay people to preside at Holy Communion had not been widely

used by the fresh expressions in this survey. Instead, those offering Holy Communion depended on having clergy available within the fresh expression, or able to be called on from outside it.

Baptism (Q)

46 fresh expressions in the sample (14%) reported conducted baptism(s).

As noted previously, 143 baptisms (21 adult and 122 child baptisms) were recorded in the sample (with two fresh expressions indicating they conducted baptisms, but not giving a number of baptisms that had been held).

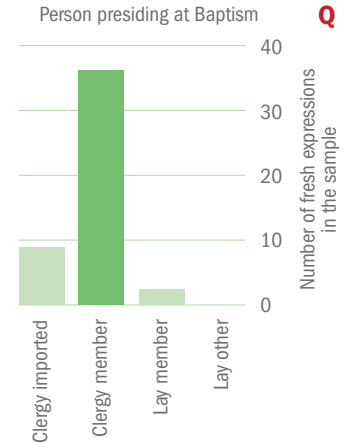
Although only a small number of fresh expressions recorded baptisms, those that did reported having performed just over three each. The summary on page 24 sets this figure in the context of wider numbers of faith commitments reported as arising from fresh expressions.

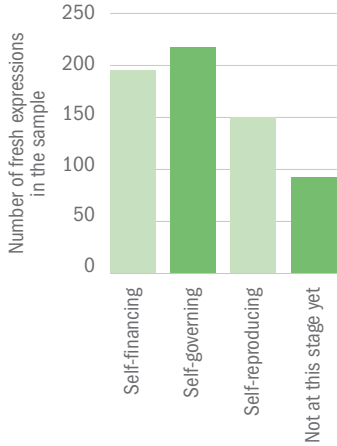
Reflections

This is a small number, amounting to only just under 15% of the 984 new or renewed faith commitments (including baptisms, confirmations and other new/renewed faith commitments, but excluding transfers) that were recorded in the sample. If baptism is perceived to be a natural next step after profession of faith in inherited church, it does not seem to be as significant a marker in the spiritual journeys of people in fresh expressions.

However, we do not know how many of those making faith commitments had previously been baptised. If they had, they might have found other ways of making a public declaration of faith.

Others may have felt such a public declaration unnecessary or inappropriate.



R

Spiritual journeys in fresh expressions may take many forms and key milestones may both be perceived and celebrated in diverse ways.

Three selves (R)

The ‘three-self principle’ was first articulated by Henry Venn^{xv} as a way of assessing missionary churches in the 19th century. The three selves that Venn proposes are: self-financing, self-governing and self-propagating.

Reflections

These principles are not always easily accommodated in a Methodist ecclesiology. Methodism has always placed a high value on connexionalism – a mutual interdependence that works on a number of different levels. Ministers are appointed to circuits, not to local churches, and within a circuit there may be few (or no) churches that are capable of financial independence.

S

Leaders were asked about practical steps they had taken towards being self-financing and self-governing, and what developments there had been in relation to becoming self-reproducing.

Overall, 57% reported making practical steps towards being self-financing, 64% reported taking practical steps towards becoming self-governing, and 41% reported developments towards becoming self-reproducing.

These are explored further below.

Steps taken to be self-financing (S):

45% of fresh expressions receive income from collections and donations and 7% benefit from regular giving/standing orders.

However, only 4% report themselves as being totally self-financing (including staffing costs).

An additional 13% cover the costs of their activities excluding staffing costs.

Reflections

Self-financing is not straightforward to measure and it is difficult to compare the income of fresh expressions with the finances of local churches that often have multiple sources of income – not just the giving of the attendees. Whereas an inherited church often gains considerable income from letting out its premises, few fresh expressions own property and some pay rent to the local church for their activities. Similarly, staffing costs allocated to a particular fresh expression may be hard to quantify, though many are led by volunteers so do not incur staffing costs.

Although we asked fresh expressions leaders in the survey about the direct giving of attendees to the fresh expression, we did not ask if any attendees who

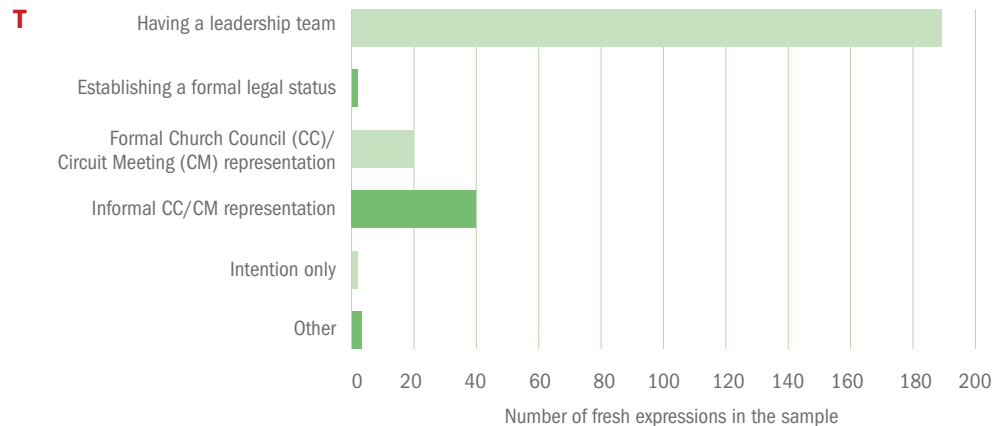
also attended another church were also contributing to the finances of their 'sending' church. There is wider anecdotal data that this is happening, but it was not explored in the research.

Steps taken to be self-governing (T):

Examining the steps taken to become self-governing very clearly highlights

the complex relationship between fresh expressions and their sponsors (church, circuit or district). While 56% of fresh expressions have established leadership teams, only a small number (1%) either have or are establishing a formal legal status.

A slightly larger number (6%) have formal Church Council or Circuit Meeting representation, whilst a larger number



(12%) have informal representation on these bodies.

Reflections

This may demonstrate an anomaly within Standing Orders. Standing Orders make generous provision for other groups active within the life of the Church to be appointed to trustee bodies, but for Church Councils and Circuit Meetings, they stipulate that those people must be members. Since one cannot become a member of a fresh expression (only of a local church), many of those who attend fresh expressions are excluded from this possibility.

It is, however, straightforward for a Circuit Meeting or a Church Council to appoint a management committee for a fresh expression that includes fresh expressions attendees who are not members, as long as they are members of the community roll of a church in the circuit.

Steps taken to be self-reproducing (U)

The research explored a number of intermediate steps to becoming self-reproducing, as can be seen in the graph overleaf (where each fresh expression could choose more than one option where appropriate).

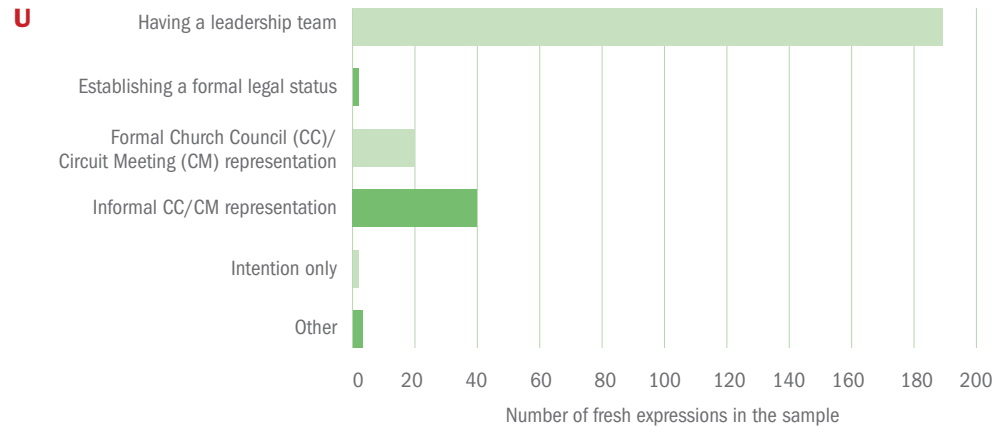
The first group of indicators explores the development of individuals within the fresh expression:

- 13% of fresh expressions reported new believers in response to this question
- 17% reported participants living more virtuous lives
- 17% reported that indigenous leaders have developed.

A second group of indicators explores reproduction beyond the life of the fresh expression:

- 5% report having started further outreach projects
- 6% report having supported other projects to reproduce
- 7% report having started new fresh expressions themselves.

Fresh expressions leaders are rarely engaging with the traditional offices of the Methodist Church. Only 0.5% of fresh expressions have seen people candidating for ordained ministry and 1.5% have seen candidates for local preaching or other recognised roles in the local church.



Basis of research

This report is the culmination of a year-long research project. The research team created a stratified random sample of circuits, taking account of the wide diversity of circuit sizes; we included just over 31% of all circuits in the research. We initially used Statistics for Mission data to identify which projects within the circuits considered themselves to be fresh expressions of church, and we then contacted the superintendent of the circuit.

In conversation with the superintendent, the research team established which of the projects were still running and if any had closed. The team also ascertained if any of the projects did not reach the definition of a fresh expression of church that was used (see page 6), and if there were any projects within the circuit that did meet the criteria but were not reported through Statistics for Mission.

The team then invited the fresh expressions to complete a questionnaire either by telephone or in writing. The questionnaire was developed from work done by the Sheffield Centre of the Church Army in researching fresh expressions in the Church of England, so that as far as is possible the two sets of research are comparable, whilst adapted for the Methodist context. Whilst the questionnaire included questions about other possible criteria, the only criteria that affected inclusion in the research was whether they met the definition above, had still been running in the past year, intended to meet at least monthly if they weren't already doing so, and (given the research focus on the Methodist Church), whether it was in some way primarily the responsibility of the Methodist Church.

158 people contacted as potentially running a fresh expression of church did

not complete the questionnaire because they did not consider themselves to meet the above basic definition.

Non-response was negligible – only two small circuits within the sample declined to take part as a whole, and only eight

potential fresh expressions within otherwise-participating circuits declined to respond.

Where necessary, all reported figures and estimates have been rounded to an appropriate level.

Acknowledgements

The research project was designed by Dr Hamish Leese in consultation with Dr Andrew Orton of Durham University.

We are grateful for the help of Dr George Lings and Ms Elspeth McVey of the Sheffield Centre who shared their experience of similar research in the Church of England at the design stage. They also provided the technical expertise to collate the data.

Special thanks to Dr Marcianne

Uwimana, who conducted the interviews with the fresh expressions.

Dr Leese analysed the research and began to write up the findings. After the departure of Dr Leese from the Methodist Connexional Team, Revd Graham Horsley, (Methodist Connexional Fresh Expressions Missioner) completed the report, advised by Dr Orton.

The reflections section of the report is written by Revd Horsley, who brings his considerable experience of Methodist fresh expressions to the research data.

Endnotes

- i Ed Steven Croft, *Mission Shaped Questions* (CHP, 2008), p. 9.
- ii Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life* (SCM Press, 2017), p. 115.
- iii When weighted to take into account circuit sizes and outliers.
- iv Again, when weighted to take into account circuit sizes and outliers.
- v A statistical measure that takes into account the frequency of meetings as well as the numbers attending – a worship event taking place every four weeks with an average attendance of 24 will have a SWA of 6.
- vi The figures used in this report are from the sample surveyed (please see page 8, under ‘How many?’).
- vii Messy Church is a form of church for children and adults that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality. It’s primarily for people who don’t already belong to another form of church, and meets at a time (and sometimes in a place) that suits people who don’t already belong to church. It typically includes a welcome, a long creative time to explore the biblical theme through getting messy; a short celebration time involving story, prayer, song, games and similar; and a sit-down meal together at tables. All elements are for, and should include, people of all ages, adults and children. Its aim is to introduce Jesus, to give an opportunity to encounter him and to grow closer to him. Messy Church is part of, resourced by and enabled by The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) which believes, with the historic churches, in one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. See www.messychurch.org.uk for more information.
- viii Café Church is a widely-used term that is understood in a variety of ways; perhaps the only common factors are café-style seating, refreshments during the event rather than before and/or after and an approach that emphasizes discussion around tables.
- ix Methodist Statistics for Mission; see www.methodist.org.uk/media/9920/stats-2017-attendance-summary.pdf

- x In calculating the percentage of leaders in this section, all listed leaders have been included; for 12 fresh expressions, details were recorded for two leaders working together to lead the fresh expression. If the same leader was reported as leading more than one fresh expression, they have been counted once for each fresh expression they led when calculating these percentages.
- xi See <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/resources-3/mission-shaped-introduction/>
- xii Philip J. Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (Darton Longman and Todd, 1998).
- xiii Ed Steven Croft, *Mission Shaped Questions* (CHP, 2008).
- xiv Claire Dalpra and John Vivian, *Who's There* (Church Army, 2016).
- xv The background to this can be found in Ed Steven Croft, *Mission Shaped Church* (CHP, 2009), pp. 120-123.

Contact details

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