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**Community Involvement as a Model of Mission**  
**for the Local Urban Church**

**A Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Theology**

**by**

**Andrew Martin Williams**

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**The Faculty of Divinity**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis attempts to answer the question 'Can community involvement be a model of mission for the local urban church?' The research is introduced with a discussion of the author's experience of church community involvement and the questions which arise from it. The changing social context of the Church in England and Scotland is outlined, before exploring recent developments in missiology and community involvement. The research methodology led to the exploration of mission through community involvement in two case studies of churches and their local communities. The case study research sought to be distinctive by listening primarily to people from the community speak about their perceptions of church community involvement. From analysis of this qualitative data, the key themes discovered in each case study are discussed and brought into dialogue with the author's questions and the literature on missiology and community involvement. The study concludes by pointing towards community involvement as a model of mission, whilst recognising that is an authentic and costly way of being the church in a local urban community. The author ends with some reflections on the implications of the research for personal practice in mission and ministry.

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# **Chapter One: Community Involvement and Mission**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis aims to explore the theology and practice of local church community involvement, and to consider the extent to which it may provide an authentic model of contemporary Christian mission for the local urban church. This exploration of church community involvement draws on the writer's own experience, the relevant literature on mission and community and the qualitative research carried out in two case studies. Subsequent chapters describe the design and results of the case study research and the final chapter discusses the main issues which arise from the thesis for community involvement as an appropriate model of mission.

This chapter describes the context of the thesis, beginning with the writer's experience, reflections and questions. Then the wider context of the Church in society is considered briefly, before exploring some key themes in the literature on community and mission which relate to the writer's questions about community involvement as an expression of mission.

## **1.2 Personal experience, reflections and key questions**

My earliest experience of church community involvement was as a member of Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church which is set in a large 1960's council estate on the eastern edge of Birmingham. Through a large multi-purpose church centre, a wide range of activities were offered for the local community as the Church sought to relate both socially and culturally to local people. This provision included a lunch club, coffee bar, play group and clubs for children and young people. There was a creative initiative to develop a nearby community hall as a youth centre, in partnership with local young people, but it was short-lived. This attempt at partnership with the community was different from the approach taken in the church centre where the activities were usually run by people from the church for the community.

Training for the Baptist ministry in Manchester facilitated contacts and placements with a variety of urban churches. It was here that I came into contact with churches who



opened their buildings for the use of community groups and projects. It was often the case that the church was represented on the management committee of such projects by one or two church members, but it was usually felt by the community that the church was little more than a landlord who collected the rent and was sympathetic at times of crisis. There were the usual tensions over shared space in the buildings and little interaction between the church and the community groups. I also did a placement with Mosscafe Housing Association which began as a Church initiative and has become a major provider of social housing in Moss Side. These were different church approaches to community involvement from the first at Chelmsley Wood.

I became the minister of Didsbury Baptist Church in south Manchester, a predominantly suburban setting, on the edge of the city boundary. A variety of community groups used the church building, but the relationship the church had with them was minimal and the church hoped to build on its community links. As minister, I helped the church to think through what was meant by mission, and the church embarked on a mission audit process entitled Action in Mission. This involved developing a profile of the local community and a profile of the church community. Each profile involved a questionnaire survey, with the aim of identifying opportunities and resources for mission. This was a demanding process for a working group and, mistakenly, the process continued alongside the general development of the church, and it took a number of years until it was completed, resulting in a report which made thirty eight recommendations for action.

During the lengthy process of working through the mission audit, the church became more open to community involvement and a number of forms of partnership developed. The Church became involved in the management of the play group as its parent charity. A 'Tools for Self Reliance' Project was established to refurbish old tools for partners in developing countries. The church and users of the building joined together in partnership to put on an Open and Fun Day for the neighbourhood to celebrate and promote all the activities which took place on the site. A partnership was also developing with the infant and junior schools next door to the church's building. My own work with people in the community revealed an openness towards the church when they encountered a positive and accepting attitude. Sometimes this led people to come to worship and occasionally it led to church membership.

There were practical benefits for the church and community groups which would not have been achieved without this degree of partnership. The church buildings were made more child friendly; the Open & Fun Day was offered to the community; the 'Tools for Self Reliance' volunteers willingly carried out repair work on the church building. More importantly, through these developments relationships were growing, and the church was demonstrating an interest in, and concern for, the lives of people in the community and this was slowly, but surely, recognised.

In reflecting on these experiences of mission and ministry, it seems to me that it is difficult for people in the church to enter into a sense of partnership with community groups. They can find it difficult to share the resource of the church building with others. Yet experience in the community suggests that there are people of good will who will readily enter into relationship, or partnership, with the church over matters of common concern, if they are accepted and made welcome. I recognise that a local church which is involved in its community can find itself with an expanding agenda which becomes difficult to meet with the time and resources available. A church can become dominated by its community involvement, perhaps losing sight of why it is involved and missing important opportunities because there is not adequate time or energy left for reflection. My own conviction has been that if the church is truly incarnational in its community by shaping its life and activity in response not only to the Gospel, but through a deep identification with people in their cultural, sociological, economic and spiritual context, then there will be a variety of responses, including some which lead to faith and church membership. Instances of this response of journeying towards faith have occurred in my experience of church community involvement, but they have been rare, usually among the older age groups and those who have retired, rather than with younger age groups. I have also thought of the friendships which can be established through community involvement as the relationships in which personal faith can be explored and in which invitations to further exploration and worship can be made. However, I think that in reality, few, church members or ministers, if any, have done this in practice.

It is these experiences, reflections and questions which have led me to explore in more detail whether community involvement can be an authentic model of mission for the local urban church. The key questions with which I began this thesis can be summarised as

follows. If community involvement is adopted as a model of mission by a local urban church:

- 1) How could the whole local church be open to partners from the community who do not share Christian faith?
- 2) How could the experience of involvement, and the perceptions received from the community, make a significant contribution to the transformation of the community, the church and its participation in mission?
- 3) How could it integrate appropriate opportunities to explore Christian discipleship?

The exploration of these questions is inevitably shaped by the context, not simply of any local church, but by the context of the Church in Britain, in the wider context of the Church in the West. This wider context provides the background in which this research takes place.

### **1.3 A Changing Social Context for the Church in Mission**

In England, the membership of the Church has been declining since the early years of the Twentieth Century. More recently, in 1996, the Guardian reported, 'Methodist Church faces "meltdown"'<sup>1</sup> in response to the publication of membership figures.

Between 1992 and 1995 there had been a 6.8% decrease in Methodist membership; attendance at worship had declined by 9.7%; the number of young people attending on a Sunday had fallen by 19.1%.<sup>2</sup>

In the Church of England, official figures revealed a similar decline.

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<sup>1</sup> The Guardian, 21 March 1996, 12 quoted by Philip Richter, *Gone but not forgotten*. Darton Longman and Todd, 1998 xi.

<sup>2</sup> Triennial statistical returns, in 'Minutes of Conference and Directory', Methodist Church Conference Office, 1996 61-70, Ibid., xi.

Average church attendance in 1995 was 3.3% lower than in 1994; attendance had dropped by 678 people each week, of whom 180 were under the age of sixteen.<sup>3</sup>

In Scotland, the Church fared better for the first half of the century, but people have been leaving the Church in significant numbers in the latter part of the century. The following figures provide one example.

In 1965 there were 1,248,000 Church of Scotland communicants... in 1995 the figure was 698000.<sup>4</sup>

This scale of numerical decline is reflected across Europe as 'an average of 7,500 people leave the Church every day.'<sup>5</sup> The dramatic growth of the Christian Church in other parts of the world provides a deep contrast with the situation of decline in Europe. This decline in church membership provides one perspective on the Church's crisis. The reduced influence and involvement of the Church in public life and policy making would provide another. However, a comprehensive analysis of the decline of the Church in Britain is not the purpose of this thesis, but it is noted as part of the context for this research.

The Church is increasingly aware of the perception that Western culture is in a period of paradigm change from the modern to the post-modern era. The new post-modern paradigm is still emerging and this process is characterised by great uncertainty. Belief in progress, that humankind could overcome the problems of life in the world through scientific, technological and economic development has evaporated. Whilst our achievements may be momentous, some of their bi-products have caused the ecological crisis and the growing gap between rich and poor. The assumptions of modernity have been found wanting and there is a search for new ways of understanding the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Church Statistics: parochial membership and finance statistics for January to December 1995. The Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>4</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, Edinburgh University Press, 1997, 161.

<sup>5</sup> David B. Barrett, *The Bulletin of International Missionary Research*, various editions, quoted by John Drane, *Faith in a Changing Culture*, Marshall Pickering, 1997, 22.

John Drane has effectively spelt out the far reaching implications of this paradigm shift for the Church.<sup>6</sup> The Church has been part and parcel of modernity and so is seen as part of the past, partly responsible for causing the present crisis, and therefore having no relevance for the present or future. This is born out by the way in which the increased interest in spirituality during the last decade or more has not led the new spiritual searchers into contact with the Christian churches. People in the broad spectrum of the New Age movement draw on many sources of religious and spiritual insight, but not Christianity. Morisy sums up the new situation;

The fact that we Christians have to face is that our convictions about the reality of God, and the symbols and concepts we use to express this awareness, have lost their claim to ultimate significance. No longer is it possible for one person to tell another what to believe. This is the reality of our post-Christian context but, so far, we in the churches have yet to discover an approach which takes account of this reality and has any claim to effectiveness.<sup>7</sup>

The combination of these factors is causing many theologians to consider the future of the Church and Christian mission in the West. Writers speak, for example, of 'creating'<sup>8</sup>, of 'reforming'<sup>9</sup> and of 'refounding'<sup>10</sup> the Church in our evolving culture. Change is inevitable, but what the future holds for the Church in Britain and how it should respond in this climate of uncertainty is unclear. This is the wider context of Church, society and Western culture in which community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church is considered.

### 1.3.1 Paradigm Shifts in Mission

David Bosch has drawn on paradigm theory to make a convincing argument that there have been paradigm shifts before where, 'each of them constituted the end of one world and the birth of another, in which much of what people used to think and do had to be redefined.'<sup>11</sup> He traces how these earlier shifts influenced the thinking and practice of

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<sup>6</sup> John Drane, *Faith in a Changing Culture*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan*, Mowbray, 1997, 2.

<sup>8</sup> John Drane, *Faith in a Changing Culture*.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the future*, SPCK, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthling the Gospel*, Orbis, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, 1991, 4.

mission as the church responded imaginatively to paradigm changes. He suggests that, for too long, the Church in the West has had a 'crisis-free existence', and that now we are 'back to normal', because we are in crisis again. The crisis may be seen as the beginning of disaster for the church, but Bosch presents it as an opportunity to be met with imagination as the church faces a new paradigm.

To encounter crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the church...crisis is therefore not the end of opportunity but in reality only its beginning, the point where danger and opportunity meet.<sup>12</sup>

In 'Transforming Mission', Bosch identifies a number of elements in what he terms 'an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm'. Four of these elements are discussed in this chapter. The first is the *missio Dei*. In 1932 Karl Barth claimed that mission was an activity of God, and this developed into a new understanding of the classical doctrine of the *missio Dei*, in which mission is seen as an attribute of God rather than as an activity of the Church. God is the missionary God. The Church exists because of God's mission and may participate in it, but mission is God's.<sup>13</sup> The other three elements of Bosch's emerging missionary paradigm which are discussed here are Mission as the Church-With-Others, Mission as Contextualization and Mission as Liberation. The following section (1.4) explores the relationship between the theology and practice of community involvement and these three aspects of mission. The three remaining sections of the chapter will each explore the theme of one of the key questions which was identified at the end of (1.2) in relation to the literature on community involvement and mission. These are partnership, transformation and the integration of human and community development with opportunities to explore Christian discipleship.

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<sup>12</sup> David J. Bosch, 3.

<sup>13</sup> See David J. Bosch, 389-393.

## **1.4 Community Involvement and Contextual Mission**

### **1.4.1 Mission as the Church-With-Others**

Mission as the Church-With-Others is the first element in Bosch's emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm. During this century, there has been a growing recognition that mission is not simply a task which missionaries are sent to do in other parts of the world. Rather, mission is the defining purpose of the Church in every part of the world, and in each context in which the Church is expressed as a local church. Thus the task of the local church is not only to offer ministry, but to engage in mission in the place in which it is set. So mission is no longer to be seen as the sole responsibility of the missionary society, or the mission department at denominational head office, or the para-church organisation. Mission is the task of the whole Church, in partnership, but, if it has any meaning and practice, it must find expression through the life of the local church. 'The church-in-mission is, primarily, the local church everywhere in the world.'<sup>14</sup> The local church has been rediscovered as the primary agent of mission and 'this constitutes a decisive advance over positions that had been in vogue for many centuries.'<sup>15</sup>

The well known quote of Archbishop William Temple that, 'the church is the only society in the world which exists for the sake of those who are not members of it' had its classical origin in Bonhoeffer's concept of 'the church for others', sharing in 'the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving'.<sup>16</sup> Sundermeier criticised the 'for others' notion on the grounds that it claimed to know what others needed, and he modified it to 'the church with others'. The life and work of this church is oriented towards God's love and purpose for the salvation of the world through the Kingdom of God. Crum sees this church like an ellipse with two foci. The first acknowledges the source of its life emphasizing worship and prayer. The second provides a focus through which the church engages with the world emphasizing service, mission and evangelism. In this way the church's identity sustains its relevance and involvement.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David J. Bosch, 378.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Bosch, 381.

<sup>16</sup> William Temple, quoted by David J. Bosch, 375.

<sup>17</sup> See David J. Bosch, 385.

A different analysis of the task of mission has been put forward by Newbigin who challenged the notion of the secular society as a myth, 'an unproven belief accepted uncritically to justify a social institution.'<sup>18</sup> He claims that what has come into being is 'not a secular society but a pagan society, not a society devoid of public images but a society which worships gods which are not God.'<sup>19</sup> Christianity must seek to expose this and to offer the Gospel, not simply for private belief, but as public truth by which society can be given coherence and direction. This sounds a warning against the church aligning itself too closely with the agenda of the world. Newbigin calls for a church that is fully open to the needs of the world and yet has its eyes fixed on God. How can this be achieved? By a congregation who believe it and live by it. This is the only hermeneutic of the Gospel.

The movement towards missionary congregations gained added impetus in 1989 when the Conference of European Churches and the mission section of the World Council of Churches initiated a long term process of promoting 'missionary congregations in a secularized Europe'. In this way, the congregation is called to be a sign of the *missio Dei* in accepting responsibility for mission, by crossing social, cultural and economic boundaries. In so doing, the missionary congregation itself undergoes a conversion of faith which integrates justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It acts as an advocate for the marginalised and works at a sustainable counter-culture.

The church can exist as a healing community concerned for spirituality and human needs, only if it takes its own context and environment seriously and works creatively and imaginatively in the local situation...the first step is always the same: a congregation allows itself to be provoked by the situation of the people in its own context.<sup>20</sup>

If the local church, as a missionary congregation, is the Church-With-Others, then 'the others' are those who are in the locality of the church. This emphasis on the importance of the local, and the local church in mission being provoked by its own context, has

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<sup>18</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Eerdmans & WCC, 1989, 211.

<sup>19</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, 211.

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Carlos de Melo Magalhães, 'Not a Dream Church, but Churches with Dreams', 'in'. *Hear What The Spirit says to the Churches*, ed. Gerhard Linn, WCC, 1994, 119.



gained further impetus from the recognition of the significance of local culture for theology and mission, through contextualization.

#### 1.4.2 Mission as Contextualization

Mission as Contextualization is another element of Bosch's emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm in which he points out the recent recognition of the contextual nature of both theology and mission.

From the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life of the world of those who had embraced it. It is, however, only fairly recently that this essentially contextual nature of the faith has been recognised.<sup>21</sup>

Contextual theology uses a hermeneutical cycle which begins with experience of life in the world, which, for many, is an experience of marginalisation and poverty. From experience the cycle moves to reflection and then, in the light of reflection, to action which, in turn, becomes new experience for reflection. The contextualization of mission involves the construction of local theologies. Making the local the starting place for mission, and for theology, is increasingly seen as an appropriate response to the fragmentation now so characteristic of the world. In his work on local theology, Reader quotes David Tracy's identification of the need to accept the particularity of a context.

The need to give up the quest for an illusory ahistorical certainty and live the quest for a situated understanding of the Christian tradition in a particular place and time.<sup>22</sup>

Schreier identifies three principal roots which must interact with one another in the growth of a local theology. These are the Gospel, the Church and the Culture, where the Culture is defined as the 'concrete context';

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<sup>21</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 421.

<sup>22</sup> David Tracy, quoted by, John Reader, *Local Theology*, SPCK, 1994, 3.

It represents a way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols and meanings, reaching out with hopes and dreams, often struggling for a better world. Without a sensitivity to the cultural context, a church and its theology either become a vehicle for outside domination or lapse into docetism, as though its Lord never became flesh.<sup>23</sup>

Schreiter's ideal starting point for developing a contextual local theology is by opening the culture. This is a long and careful listening to a culture to discover its principal values, needs, interests, directions and symbols. The context determines the most appropriate kind of approach which he categorises as materialist, functionalist or semiotic. It is only by trying to catch the sense of a culture holistically, in all its complexity, that a truly responsive local theology can be developed. In this listening, part of the task is to identify Christ's activity in the culture. From analysis of the culture, culture texts develop which contain the themes that are the cultural nucleus around which a local theology develops. These are brought into an encounter with the Christian tradition which is to be seen as a series of local theologies. These local theologies of the tradition are sifted to find those which are parallel with the local themes or needs in either content, context, or form, or all three. Through bringing the tradition into dialogue with the local themes and needs, a local theology is developed.

Schreiter distinguishes between Ethnographic approaches and Liberation approaches in constructing contextual local theologies.<sup>24</sup> Ethnographic approaches are concerned with cultural identity, often re-constructing an identity which has been denied. Liberation approaches are concerned with the dynamics of social change in human societies and are therefore highly relevant to considering the social realities of urban life.

#### 1.4.3 A Liberation Approach to Local Theology

Liberation Theology is a form of Contextual Theology which developed in third world contexts, and which is increasingly found in third world contexts in the first world. It grew out of the struggle of the poor in Latin America, and their realisation that Western development would not overcome the unjust oppression under which people lived.

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<sup>23</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, SCM, 1985, 21.

Structural injustice and exploitation had to be understood from the perspective of the poor. The Church is therefore called to express God's preferential option for the poor by doing theology which begins with their experience of life. In this sense it has been called 'theology from below', and it is from below that the process of liberation is initiated.

Liberation theology emphasises the central role of practice, or what has been termed 'praxis', which is 'doing the truth'. Gutierrez writes;

'To do the truth,' as the Gospel says, thus acquires a precise and concrete meaning in terms of the importance of action in Christian life...only by doing this truth will our faith be 'verified', in the etymological sense of the word.<sup>25</sup>

From this notion, the term orthopraxis has been derived to balance, and even reject, the Christian pre-occupation with doctrine which is suggested by the term orthodoxy.

The intention, however, is not to deny the meaning of orthodoxy, understood as a proclamation of and reflection on statements considered to be true...The intention is to recognize the work and importance of concrete behaviour, of deeds, of action, of praxis in the Christian life.<sup>26</sup>

This emphasis on praxis and orthopraxis in Liberation Theology connects with the emphasis on action by the church in the local community. The actions of the Church in the community need to show the Gospel in ways that can be seen and experienced, and which contribute to the liberation of people and their communities. This is not to deny the importance of the Gospel as a message which can be spoken or read. It is to argue that the truth of the Gospel is to be found in actions and words, and to recognize that actions can speak louder.

Having considered these developments in approaching mission and theology, the task is now to see how community involvement relates to these elements of the emerging

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<sup>24</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, 12f.

<sup>25</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, 1973, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, 8.

ecumenical missionary paradigm. This begins by considering the notion of 'community' as an expression of local culture.

#### 1.4.4 The Notion of Community

It is difficult to define the meaning of the term 'community'. In popular use it can be applied to people living in a district, or to a group of people living together, or to ethnic and religious groups, or to whole sections of society, for example, 'the business community'. This ambiguity in popular use, is no less in the social sciences.

The concept of community has been one of the most compelling and attractive themes in modern social science, and at the same time one of the most elusive to define... It provides both a means of encompassing a wide variety of social processes and an idea which has much more than simply technical meaning, for it refers to symbols, values and ideologies which have popular currency. People manifestly believe in the notion of community, either as ideal or reality, and sometimes as both simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

Ballard suggests that the language about community works on three different levels simultaneously and this leads to confusion. First, descriptive language seeks to describe what happens in a locality or other area of concern. Second, feeling language expresses the sense of belonging, of 'community spirit'.

People find their identity, purpose and support in various structures that are emotionally important... Such a sense of identity may or may not be related to a specific place. It can be found in an organisation like a church or school or club. Others find it in structures, like professional associations, that transcend locality.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Hamilton, quoted by Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Ellis Horwood, 1985, 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ballard, 'Considering Community', 'in' *Issues in Church Related Community Work*, ed. Paul Ballard, University of Wales, 1990, 86.

Third, is the language of obligation which expresses that human beings ought to live in community. He quotes Newby to illustrate this point.

The yearning for community often represents not so much a carefully weighed assessment of current social developments as a gut feeling that the quality of life in the contemporary world leaves much to be desired.<sup>29</sup>

Ballard suggests that the confusion of these levels of language about community have contributed to the widespread assumption that modern, urbanised, industrial society has lost its sense of community. This arose, in large part, from the attempts of many of the early sociologists, such as Marx, Toennies and Weber, and Wirth, to account for the manifest differences between pre-industrial and industrialised society. Ballard challenges this as a false myth, claiming that there are real forms of community in the city.

The urban village, often formed out of common industrial or migratory experience, is real and rich. Pubs, corner shop, chapel or school provide real foci of community. Furthermore, even in conditions that would seem totally unsupportive of community, such as the production line, it is well known that real community structures emerge. It would seem that human beings are community creating beings.<sup>30</sup>

There are forms of community in the city, but Ballard's foci of community are reducing in number in urban contexts. Pubs, corner shops and chapels are all vulnerable to closure on the grounds of viability. Schools are being rationalised into larger units that relate to more than one locality. The loss of some of the traditional foci of community life have an impact on what can be expressed through Ballard's 'descriptive' level of language about community. This may mean that, at the 'feeling' level of language, there is a sense of loss of community spirit which intensifies the longing and language of 'obligation'. This does not necessarily indicate the terminal decline of community.

It must be recognised that in a society which is increasingly mobile and which has a variety of methods of communication, people can, partially or wholly, create their feeling

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<sup>29</sup> Newby, *Introducing Sociology*, quoted by Paul Ballard, *Issues in Church Related Community Work*, 86.

of community outside their locality. The forms and patterns of community life are changing and some are dying. Such changes can lead to conflict in communities such as those identified by John Reader, between 'locals' and 'newcomers', who have different ways of life in terms of working patterns, standards of living, family and social relationships, and expectations of local community life.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the problems of community are perennial and constantly have to be worked on. Community, real and potential, is present in urban neighbourhoods, but some new forms may be needed to replace those which are dying. While the forms and patterns of community life are changing, the yearning for community, reflected in the language of 'obligation', still expresses an important need to belong. Whilst non-geographic forms of community must be recognised and inevitably embraced, people need ways of relating to those who live around them. Sophisticated communication systems cannot replace the real presence of relating to other human beings. People are not to become isolated, individual units, competing and consuming in the market place. Furthermore, the situation of the urban poor and marginalised means that their access to modern communications, and their mobility, is much more limited than more affluent sectors of the population. There must be local expressions of what it means to be human together. 'Community' remains a meaningful way of symbolising the inter-relations of local people.

Ballard may be right in suggesting that human beings are community creating beings, but in order to create community, people need sufficient human contact to develop relationships from which community can emerge. In an individualistic society where people live in smaller households, where an increasing proportion live alone, and where the home is increasingly a centre of recreation, people have less 'natural' opportunity to meet, relate and create community at the local level. In this context it seems that there is an increasing need to recognise the remaining forms of community, and to facilitate the development of new expressions of community. This is where the scope lies for the church involvement with the local community. One aspect of this research is to explore how the community involvement of the church could bring people together in shared concerns about life in their locality.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Ballard, 'Considering Community', in *Issues in Church Related Community Work*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> See John Reader, *Local Theology*, 50-52.

#### 1.4.5 Church Community Involvement

Recognising the contextual nature of mission and theology, the fragmentation of community life, and the local church as a primary agent of mission, this thesis argues that community involvement can be an appropriate contemporary expression of mission.

In a book which relates stories of church based community work, Paul Ballard reflects on the significance of community involvement as an expression of faith. Like the theology of contextual mission, he affirms that God is already present in human life and community. He quotes from a paper by the Community Development Group of the William Temple Foundation.

Faith proclaims at its very heart the incredible possibility that God through Christ is involved and committed to the actualities of human existence as men and women experience them. Community involvement consequently forms one of the principal arenas in contemporary society for the practice of Christian belief and discipleship.<sup>32</sup>

David McAdam reflects on the incarnational approach of contextual mission in making his case for church community involvement. He argues that the pattern of church life must follow the pattern of the life of Christ in incarnation and servant-hood, with the Kingdom as the ultimate goal.

That God became human in order to redeem the world is not incidental to the gospel but of its essence (Heb. 5:5ff.) In the incarnation God speaks to us in and through the situation and experience of human people.<sup>33</sup>

McAdam argues that, for Christ, the incarnation meant participation in the particularity of Jewish life under Roman occupation along with its living conditions, limitations and disciplines. So, for the community of Christ, participation in his life demands the same identification and involvement with a specific human situation. As the incarnation led Christ to the acceptance of suffering with those on the margins of society, so the church

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<sup>32</sup> The Community Development Group, *Involvement in Community*, William Temple Foundation, 1980, 21.

must accept the pain and hurt of the human history in which it takes root and be involved in every part of human life. This sense of the Church belonging in the world is echoed in the World Council of Churches work on the Church-with-Others.

The Church must not think it can separate itself from the world, nor must it segregate itself within a position of spiritual pride. The Church can only be the true Church when it knows that it is part of the world which God loves and to which he reveals his love.<sup>34</sup>

This section has demonstrated that the concept of church community involvement has the potential to be consistent with three elements of the emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm identified by David Bosch. These elements are mission as the church-with-others, as contextualization and as liberation. The contemporary notion of 'community' as a local phenomenon has been explored with the conclusion that it remains a valid, contemporary symbol of life for urban dwellers. The remaining three sections of the chapter explore community involvement as a potential model of urban mission from the perspective of the three key questions raised in section 1.2. These are the themes of partnership, transformation and the integration of human, community and faith development.

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<sup>33</sup> David McAdam, *The Church and Community Involvement*, Handsel, 1992, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Norman Thomas, *Readings in World Mission*, SPCK, 1995, 90-91.



## **1.5. Partnership**

This section addresses the following key question. How could the whole of the local church be open to partners from the community who do not share Christian faith? Partnership with people who are not members of the church is an issue which often arises for churches which become involved in their communities. People may want to join in and work alongside the church in a particular community project, or a church which is recognised for its community involvement might be invited to form a partnership with another organisation. A church may want to invite local people to participate in its community work. There are issues here about power and control, Christian identity, and attitudes to non-church people and culture. These are shaped to some extent by theological understanding. How a church community perceives the presence and activity of God in the world is likely to be influential. The perspective of the Church-with-others includes an understanding of God with others.

When the Church is aware that the presence and activity of God are not only manifest in itself, it will be constantly vigilant to discern any signs whereby God makes himself known to the world. There is no true Church without a humble dialogue with non-Christians or without fellowship with them. In this dialogue, the role of the Church is that of a partner ready to listen and receive.<sup>35</sup>

Here some approaches to partnership with people and organisations, who are not part of the church, are explored.

### **1.5.1 A Common Agenda for Partnership**

The concept of partnership is central to Raymond Fung's ecumenical strategy for congregational evangelism, known as the Isaiah Vision. The vision takes its agenda from Isaiah 65: 20-23;

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<sup>35</sup> Norman Thomas, *Readings in World Mission*, 90-91.

that children do not die; that old people live in dignity; that those who build houses live in them and those who plant vineyards eat the fruit.<sup>36</sup>

This is offered as a simple, minimal, partial and relevant vision of God's intention for human community that is shared by many people, groups, institutions and faiths. The first element of the strategy is that the church invites others to become partners in taking up the agenda. The Church is to see itself, and declare itself, as a partner with the people in the community on the following basis.

Partners are equals. Partners know their limits and limitations, recognizing the share they are bound to contribute. A partner expects other partners to give their fair share. A partner knows that without others, he or she cannot succeed. A partner does not do things for other partners. They do things together. Partners share gain and loss. They share joy and sorrow.<sup>37</sup>

The Isaiah vision is helpful in suggesting that partners from beyond the church can share a common agenda which can be pursued collaboratively. This is breaking down a commonly perceived boundary. It shows that the Church is willing to share power and control in its community involvement and to receive the work and insight of those who do not share Christian faith. This theme of the need to cross the boundary between church and community and establish a common agenda, comes through repeatedly from authors concerned with church involvement in the community. Where it is done, it can change relationships, whether or not they become formal partnerships. For example, James Dunn, referring to the divisions in the parable of the Good Samaritan as racial, social, religious and political, points to the significance of putting this into practice.

Practical projects, by their very nature, transcend and neutralize such divisions, for people are brought together to share a priority concern for community; and community is a central expression of the kingdom. If community is once given the leading edge, then real challenges emerge to the way people, groups and institutions actually perform.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision*, WCC, 1992, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> James Dunn, ed., *The Kingdom of God and the North-East of England*, SCM, 1986, 77.

John Taylor writes,

The service we give may be outwardly indistinguishable from that of others and we shall often find ourselves bettered by strange fellow-workers, but what makes an act Christian is its derivation, overt or implicit, from the nature of God.<sup>39</sup>

If people from church and community can be brought together around common community concern, boundaries are broken down and new shared experience is created.

This is also crucial for Ann Morisy who has drawn on the concept of partnership in the Isaiah Vision and is inspired by the same parable as Dunn in her book 'Beyond the Good Samaritan'.

The challenge is for churches and Christians to become more purposeful in crossing boundaries between people.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.5.2 Stakeholder Partnership

Changing the concept of the boundary between church and community is also vital to John Drane's model of the 'Stakeholder Church'. Stakeholders can be thought of as all those, inside and outside an organisation, who are directly affected by what it does. In terms of church, stakeholders might be church members, their friends and relatives, youth groups, Sunday Schools, clergy, lay leaders, people's work contacts, groups like 'parent and toddlers' and the general public. In this model the church identifies other people working in the community with a concern to meet the needs of the same people as the church. They might be shop owners, social workers, dentists, doctors or whoever seem to be the 'movers and shakers' in a community. The church approaches these people to enquire how they think Christians might be able to help in meeting the needs of the people in the community. The church may then enter into a sense of partnership with

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<sup>39</sup> John Taylor, 'Conversion to the World', in 'The Parish Church', ed. Giles Ecclestone, Mowbray, 1988, 132.

<sup>40</sup> Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan*, xiii.

them, becoming a stakeholder in what they are doing, and they become stakeholders in what the church is doing.

Drane has drawn on the thinking of Charles Handy and quotes Handy's view that even the stakeholder model will soon be forced towards a more genuine sense of community ownership and accountability.

In order to give proper expression to the ideas of stakeholders and community the power of ownership will not reside in the centre but in the parts...making the centre truly the servant of the whole, not the master of it.<sup>41</sup>

Drane comments,

For Christians to grasp that would require a major change in our present attitudes to non-church culture, as well as (encouragingly) a return to some fundamental values espoused by Jesus.<sup>42</sup>

The strength of the stakeholder model is that it is genuinely incarnational and it does not assume that it knows what people need. It listens to the experience and insight of others and, where appropriate, enters into partnerships where, as Drane point out, relationships of mutual trust and understanding can grow;

It might be regarded as doctrinally weak because it networks into the community, its structures are flexible, and it is geared towards building bridges to people who are not yet believers.<sup>43</sup>

The stakeholder model offers a creative way in which the local church can establish and develop community involvement. In making partnerships and alliances with the 'movers and shakers' in a community, a local church could play a significant role. It offers the community a sense of partnership and some ownership of the local church, while the church benefits from stake-holding partnership in the community.

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<sup>41</sup> John Drane, *Faith in a Changing Culture*, 240.

<sup>42</sup> John Drane, 240.

<sup>43</sup> John Drane, 164.

Some ministers, as leaders, are unlikely to embrace the openness required for partnership due to a certain rigidity in their theological perspective and affiliation. A major objection to entering into partnership with the community is that it may dilute the Christian identity of the Church and its members. However, it must be doubted whether such weak Christian identity is worth preserving. Part of the problem of Christian identity is that it needs to change and the more open approach of partnership could help this develop. More seriously, it points to the 'identity-involvement dilemma' referred to by Moltmann.

It is of the essence of the Christian faith that, from its birth, it again and again had to seek, on the one hand how to be relevant to and involved in the world and, on the other, how to maintain its identity in Christ. These two are never unrelated; neither are they the same.<sup>44</sup>

However, it seems that, at the present time, it is the hand of relevance and involvement which most needs to be strengthened. John Taylor makes a telling comment which identifies the plight of the contemporary church in Britain.

The Church's most important duty is to be present in the world in the knowledge that any loss of contact with it is disobedience to God's will and leads to the destruction of the Church itself.<sup>45</sup>

Partnership, with non-church people and organisations, offers the opportunity of sharing the workload, changing relationships and sharing resources. Inevitably, tension and conflict with partners may arise. The advantages and tensions of partnership, and how churches can accept such partnership, will feature in the case studies.

## **1.6 Transformation**

This section addresses the following key question in relation to community involvement. How could the experience of involvement, and the perceptions received from the community, make a significant contribution to the transformation of the community, the

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<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, quoted by, David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427.

church and its participation in mission? This question will be addressed partly through the case study research and partly through the literature.

#### 1.6.1 Towards the transformation of local community.

Drane's 'Stakeholder' model certainly provides scope for church participation and stakeholding in community life. However, it seems to assume an easy compatibility between the local church and the local community. It recreates the concept of the 'parish church' along with the weakness that it does its business with the significant and powerful, the 'movers and shakers', in the local community. The danger of this is that the church finds itself drawn, however subtly, into supporting the values and practices of those who hold power in the community, at the possible cost of critical and prophetic freedom. It may well be that the church needs to challenge the role played by the movers and shakers and the interests which they represent in the community. Where is the voice of the poor and powerless to be heard in the stakeholder model? It may be that it can only be heard second hand through the interpretation of the providers of services in the community. The great strength and attraction of this model is that it seems to offer a fast track route to community involvement, but its method will tend to align the Church with the powerful, rather than enabling it to identify the deeper, structural issues which shape the life of a community, and which need to be engaged for transformation to take place.

The strategy of Community Ministry and Mission, developed by Ann Morisy, is designed to facilitate experiences through community involvement which provide the stimulation to re-shape conventional Christian thinking and practice about the church and society. Involving people in their community, whether primarily as givers or receivers of care, is for Morisy, a recovery of an emphasis in mission.

Community ministry provides a way of retrieving an important and neglected aspect of the churches' mission, that of calling out people's involvement in their community and, through this, enabling them to embrace a struggle wider than their own.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Norman Thomas, *Readings in World Mission*, 90-91.

<sup>46</sup> Ann Morisy, 10.

Morisy identifies 'the mysterious place of the poor in the purposes of God'.<sup>47</sup> Being alongside them can be a place to encounter God as they open the eyes of those whose lives have been largely protected from harshness and enable them to grasp the radical Kingdom reversals of the Gospel.

Community ministry borrows this insight from Liberation Theology, where it is the poor and dispossessed who preach the Gospel, in its fullest sense, to the rich and powerful. It is the poor and oppressed who are likely to be the first to recognize the radical 'upside-down' nature of the Kingdom of God, whereas those of us who benefit from the taken-for-granted 'ways of the world' are likely to have the greatest investment in the *status quo*.<sup>48</sup>

If people respond to the call to embrace a struggle wider than their own in the community, and if, through it, they are challenged by relating to the marginalized, then seeds of transformation will be sown.

#### 1.6.2 Towards the transformation of the church

Drane's 'Stakeholder' model requires the openness of the church to receive from partners and the community, so that the church can be evangelised by the community. Drane comments on the evangelistic implications;

The difference between the traditional model and the stakeholder model is the difference between a church still trying to package and market a religious product which people may take if they want (they typically don't), and offering the gospel - which will change us as well as them.<sup>49</sup>

The concept of the missionary congregation centres on God's love for the world, and that the congregation express this love for the world. In loving the world, the missionary congregation is re-shaped by its engagement with the world.

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<sup>47</sup> Ann Morisy, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ann Morisy, 8.

<sup>49</sup> John Drane.

Orientation towards the world and openness to it are essential before any new patterns may be evolved to replace traditional structures.<sup>50</sup>

Letty Russell suggests that this points to an 'open ecclesiology' which investigates the variety of possible shapes that the church might take. It begins 'with the function of participation and moves from there to understanding the form and nature of the church'.<sup>51</sup> A possible model for a community of faith is one of an open circle, based on the metaphor of a round kitchen table as a place of hospitality, which Russell has developed as 'Church in the Round'.

Because Christ is present in the world, especially among those who are neglected, oppressed and marginalized, the round table is also connected to the margins of both church and society, always welcoming the stranger to the feast or sharing the feast where the "others" gather.<sup>52</sup>

Each writer suggests that it is through engaging with the Gospel in the world, that the church will discover new forms and patterns of life.

### 1.6.3 Towards the transformation of mission

Historically, the 'parish church model' served the Church and local communities very effectively, despite its weaknesses. The Grubb Institute initiated a process which was set up to consider the future of the parish church, or, as defined in their work, the 'communal' church as distinct from the 'associational' church. As a contributor to the process, John Taylor, argues that the Church's problem in the West is not its context, but uncertainty about its task. God's purpose in Christ is not to save the Church, but to save the world. Therefore he opts for a style of local church life with the community, and not merely the congregation, as the object of its concern. He identifies the task of the Church as follows:

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<sup>50</sup> Norman Thomas, *Readings in World Mission*, 90-91.

<sup>51</sup> Letty Russell, 'Open Ecclesiology', in, *Readings in World Mission*, Norman Thomas ed. 93.

<sup>52</sup> Letty Russell, *Church in the Round*. Westminster/John Knox, 1993, 18.



All we are called to offer is the insight into what a human community might become and the way in which it might achieve this which we derive from our relationship with God in Christ.<sup>53</sup>

He sees the Church's service to the world as witness, in that it always has something to say about God which is not generally recognised and, in so doing, the Church reveals something about the human community and its true reality which has not been generally recognised. He calls for the clergy and laity to be converted to the world, by the congregation taking up responsibility for mission to the community of which it is part.

Morisy's approach to community ministry and mission is based on the assumption that the 'givers' of care, who may often live in relative comfort, will receive from those to whom they give care. Referring to the parable of the Sheep and the Goats she writes,

It is likely that those in need will be the means of conversion of those who show concern for their needs. In our post-Christian, post industrial society it may be that the secure are likely to receive most from an encounter with the poor and marginalized... Might it really be that in ministering to those in need we increase the possibility of an encounter with Jesus? I have to confess that this is the conclusion I reach when I assess my own journey as a Christian. Being alongside the poor has kept my faith alive and has deepened it.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, part of the significance of community ministry is that it enables Christians to live a more authentic discipleship by expressing 'venturesome love' and, 'to engage with issues relating to the Kingdom of God, rather than activities associated with the maintenance of the Church and the dominant value system of society'.<sup>55</sup>

There are signs that church community involvement could contribute to the transformation of the community, the church and its mission. It is likely that change in any one of these will effect change in the others. These issues will be explored further in the case studies.

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<sup>53</sup> John Taylor, *'Conversion to the World'*, 'in' *The Parish Church*, ed. Giles Ecclestone, 132.

<sup>54</sup> Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan*, 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

## **1.7 Community Involvement and Christian discipleship**

This section begins to explore the following key question. How can community involvement integrate appropriate opportunities to explore Christian discipleship? Hall reflects on his experience of urban mission and ministry of more than twenty years in an urban context, and argues for commitment to community work and evangelism, but that they should be kept quite separate. They should not be integrated.

It is important that when we blend, we truly blend, and that when we distinguish, we truly distinguish. By this we mean that we should be honestly concerned for the community and not be involved for our own more uniquely Christian concerns...discouraged and oppressed peoples can tell in a minute when we have ulterior motives; they have dealt with those "other agenda" people all their lives. Our concern for the people and our community needs to be genuine.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to Hall, Raymond Fung's second and third elements of strategy in the Isaiah Vision are that the church invites partners and contacts to join them in worship and that partners and contacts are invited to consider discipleship. He argues that in genuine partnership, partners explain their convictions to each other honestly and humbly. They are answerable to one another, mutually accountable. It is through the relationship and activity of partnership in the Isaiah agenda that equal and trusting relationships are built up and in which appropriate opportunities can be taken to invite partners to relevant worship and to consider discipleship.

The contrast seems to suggest that Hall's community involvement is on the basis of working for people, whereas Fung's is working with people who have responded to an invitation of partnership.

Morisy seeks to integrate Christian witness with community ministry to enable people of 'half faith' and 'no faith' to articulate and think about their experience in relation to God, which may lead to an understanding of, or encounter with, God. This is seen as the task of mission, encouraging people to 'do business with God' and contribute to God's

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<sup>56</sup> Douglas Hall, 'The Church and Its Community', *Urban Mission*, November 1986, 40.

purposes for humankind. This is quite different from encouraging people to come to church and worship on Sundays. She claims that, in embracing care and concern in community involvement, the Church has missed a lot of other positive features. These positive features, which include, taking Christian faith seriously, linking with pastoral care and creating apt liturgies, are to be promoted in Community Ministry.

Morisy's Community Ministry offers a well thought out, strategic, mission model based on community involvement. The crucial addition on which the model will stand or fall is that of the vital element of reflection. Do local churches have the great skills needed to do this with Christians and non-Christians alike? Will people from the community who are interested in giving their practical help be willing to meet with others to reflect? The strategy does not offer a great deal of help as to how this could be facilitated. Does this suggest that the emphasis on reflection is something of a good idea which has a limited basis in experience?

Both Fung and Morisy challenge the criticism that to invite community partners and those in need to consider aspects of Christian faith is an insensitive denial of partnership and an abuse of the relationship which has been established. Morisy concedes a legitimate ethical aspect to this concern, but presses the case for going further.

The challenge is to devise a model of community involvement which allows us to be open about the potent contribution of the Christian Gospel and the experience that faith has played in our own lives, without abusing a sensitively established relationship with those who are vulnerable and who, for the most part, already have to dance to other people's tunes. The fundamental issue which those who take this line must address is whether they believe faith makes a difference to a person's and a community's well being. If the answer is 'yes', any resulting theory of mission which is adopted must take account of this. To respond only to people's social welfare needs, when the Christian faith is assessed as having played a profound role in one's own well-being, is oddly inconsistent.<sup>57</sup>

Morisy's challenge, to work towards a model of community involvement, is one to which she has responded and to which this thesis also seeks to respond. However, this will

have to be a model which has a much greater integrity to it than using community involvement like bait for evangelism. If that were the only option, Hall would be right. What is needed is a holistic model which embraces personal and community transformation in social, spiritual and political terms, consistent with Gospel.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the personal and wider context from which this research was initiated. It has been shown that the local community could provide an appropriate context for putting into practice recent developments in aspects of missiology and theology. The emphasis on the local church's participation in mission in the world means that the community involvement of the local church can be a contextual, local, participation in the *missio Dei*. Three key questions have been drawn out from the writer's reflections on community involvement. These are concerned with partnership, transformation and exploration of Christian discipleship and each have been introduced and explored. This has prepared the way for deeper exploration of these issues in the case study research which is described in the next chapter.

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<sup>57</sup> Ann Morsiy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan*, 6.

## **Chapter Two: Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The hypothesis that community involvement can be an authentic model of Christian mission for the local urban church was deduced from theological and community development theory. It drew partial empirical support from the writer's experience of training for local church ministry and then working as a practitioner. The purpose of this chapter is to describe how this hypothesis, with the theoretical and experiential issues about community involvement and mission, were transformed into operational concepts and made operational for the purposes of research.

Most of the chapter is concerned with explaining the design of the research, which is followed by a brief consideration of ethical issues and the role of the researcher. The last part of the chapter provides two profiles which introduce the two contexts in which the research was carried out.

### **2.2 Research Design**

Research design is a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed.<sup>58</sup>

The aim of this research was to discover how people, who had come into contact, or relationship, with the church through its community involvement, perceived and understood the church's involvement in the community. This aim suggested a qualitative research strategy which would enable the perceptions and understanding of relationships to be explored. The research envisaged in this thesis is directly relevant to two of the three goals of qualitative research suggested by Ragin. One goal is, 'Giving Voice'<sup>59</sup> to groups who lack a voice in society, and whose voices are rarely heard by mainstream audiences. This research aims to give a voice to those who are on the edge of the life of

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<sup>58</sup> Charles C. Ragin, *Constructing Social Research*, Pine Forge Press, 1994, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Charles C. Ragin, 83.

the Church through community involvement and whose voices are not normally heard by the mainstream Church. Another goal is 'Advancing Theory; in-depth knowledge - the kind that comes from case studies - provides especially rich raw material for advancing theoretical ideas.'<sup>60</sup>

The complexity of exploring relationships and perceptions pointed towards the study of one or two cases of church community involvement where the practical approach, implications and responses of people from the community could be explored in some depth. Bell affirms the use of case-study for researching this kind of situation.

The great strength of the case-study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. These processes may remain hidden in a large scale survey but may be crucial to the success or failure of systems or organizations.<sup>61</sup>

As the writer was seeking pointers towards a theology of community involvement which could be taken into his ministry and developed in the context of a new appointment in a local church, it was decided not to limit the research to the study of a single case. However, the need for a depth of study, combined with the limitations of time, suggested that two case studies, along with the writer's experience of church community involvement, would provide a sufficient breadth of research. The churches to be studied needed to have made a major commitment to community involvement as participation in mission which they were working out in practice. The focus of the case study research was not to be primarily on the churches, but rather on the views of people from the community who had become involved.

Church community involvement raises issues about the kind, quality and purpose of the relationships which develop between people from the church and people from the community. These issues were used in helping to develop 'initial, sensitizing concepts', which Ragin says 'are often drawn from half-formed, tentative analytic frames, which

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<sup>60</sup> Charles C. Ragin, 84.

<sup>61</sup> Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, Open University Press, 1993, 8.

typically reflect current theoretical ideas.<sup>62</sup> These may alter, or be discarded, in the course of research, but they are used to guide the early stages of the investigation. They were as follows:

The understanding and perception of relationships between people from church and community.

The problems and tensions between church and community and their representatives.

The ways in which the community involvement of the Church is received, perceived and understood by the community.

The lived experiences of the people who encounter one another from church and community.

The social needs which are addressed or met through community involvement.

The alleviation of the effects of inequality.

The awareness of factors which cause and maintain inequality and how these are challenged.

How the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are expressed.

The ways in which people are enabled to explore Christian faith and discipleship.

These are examples of some of the practical and theoretical issues which need to be researched and analysed in considering the appropriateness and authenticity of community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church.

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<sup>62</sup> See Charles C. Ragin. *Constructing Social Research*, 87.

### 2.2.1 The Aim of the Case Studies

The aim of the case studies was to explore the views and responses of people from the community who have developed a relationship with the local church through its community involvement, in order to discover:

- a) how they perceive the community involvement of the church.
- b) how they affirm, or challenge, the community involvement of the church.
- c) what the church could learn from them.
- d) the extent to which community involvement is an authentic and contextual expression of urban mission.

Consideration of the last point will also require exploring the views of those from the church who were working in its community involvement. The analysis of these views, from both community and church perspectives, will provide a practical source for theological reflection. This analysis will be brought into dialogue with the theology of mission and community explored in chapter one and it will address the key missiological issues identified at the end of that chapter. Pointers about the appropriateness, or inappropriateness and limitations, of church community involvement as urban mission will be drawn from the dialogue to contribute to the concluding chapter of the thesis.

### 2.2.2 Selecting Appropriate Case Studies

Initially, a number of church contacts were made in Edinburgh and Glasgow and then a number of churches, church projects and community ministries were visited to explore their suitability as possible case studies. These were as follows:

The Urban Mission Adviser for the Church of Scotland  
The Clerk of the Edinburgh Presbytery of the Church of Scotland.  
The Eric Liddell Centre, Edinburgh



The Community Minister for Greater Pilton, Edinburgh  
Glasgow City Mission  
Drylaw Parish Church, Edinburgh  
“Thorncliffe” Church, Glasgow  
Springburn Parish Church, Glasgow  
“Leavale” Church, Lanarkshire  
Adelaide Place Baptist Church, Glasgow

Through reflecting on these visits and the overall aim of this research, the following criteria were developed for selecting suitable case studies:

- a) Each case study church should have, as far as possible, a commitment to community involvement as a whole church, rather than seeing it as the responsibility of a particular worker or group.
- b) For the practical purposes of carrying out the research, the location of each case study should be accessible from Edinburgh, or from the M8 between Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- c) The willingness of the church/project to participate.
- d) If possible, one case study should be located in an area of multiple deprivation and the other in a more affluent urban context, so that they can be compared and contrasted.

Following reflection on the initial exploratory visits in the light of the criteria, two churches were approached about becoming case-studies. These were Leavale Church (linked with Anderton Church) in Lanarkshire and Thorncliffe Church in Glasgow. The names of these churches have been changed to conceal their identity and to help protect the identity of individuals who took part in the research.

The Minister of Leavale Church was contacted to explore whether the Church would be willing to consider being a case study, and a second visit was made to the Church which is in the ‘parish church’ tradition. It was agreed that the Church would be a case study.

The main contact for setting up and running the case study was the Centre Manager, with the Minister providing a major interview to consider issues raised by the study at its conclusion.

Thorncliffe Church had been suggested by the Supervisor as a church that was taking a community involvement approach to mission and had appointed a Project Leader to oversee this work. The exploratory visit suggested that this was a church which met the case study criteria and would provide a more affluent, urban, community context from that of Leavale. On a second visit the case study was negotiated and agreed with the Project Leader. It provided a further contrast from Leavale in being from a 'gathered church' tradition. The main contact for setting up and running the case study was the Project Leader who is a 'community theologian' and had previously worked for a year as the Worship Co-ordinator of the project at Leavale Church in 1996. She would provide a major interview to consider issues raised by the Thorncliffe study at its conclusion in her role as Project Leader. This interview would include some limited discussion of worship and other matters at Leavale, but not as a primary contributor.

### 2.2.3 Interview Method

In order to discover a range of views and responses from people who were linked with the church's community involvement, it was decided to interview those who represented a type of community user, or participant. A semi-structured method of interviewing was selected as the most appropriate for this research. This utilises techniques from the structured and unstructured/focused interview methods by making clear the overall topic to be explored with some themes as guidelines for questions, but allowing the interviewer to seek clarification and elaboration, and giving the interviewer the freedom to pursue any relevant lines of enquiry which emerge in conversation.<sup>63</sup> The advantage of the semi-structured method is that it 'allows people to answer more on their own terms than in a standardised interview'<sup>64</sup>; it gives more latitude to the interviewer to probe beyond answers, seeking qualitative information, than in a structured interview;

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<sup>63</sup> See Tim May, *Social Research - Issues, Methods and Process*, Open University Press, 1993, 93.

<sup>64</sup> Tim May, 93.

'but it provides a greater structure for comparability than the focused interview method.'<sup>65</sup>

There are a number of disadvantages and criticisms of this type of interviewing of which a researcher needs to be aware, and to seek to minimise their effect through good practice. One potential criticism is that a single interview gives minimal time in which to secure the full and open participation of the interviewee, particularly if they have not met the interviewer before.<sup>66</sup> In order to minimise the effect of this, wherever possible the researcher sought to meet each interviewee informally, at least once, prior to the interview to begin establishing rapport. In the interview the initial apprehension of both parties needs to be overcome as each discovers what the other is like and how the interview will proceed. This early stage of the interview is assisted by asking descriptive questions so that the interviewee gains in confidence, in order to co-operate with the interviewer in tackling more open and personal questions about opinions and perceptions. There is a craft to this kind of interviewing in which the researcher needs to work at minimising the extent to which an interview can be criticised as a 'false social situation where answers are given in the context of an interview that may not, or does not, reflect the real world.'<sup>67</sup> Asking questions and follow up questions, which were both relevant to the research and which enabled the interviewee to respond appropriately, was an aspect of interviewing where the guidance of specialist literature was of great help.<sup>68</sup> The interview situation provides a variety of possible ways in which bias can be introduced.

Eagerness of the respondent to please the interviewer, a vague antagonism that sometimes arises between interviewer and respondent, or the tendency of the interviewer to seek out the answers that support his preconceived notions are but a few of the factors that may contribute to biasing of data obtained from the interview.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Tim May, 93.

<sup>66</sup> See Tim May, 99.

<sup>67</sup> Tim May, 108.

<sup>68</sup> See Stanley L. Payne, *The Art of Asking Questions*, Princeton University Press, 1979 and Jack D. Douglas, *Creative Interviewing*, Sage, 1985.

<sup>69</sup> W.R. Borg, quoted by, Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 95.

The researcher, who was also the interviewer, sought to be aware of the dangers of introducing bias in the process of interviewing. The semi-structured interview was designed to last for a maximum of one hour and would be tape recorded if the interviewee gave their permission. A minimum of four interviews from each case study were to be undertaken to contribute to the thesis.

The types of people to be interviewed were put into two main categories. The first group could be said to have a 'formal' connection, for example, being an employee, volunteer, or leader of a community group. The second group could be said to have an 'informal' connection, for example, using a drop in facility or attending a group. A list of possible people to be interviewed was drawn up in consultation with the contact person responsible for community involvement in each case study. This included a very brief profile of each person selected, outlining their involvement, occupation, whether they lived locally and any other details felt to be relevant. This list of profiles was then discussed with the supervisor and a selection of eight people were made from each list to approach initially. The research was carried out during a four month period between April and July in 1998.

The churches were placed in their community context by building up a profile of the community from observation, conversations and gathering readily available information. In order to explore the relationship between the community and the church, a profile of the church was to be built up in a similar way.

The research methodology can be summarised as follows:

- a) Gather readily available information to build a profile of each community e.g. maps, census data, walking round.
- b) Gather information about each church's approach, theology, aims, motivation and forms of community involvement from church literature, reports, informal conversations and interviews.

- c) Carry out semi-structured interviews with representative types of people with whom the church has contact through its community involvement to explore their views and perceptions.
- d) Observe the practices of community involvement and enter in to informal conversations with 'users'.
- e) Analyse the interviews to gain understanding of the views and perceptions which people have of church community involvement, and identify any patterns to bring into dialogue with the hypothesis and theoretical and experiential issues discussed in chapter one.

### **2.3 The Ethics of Research and the Role of the Researcher**

Ethical decisions in research arise when we try to decide between one course of action and another, not in terms of efficiency or expediency but by reference to standards of what is morally right and wrong.<sup>70</sup>

The negotiations to set up the case-studies were characterised by openness and honesty about the purpose of the research, and the demands that would be made on those who agreed to participate in the research. A particular issue in approaching the interviews concerned tape recording. Should the permission of each participant be sought at the beginning, or should it be assumed that tape recording was acceptable unless an objection was raised? Asking permission would highlight the issue of tape recording and perhaps make the respondent more nervous, but from an ethical perspective it seemed that the permission of each respondent should be sought. In practice, the approach taken was, wherever possible, to meet each potential interviewee in advance of the interview to explain, negotiate and request their participation, and include the issue of tape recording within that discussion. It was also agreed that the identity of each respondent would be concealed by changing their name.

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<sup>70</sup> Tim May, *Social Research*, 43.

The researcher was aware of national and cultural differences in approaching the interview process. The researcher was an Englishman who had only recently moved to Scotland and was living in Edinburgh, while carrying out research among Scots in the West of Scotland. Before embarking on the interviews, a discussion was held with the key contacts at Leavale in an attempt to anticipate any likely difficulty over language and terms. The researcher was conscious that disclosure of his usual occupation as a Baptist Minister may introduce bias into the way participants would respond. A consequential approach to ethics might allow this identity to be concealed, or to be lied about. In practice, the approach taken was to only reveal the usual occupation of the researcher when asked directly. Other issues about the role of the researcher in the context of the interview were discussed earlier.

## **2.4 A Profile of Leavale Church and its Community**

Leavale is a post-war housing scheme on the south side of the town of Anderton which is on the west side of Scotland's central belt, in Lanarkshire. The history of this part of Scotland includes sectarian divisions which are now not as strongly felt, but their influence and prejudice still affect local community life. Leavale Church was founded in 1956 and the surrounding community comprises a population of 8000 people. The Church has 330 members with between 80 and 100 who attend worship. It is linked with Anderton Church in the town centre. This is an historic church which was established in 1763<sup>71</sup> and, since the mid 1980's, it has shared an ordained minister with Leavale Church. The present minister of the two churches has served there since 1989. The Anderton Church has 220 members with between 60 and 80 attending worship.

Anderton was dominated by the mining industry throughout the Nineteenth Century and the early part of the Twentieth. After the Second World War, Anderton's economy developed around the steel industry, but plant closures in the area during the 1980's led to the loss of thousands of jobs. Since then, Anderton, like most of the surrounding area, has been marked by high unemployment, low morale and social deprivation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> For the historic background of the Church, see Kathy Galloway, *Starting where we are*, Wild Goose 1998, 31-33.

<sup>72</sup> For a more detailed account of the economic and social history see Kathy Galloway, 22f.

Leavale has a high level of unemployment (23%<sup>73</sup>) and part of the area has been designated as an Area of Priority Treatment (APT) by North Lanarkshire Council and the Scottish Office because of its level of deprivation. The majority of households (71%<sup>74</sup>) are owned by the local authority and most households (64%<sup>75</sup>) do not have a car. A high proportion of households (41%<sup>76</sup>) have a person with long term illness. It was against this kind of background that the churches of Anderton and Leavale came to consider the future in 1991.

The Minister enrolled on a Master of Ministry Course with the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield and an Urban Theology Group was established to work with the Minister. This group included members from both churches. The group began by sharing their experiences of life by telling one another their stories of struggle and joy. Kathy Galloway writes,

They knew within their number the pain of unemployment, of disability, of poverty, of poor housing, of lack of facilities for young people and lack of care for old people. These were not someone else's problems. They were theirs.<sup>77</sup>

In their faith, they also believed that God cared, and they recognised that their faith in God was important for them in keeping going, despite the problems. As they reflected on their stories they saw how some themes would come up repeatedly. These were 'religious bigotry; the lack of attractive options for young people; the effects of unemployment on families; the situation of those on the margins (the frail, the elderly etc) whose care was seen as the job of professionals, rather than the community.'<sup>78</sup>

Having identified these as key issues from their own stories, the Theology Group then set out to learn more about these issues in their community. They divided into teams to gather information and interview people and groups who would have a perspective on the issue they were exploring. Through this process they gained a clearer picture of their community, and the historical and economic forces which shaped it. Through reflecting

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<sup>73</sup> Combined figure from two sets of ward statistics produced by "Leavale" Neighbourhood Centre.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Kathy Galloway, 40.

<sup>78</sup> Kathy Galloway, 41.

on all the information gathered and interviews carried out, and not without a good deal of struggle to express what it all meant, they finally agreed this statement. 'Leavale lacks a sense of community. This is, in part, caused by the lack of a common meeting place.'<sup>79</sup> In the process of making this statement they had come upon the idea of a Neighbourhood Centre to provide a common meeting place. The idea was explored at a joint meeting of the two churches and the decision was taken to proceed. A survey was carried out which covered every other house in the parish, a total of six hundred homes. The group were surprised by the enthusiasm for the idea and they received four hundred completed questionnaires.

The results of the survey were shared at a second joint meeting of the churches, and, again, it was decided to proceed with setting up a neighbourhood centre, and that this was a form of mission. In July 1993 a charitable company was established to run the centre with an ecumenical board of local people. Over the next year, seventy separate applications for funding were made. The Social Work Department agreed to be the sponsoring body of the project, and, in May 1994, major funding was offered through the Urban Programme. In order to make the building of the centre feasible it was decided to build it on the church site, so that the church building could be used as part of the centre. Building work began in January, and the Leavale Neighbourhood Centre was opened on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1995.

At the time of this research, almost three years later, the Leavale Neighbourhood Centre has thirteen paid staff and many volunteers who are involved in offering a wide range of services and activities. These include Day Care for the Elderly, Out of School Care, Parents and Toddlers, All Day Café, Junior Youth Club, counselling, music, dance and exercise classes, a food co-operative, quiet room and daily worship, and the Credit Union also runs a weekly session in the building.

The Centre seeks to be a place of community which is open to all and which contributes to the sense of community in Leavale. Its mission statement is as follows:

Leavale Neighbourhood Centre seeks to bring together the people of Leavale in a bid to help combat the injustices of poverty, isolation and intolerance, irrespective

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<sup>79</sup> Kathy Gaffoway, 76.



of age, ability, race, religious persuasion or none. Our organisation has arisen out of a desire to give practical expression to God's love for our community.<sup>80</sup>

## **2.5 A Profile of Thorncliffe Church and its Community**

Thorncliffe Church was founded in 1883 when Thorncliffe was a rapidly expanding suburb of the city of Glasgow. The Church has a strong preaching tradition, ecumenical commitment and open membership. It is distinctive in having a theologically liberal ethos. Its membership, which at one time comprised more than two hundred people, is now just over one hundred. The Church does not currently have an ordained minister in pastorate, following the retirement of the last minister who concluded a five year ministry at the end of May 1998. The church building is listed and is located in a side street, near to the main shopping street and station.

Thorncliffe is a district in a cosmopolitan area of the city, adjacent to a main road, a city park and a major employer on one side, and a university on the other side. The majority of its buildings date from the Victorian period and much of the housing is provided by tenements. In different parts of Thorncliffe these provide both run down student flats and bed-sits, as well as sought after family homes. There are approximately 2700 dwellings and, of those occupied by residents, 56% are owner occupied and 38% are privately rented. Only 1% are rented from the local authority.<sup>81</sup> The population of the Ward of Thorncliffe is approximately five thousand six hundred.<sup>82</sup> There are less children and young people under the age of fifteen, representing 11.2% of the population, compared with the city average of 18.2%. There are almost twice as many people aged 15-24 (27.4%) than in the city as a whole (14.5%). There are only half as many people of retirement age and above, as compared with the city as a whole. 35% of households included a person whose occupation was classified as professional/managerial/technical, which is two and half times the city average. The proportions for skilled manual/non manual and partly skilled/unskilled were slightly

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<sup>80</sup> "Leavale" Neighbourhood Centre Mission Statement.

<sup>81</sup> Based on Glasgow City Council Ward Factsheet for "Thorncliffe", 1995. Source: 1991 Census Small Area Statistics.

<sup>82</sup> Glasgow City Council, (1995) Ward Factsheet, for "Thorncliffe".

below the city average. Unemployment is approximately 18% of those who are economically active which closely reflects the city average.

In conclusion, it can be said that the community of Thorncliffe appears to be relatively affluent with high levels of home ownership and professional employment. There are fewer than average children and young people under the age of fifteen and fewer than average retired people. There is a much higher than average proportion of those aged 15-24, and a significant number of these must be students who represent approximately 15% of the total population. These factors contribute to a vibrant community, in what is generally considered as a desirable area in which to live, convenient for shopping, parks, the university and the city centre. However, the realities of Thorncliffe include significant unemployment, poverty, drug abuse and homeless people on the streets.

The nature of the housing in Thorncliffe has made it difficult for Thorncliffe Church to communicate with the local residents. The entry phone systems in the tenements make communication by ringing the bell rather awkward, and ground floor letter boxes often mean that church publicity material reaches no further than the hall floor. A church in the gathered tradition may not see this as a problem since the congregation can be drawn from far and wide, rather than from the immediate locality. To some extent this has been, and is, the case for Thorncliffe Church. There was a time when the church considered moving from its building, which had been listed, to a new site somewhere else in the city and developing its identity as a gathered church, which offered theological openness and acceptance, with a particular style of worship. However, the membership decided that, rather than leave Thorncliffe, it should remain in its building and seek to serve, and develop its relationships with, the local community.

Having carried out a number of surveys in the locality, and reflected on the life of the Church, it was decided to appoint a community worker. This was a part-time post to carry out further research on the needs and opportunities of the church and community, and to begin developing initiatives. This work, combined with further thinking about the facilities which the church could make available for community use, led to an approach to mission and a project, both called 'Opening Doors'. This included a phased refurbishment of the interior of the church building to make it more open and appealing to the wider community. Phase two provided for the refurbishment of the church hall to

provide new toilets and a kitchen with a serving area. This work was completed in 1996 and the hall was renamed the Tryst. This is an old Scottish word which has a number of community related meanings which the Church present as 'a meeting place', 'a promise to meet' and 'a journey taken by a company pledged to travel together'.<sup>83</sup> The community worker was replaced by a part-time Project Leader, with overall responsibility for the Opening Doors Project.

The Tryst has become the focus of the openness of the Church to the community. The Church runs 'The Café in the Tryst', offering lunches from Tuesday to Friday each week. There is a 'pause point' in the adjacent sanctuary for fifteen minutes each lunch time which provides 'Space - to be quiet, to slow down, to be still, to find peace'.<sup>84</sup> The Café also provides music, (occasionally live), and exhibitions. Before the café opens a Nursery Group use the Tryst for children's activities each weekday morning, and about a dozen parents and children sometimes use the café for lunch when nursery has finished.

Two community organisations have permanent offices which they rent in the church building. These are the Conservation Trust and Survivor's Poetry Scotland. For most of the year the Conservation Trust simply use their office in the building, but also run occasional talks/lectures for the community on matters of local conservation and interest. Survivor's Poetry Scotland make good use of the facilities by regularly running their workshops for survivors of the mental health system in various parts of the building. They also give occasional public readings of their poetry and hold social events. At the end of the period during which the research was carried out, the Key Fund established an office on the premises. This is an ecumenical initiative by local churches to enable homeless people to gain access to privately rented accommodation.

In addition to those already mentioned, many organisations and groups from the community use the facilities provided by the Tryst and Church on a regular basis. These include Parent Link, Disabled Guides, a Fitness Class, the Rokpa Trust, an African band, the Lyric Choir, and Alcoholics Anonymous. There are other organisations which use the facilities on an occasional basis, for instance, the Tryst is one of the venues used for the local Festival which takes place for a fortnight each year.

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<sup>83</sup> The Tryst and the Sanctuary information card displayed on café tables.

<sup>84</sup> The Tryst and the Sanctuary information card displayed on café tables.

The Church also directly runs a variety of groups and activities in addition to those already mentioned which include, Holdfast, the Japanese Bible study group, the Christian Education group, the Women's Guild, the prayer meeting, Wednesday Evening Liturgy, Friday Friendship and the International Café. On Sunday there is morning worship and Sunday School and evening worship. A Korean Church hold their service in the building during the afternoon.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has described how the hypothesis, with the theoretical and experiential issues about community involvement and mission, were transformed into operational concepts through the research design. This was achieved by a qualitative research strategy, based on the study of two carefully selected cases at Leavale and Thorncliffe. A selection of representative types of people, categorised as 'formal' or 'informal' in the way that they related to community involvement, were to be interviewed. A semi-structured method of interview was adopted to focus on respondents perceptions and understanding of church community involvement and their responses to it. This was to be supplemented by gathering readily available data about the church and community in each case study and by informal observation and conversation.

The data provided by the interviews should be unusual in representing the voices of those who are in contact with church through community involvement, or those who are working at the cutting edge of church community involvement. The data will be brought into dialogue with the theoretical and experiential key issues identified at the end of chapter one. Through theological reflection on this dialogue, the concluding chapter of this thesis will draw out the implications of this research for the appropriateness of community involvement as an authentic approach to Christian mission for the local urban church. This may provide pointers towards a practical theology of community involvement, or it may identify aspects of church community involvement where further action or research is required. It will also identify how the perception and practice of the researcher have changed as a result of the experience of carrying out the process of this

research. The next two chapters present the analysis of the significant data which was gathered at Leavale and Thorncliffe, and begin the process of theological reflection.

## **Chapter Three: Leavale Neighbourhood Centre**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and explores the main themes concerning community involvement which emerged from the case study of Leavale Neighbourhood Centre. Ten people connected with Leavale Neighbourhood Centre were interviewed. Three of these were classified as informal in their relationship to the Centre. They were regular users of Day Care, the All Day Café and the Out of School Care. Six of those interviewed were classified as formal in their relationship to the Centre. Initially, it had been anticipated that the number of interviews would be approximately the same for formal and informal users. However, during the research it became clear that the number of people who related to the Centre in more formal, but different ways, meant an increase in the number of interviews in order to benefit from their different perspectives. Those interviewed fulfilled one of the following formal roles in relation to the Centre: volunteer, board member, staff member, supervising senior community worker and credit union organiser. Since there were thirteen staff, it was decided to interview two, one male and one female. A tenth extended interview was carried out with the minister of Leavale Church.

The sections of this chapter discuss the key themes which were identified from reflecting on the experience and perceptions of the nine people who were interviewed about the community involvement which is expressed through Leavale Neighbourhood Centre. These key themes are 'bringing people together', 'perceptions of the Church' and 'spirituality'. The reflections from the concluding interview with the minister are brought in towards the end of each section where it is relevant and appropriate.

### **3.2 Bringing People Together**

Most of those who were interviewed identified the significance of the way in which a wide range of people and groups have been brought together and made welcome at the Neighbourhood Centre. This section shows their perceptions of the Centre and seeks to identify why it has brought people together. The voices of those who are least involved in the running of the Centre are quoted first.

Mandy uses the Out of School Care for her daughter while she is at work and comments;

It's good and people are friendly. It's well organised and there are lots of things in the holidays.<sup>85</sup>

When asked if she thought the Centre was a way forward for the Church she replied;

Yes. It's bringing people together. It's got something for everyone going on here. From young to old, they're all welcome. There's nothing like this elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

Beryl comes to Day Care at the Centre twice a week and expressed what the Centre had come to mean to her.

It's the difference between living and no living. I've made friends here. They're a lovely crowd. You get to know people you would otherwise never meet. They will help you in every shape or form. The meals here are out of this world. It's the best thing Anderton ever got built. It's a God send to us all, especially when you're stuck in the house because I like company. I'd been stuck in the house for eight years before I came here... It's getting everyone together.<sup>87</sup>

Jean picks up her eldest daughter from school at lunch time each day and comes for lunch at the All Day Café. She was asked why the Centre was needed?

It's a place for socialising and there is a need for that in this area. The Day Care and the Out of School Care are important and it's good to bring things together under one roof.<sup>88</sup>

She expressed her appreciation for the human face of the Centre, particularly the staff.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Mandy.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Mandy.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Beryl.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Jean.

They do a very good job. They've got to find my wee ways and I've got to know theirs. They're very good with the kids. My daughter will sometimes tag along helping to clear tables and they're very good with her. She also likes to entertain the older people, so she's very well known. They're very friendly and will always help if you run into any problems. The food is very good.<sup>89</sup>

Although Pat has a formal relationship with the Centre through running the Thursday evening session of the Credit Union, she is not formally involved with the Centre from day to day. She reflects on her perceptions of the work carried out through the Centre.

I think it's brilliant. I definitely do because they've now opened up a co-op shop which again is helping people and I think they've got everything down there. They've got something for pre-school, after school, pensioners. They've got something going on down there every day. I just feel as though that is an opening down there which is opened up to everybody. You don't have to be Catholic or Protestant. Anybody can go and use it. I've been down once or twice and it's been the pensioners sing song. It's absolutely brilliant. You feel as though you want to sit in with them... Then they have the café, that's beautiful. You ever tasted the food down there? It's lovely, first class and the prices are very reasonable. It's smashing... Everybody I speak to, in one way or another they use it, you know.<sup>90</sup>

It is not surprising that each person appreciates the particular provision which they use at the Centre. They value meeting friendly people, good organisation, getting to know new people, getting out of the house, good food, friendly and helpful staff who are child friendly. What is more significant is the way in which they all expressed the importance of the Centre in bringing different groups of people and individuals together. There is more to this than offering services which meet the needs of particular groups. The All Day Café not only provides meals for those at Day Care and for those who come to the Café for lunch, it provides an open facility for the use of all groups and for anyone who

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Jean.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Pat.



drops in. It offers a space and an environment which is welcoming, and facilitates social interaction between members of the different groups and individuals.

Lunch time is a particular focus for this social interaction and the Café is often full to capacity. The commitment of the staff is evident as any, who are available, put aside their other work and join with the Café volunteers to ensure that meals are served promptly and that people are made welcome. This is a time in which people not only meet friends but can be introduced to those they have not met before, and good food and conversation are shared. Jean is unusual in bringing a child of school age to the Centre for lunch during term time, but there are usually pre-school children in the Café over lunch. This provides the opportunity for friendships to grow between all generations, but most noticeably between the young and the old. For the elderly people, who no longer have a family, or whose families do not include young children, this is likely to be a rare opportunity to encounter and develop friendships with children and it takes place in a safe environment. Jack is one of the Centre's staff in the All Day Café. He spoke of the role of the Café in the context of the purpose of the Centre and the importance of everyone working together.

Getting people involved in the community, getting people to come out to visit the place, especially people coming in to the café. It's a meeting place. You don't want people to come in, eat their dinner with head down. 'Sit down, have a chat, what's happening? How's Jo Bloggs getting on? Oh, she's nay well, bla, bla, bla'. I feel that's very important. It gets them out, gets them mingling and involved with other people instead of sitting in the house, looking at four walls, especially the elderly people, it's the highlight of their day which is very important. Food to the Centre is of a very good standard and that is important, especially for older people as well who can't cater, or look after themselves properly, so I feel that Day Care are doing a very good job as well there. The Centre works as a unit and I feel that if you don't, if you're not compatible, things aren't going to work for you. I feel that's very important as well.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Jack.

Kate is not an original member of the Centre staff, but was involved from the beginning as a member of the Theology Group. She summed up the purpose of the Centre as follows;

There are lots of terms about, like social exclusion, but it's about being there for people and giving a sense of belonging and a place to meet. There are some people who would be totally isolated without the Centre services that we provide for old and young. It's a focal point. In the Theology Group we recognised the lack of community spirit.<sup>92</sup>

Edith, a member of the Theology Group, and a member of the Board which manages the Centre, gave some examples of how she saw the Centre bringing individuals together.

Men, living on their own, have come into the café for their main meal and have mixed with people and it has given them a new lease of life. Mothers, who might otherwise be isolated, can come and meet here. It's like an extended family. People come into the café who have difficulties and know that they can come. There is a counselling service available. It has been very good for some of the volunteers as well. I think of one who has come from very difficult home circumstances and comes and works here, and feels that she has achieved something and she is worthwhile because of her work here. There is a lady who comes in who has just moved into the area and she had a brain tumour some years ago and her speech has been slow to come back. People would speak to her, but she would not be able to get her words out to reply, so people stopped speaking to her and so her confidence went. She would go to church on Sundays and do her shopping and that was it. She moved into this area and was walking round and saw the church and came in for a meal. Now she comes in every day for her meal, she knows people, her speech has improved and she is much more confident.<sup>93</sup>

Tracy, a Senior Community Worker and the Supervisory Officer for the Centre commented on the strengths of the Centre.

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Kate.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Edith.

It is a valuable resource for the area. Although some of the services were functioning in other buildings, the Centre is a more suitable place for them to be, for example the credit union. The community café has been a good success. Staff have worked hard to make it as welcoming as possible. They wanted to build community spirit. They are achieving that. People get a good service. The stimulation of the Day Care is very good...It is attractive and homely and there are very positive relationships within Day Care.<sup>94</sup>

There are critical views that are more negative of the Centre; that it is on too small a scale to really make a difference to the community; that it does not cater enough for the middle aged; or provide appropriate activities for men in Day Care, and that there are too few Catholics involved.<sup>95</sup> These criticisms, although significant, were not widespread, but the concern about Catholic involvement is important in the context of this community. There are Catholics involved in the life and running of the Centre, but the issue of division between Protestants and Catholics is an ongoing challenge in the running and perception of the Centre.

Pat and Edith reflected on the response from the local community to the openness of the Centre.

Phenomenal. People use it for all sorts and the community is behind them all the way I think. They just open up and let people come in and use the Centre. It's not just for going and praying. It's a place people can meet and sit and discuss one another's worries and all the rest of it. Without it we would be lost down there in Leavale.<sup>96</sup>

It's been very good. We get about 750-800 different people come a week. The total number, counting those who come more than once makes 1200.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Tracy.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Jim.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Edith.

In a local community, with a population of about 8000, the above figures represent a significant level of contact in bringing people together, although some of those who use the Centre come from outside the immediate area of Leavale. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates that the Centre is perceived, by those who use it, to be achieving the aspect of its mission statement in which it 'seeks to bring together the people of Leavale'.<sup>98</sup> The evidence is that the isolation and loneliness of some individuals is being reduced. People from the community are getting involved in giving care and interacting with one another and the sense of community spirit is growing.

### 3.2.1 Factors which help to explain the response to the Neighbourhood Centre

Why have people responded positively to the Neighbourhood Centre? There are likely to be a number of factors which contribute to their responsiveness. From the perceptions of the Centre, three factors can be identified, though they are not listed in order of importance. First, that people have a need that is met. The need may be for Day Care, for child care, for reasonably priced refreshments or a meal, for a recreational activity, for a place to meet as a group, or because they can help, in meeting needs and running the Centre as a volunteer. Second, that their need is met in a welcoming, accepting, friendly and caring environment. Third, that the environment brings them together with a variety of other people from their community with whom they can socialise if they wish. These are the three main factors which those interviewed identified as important in attracting them and enabling them to become involved in the Centre.

It is likely that there are other contributory factors, not least the rigorous community development and theological method which sought to ensure that whatever happened would be contextually appropriate to the community of Leavale.<sup>99</sup> A further contributory factor may be the attractive, purpose built Neighbourhood Centre, with access and facilities for people with physical disabilities. The Board also took an open approach to appointing Centre staff by not requiring that they should be Christians and by appointing the best person for the job.

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<sup>98</sup> See closing paragraph of 2.4.

<sup>99</sup> See 2.4 for a summary of the method.

The Centre has been successful in bringing together a significant proportion of people from the local community. Those who were interviewed, showed strong appreciation for the work of the Centre, and three main factors which have contributed to their response have been identified along with other contributory factors. Having considered the perceptions of the Centre, the perceptions of the Church are explored next.

### **3.3 Perceptions of the Church**

This section deals with how those who were interviewed perceived firstly, the Christian Church in general, in order to compare these with the perceptions of the Centre, and then secondly, the relationship between the Neighbourhood Centre and Leavale Church. The purpose of the latter was to discover the extent to which the Leavale Church was perceived to be involved with the community through the Centre, and whether this made a difference to the way people perceived it as the local church.

#### **3.3.1 A Dramatic Contrast**

There was a dramatic contrast between the way people perceived the Centre as having something for everyone and being open to everybody, and the ways in which they viewed the Christian Church in general. None of the following comments relate to the Leavale Church as it is was at the time of the research. Instead, most of them refer to the Christian Church in general or to peoples previous experiences of a local church.

Mandy, in her mid twenties, was the youngest person to be interviewed and it may be significant that she had the least experience of church. Nevertheless, her experience had left a clear impression.

Gran used to drag me off to church, but I'm not a church person. I don't have time. I do the washing and the housework on Sundays. I used to hate it. It put me off going to church. There was nothing special for children. I just had to stay with Gran. I've been to a funeral and a christening in the Salvation army - that

was an experience and a half - embarrassing - Hallelujahs and tambourines - very odd... Church is for grannies.<sup>100</sup>

Mandy was asked whether this was because of the style of doing things in church, or because less people believe in God?

A wee bit of both. Style, in the sense of being quite boring.<sup>101</sup>

Overall, Jean has a more positive view of the Church, but her experience has been mixed as she illustrated when she was asked about contact with the Church. To what extent her marriage was of influence in this story is undetermined, but nonetheless it is a relevant example.

I don't! I did. I was involved in Sunday School as a child and I went through all the groups, even though my parents didn't go. Around the time I got married, maybe it was just a personal thing, but I kind of took the huff to the Church. It was just after we'd got married and I'd been several times to the Church and I just found it... I think it's when you open your eyes to things going on roundabout you with the older people. You'd come in and sit in a seat, and this offended me, you'd just come in and plonk your bottom down wherever and you'd be told to shift because this is Mrs So and So's seat, and do you know, I thought that's not what it's all about.<sup>102</sup>

Pat's strong affirmation of the Centre contrasted with her view of the Church, where she offered a number of critical insights from her experience which, gathered together, make a telling explanation for the reasons for the decline of the institutional Church. First she noted her perception that the churches were only open for those who wanted to be part of Sunday worship. 'You only see the churches and chapels open on a Sunday'.<sup>103</sup> Second she commented, 'I think religion, it's a kind of dying trade now'.<sup>104</sup> Third she recalled the following visit of a priest.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Mandy.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Mandy.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Jean.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Pat.

I had a priest out at my house last year, or some time, and it was an old priest and he had no interest in me whatsoever and it was my young daughter that was in and he was asking her why she fell away from chapel. And she says, 'Well there's nothing down there that interests me. You go up there and its parrot fashion to you. It's parrot fashion for me to answer you back.' She says, 'I'm thinking, I'll go home and I think I'll do my windows today.' She says, 'it's not there any longer.' You have to change it and bring it in to the younger ones. The older ones, fine, but, the younger ones, I don't think it holds a lot for the younger ones.<sup>105</sup>

This story shows the representative of the institutional church as only being interested in why Pat's daughter was no longer attending chapel. There is no interest in her as a person and there was no interest shown in Pat. In this encounter, the Church demonstrated no real interest in the people concerned. Pat's daughter was no longer able to show an interest in the worship of the Church which seemed devoid of meaning in its style, if not in its content, and of little relevance to her life. The Church was perceived not to be interested, or interesting, and Pat recognised that it did not hold a lot of interest for younger people. Not interested, not interesting, not open to people and dying. In a nutshell these were Pat's observations of the Church.

Kate, as a church member was critical of the lack of activity of the Church prior to the establishment of the Theology Group.

I was feeling that there's got to be more than going along on Sundays and organising fares which was all the church seemed to be doing then. Looking at our town and what the churches were doing, there didn't seem to be much going on. Nothing for the people, spiritual or practical. People were suffering from poverty and unemployment. In the congregation we were just going along to church to worship and giving thanks.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Kate.

In summary, the interviews showed that the Church was perceived as 'not child friendly', 'embarrassing', 'odd', 'boring', being 'for grannies', 'small minded', 'uninterested', 'uninteresting', 'only open for worship', 'spiritually and practically inactive' and as 'dying'. It is not difficult to list grievances people have about the Church, but these criticisms arose simply by asking what contact people had, or had in the past, with the Church. That such a list can be gathered so readily, from just five people, is a further indication of the crisis facing the Christian Church and a reflection of the local feeling in Leavale. However, these perceptions of the Church have been included here to make clear the deep contrast between them and the perceptions of the Centre in the previous section, which were from the same group of people. The crucial point to emphasize here is that, despite their negative general perceptions of the Church, they have responded positively to the provision of the Neighbourhood Centre, even though it is linked with the Church. The next section explores the perceptions of the relationship between the Centre and Leavale Church.

### 3.3.2 Perceptions of the Leavale Church in Community Involvement

The interviews show a wide divergence in the awareness people had of the extent to which the Leavale Church was involved in initiating and running the Neighbourhood Centre. Mandy thought that there must be a relationship between the church and Centre, but she did not know what it was, other than the inaccurate view that they both provide for old people.<sup>107</sup> Jean was only aware of a link through the people that she knew who went to the church.

I really don't know where the link is. Some of the people who come to the Centre go to the church. I see the minister around, but he doesn't have a say in the running of things. I really don't know.<sup>108</sup>

Beryl had a different view. She goes to Leavale Church for Communion Services as well as attending Day Care and she saw the church and the Centre as being one and the same.

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Mandy.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Jean.



It's just like a community. Without the church it's not the same. The Centre is the church and the church is the Centre.<sup>109</sup>

For Beryl the Centre's close link with the church has an important influence, including worship.

It's a more friendly place. All different religions. Protestant and Catholics getting on well together. I don't understand this bigotry. We've got to come and go with one another. This has been a god-send to Anderton. We have a wee service in here every day.<sup>110</sup>

Pat knows about the Centre through the minister of the church. He has been involved pastorally with her family, and she approached him about the possibility of the credit union using the Centre. In her interview she identifies the development of the Centre with the work of the Minister a number of times, for example; 'When the Minister started opening the doors, I think everybody welcomed it.'<sup>111</sup> For Pat, the Minister is a key figure whom she likes and appreciates. Yet when she was asked about how the church relates to the Centre, and whether this was important, she replied;

I don't know. Honestly and truly, I'm the biggest heathen that walks, so don't ask me... I really and truly don't know if the church side of it has got a lot to do with it. It could have because it seems quite a busy wee church, but I could nay answer that one because I don't know myself.<sup>112</sup>

For Jim, as a volunteer and a local Catholic, the fact that the Centre is physically connected to the church building was seen by him as a major limitation in its attempt to break down sectarian divisions in the community.

It's supposed to help, but it's not working. I know Catholics who won't come up here because it's Protestant. Some Catholics come in, but not many. Many

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Beryl.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Beryl.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Pat.

won't. Six or seven Catholic families come, that's all...95% of the elderly are non-Catholic.<sup>113</sup>

As a member of staff and a member of Anderton Church, Kate sees the Centre as an expression of faith.<sup>114</sup> Edith, also a member of Anderton Church, commented, "We have the mission statement up everywhere and we have worship. We're just showing that God cares for the community".<sup>115</sup> This was the second of only two interviews in which the daily worship was mentioned voluntarily. It was covered in the interview with Kate, but only because it was introduced by the interviewer. One might have expected that an act of daily worship would have had a higher profile in perceptions of the relationship between the Centre and the church. The subject of worship at the Centre was a significant theme in the interview with Tracy, the Senior Social Worker, and it is explored fully in the later section on spirituality.

Tracy saw the relationship between the Centre and the church in terms of people, and she drew attention to how members of the Board and volunteers often come from either Leavale Church, or other local churches, and the implications of this.

They are fairly successful in bringing in volunteers, but it is mainly from the parishioners. I know certainly the Board is mainly from the church and quite a lot of the volunteers are. So sometimes you think, what does that say to people in other congregations who may see it as just for one denomination and it's trying to overcome those barriers? The difficulty is, I think, that it is attached to the church. If it was a kind of separate building from the church then it might be easier. There are very traditional barriers that have been around in the West of Scotland for years. That is part of their urban aid objective to break down these kind of barriers. There is nothing wrong with the activities. It's views and perceptions that have to be recognised and also that anything they do doesn't put up barriers to people coming in and that they make it clear that they are not only for one section of the community.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with Jim.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Kate.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Edith.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Tracy.

Nevertheless, Tracy also recognised the difficulty of recruiting volunteers and some major advantages of the Centre being related to the church.

I would prefer to see a greater mix on the Board, but it is very difficult to get volunteers for these kind of things and I think the people who are there, it is because of their affiliation with the church that they do volunteer and they give a lot of time and they are dedicated to the project. I think that is where, although they invite representation from a variety of groups, they quite often don't get that. There are a couple of members from outside. I think that's why the perception is sometimes that it is a church organisation.<sup>117</sup>

The question was put directly to Tracy as to whether it would have been better if the Centre had not been developed in conjunction with the existing church building?

It probably wouldn't have happened at all, mainly because of the cost of new buildings. You're using an existing resource and developing that, and using it with much greater frequency, rather than only for church services, weddings and funerals. It is also seen as being a focal point. They have also attracted a fair amount of funding from other areas and the church name, I think, has helped in attracting funding. I think that is also why the Scottish Office supported the project because they were seen to be successful in managing to raise funds elsewhere.<sup>118</sup>

The interviews show that people who were informally involved in the life of the Centre, but were not connected with the church, had little awareness of the part played by the church in the Centre. Those who were more formally involved in running and overseeing the Centre were most aware of the church's involvement in initiating the Centre, and in helping to manage and run it through the involvement of people from local churches, including the involvement of the minister of the Leavale and Anderton churches.

There is a relationship between the Centre and the church but it is somewhat ambiguous. The Centre and the church are based in the same building, yet formally the two are quite

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Tracy.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Tracy.

separate in that the Board is responsible for managing the Centre and the charitable company Utheo, not the church. However, Utheo was established jointly by the Leavale and Anderton churches with church people and others making up the Board. The Theology Group, composed of people from the two churches, developed the concept and purpose of the Centre and the group still does some theological work for the Centre.

The ambiguity of the relationship between the Centre and the church has strengths and weaknesses. For the Centre, the strengths are that sharing the church building made its construction financially viable; it could draw on the name and respectability of the church in applying for grants; it could apply to church funding agencies; it could recruit volunteers from church networks. The weaknesses are that outsiders may perceive the Centre as a church organisation of a particular denomination and that there may be pressure to offer religious activities, both of which may undermine the Centre's appeal to the Catholic and non-church sections of the community. Nevertheless, it is to the Centre's credit that there is significant, if numerically small, Catholic involvement and that, from this, it can develop the work of breaking down historical barriers of intolerance and prejudice in line with its mission statement.

For Leavale Church, the ambiguity of the relationship has the advantage that the church, through the Theology Group and Utheo, has initiated, as an expression of the love of God, a community organisation which has a different identity from that of traditional and institutional forms of the Christian Church. This different identity has enabled the Neighbourhood Centre to develop without being saddled with the negative perceptions of the Christian Church which exist in the community. Consequently, the community were free to respond positively to the initiative of the Neighbourhood Centre without projecting their negative perceptions of the Church on to it. Yet, the Leavale Church relates to the Centre as its initiator, physically through its building, through the involvement of people and its minister, and through its ethos. Thus through the Centre, the Church has initiated a community organisation which brings together caring agencies, caring people, and those who want to build community spirit, with those in who are in need and with recreational groups. In a relatively deprived area, organisations, groups and volunteers have been brought together with the community, to give practical expression to God's love in a whole variety of ways, which contribute to people's humanity and to their life together in community.

### **3.4 Spirituality**

Spirituality is expressed in the life of the Neighbourhood Centre in a variety of ways. It has already been noted that the Centre is connected to the Church building. Centre activities take place in the worship area, with a quiet room nearby for personal reflection and prayer. The menu cards on the café tables include a slip for requests for prayer. Three main aspects of spirituality, in relation to community involvement, arose from the interviews. These were personal spirituality, the expression of spirituality and the constraints of the Centre, and worship in the Centre. The section begins with hearing the voices of the people of the community and looking at the role spirituality plays in their lives.

#### **3.4.1 Spirituality beyond the Church**

The interviews of Jean and Pat demonstrate the spirituality and spiritual concern of people in the community who do not attend church. Jean went to Sunday School in her childhood, but ceased to attend church around the time when she was married. She spoke about her spirituality.

I'm not going to say that I'm a non-believer because I'm not. I've got very strong views on religion. I don't air them very often because my husband doesn't want to hear them...I would like to get back into the Church...I think it's for your own well being, or for my well being and I think for the children. The children don't come to church and I always believed it would be something they'd want to do, although I'd never pressure them into it...Both of my girls are not christened and that's a bone of contention between the two of us. I would like them to be christened. Church would add something to my life ..It's like a feeling. You feel contentment. It's something like that. I can't put it into words, but it's there.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with Jean.

Pat left the Church some years ago and yet she lives out practical Christianity, particularly through her voluntary work with the credit union. She has been on the Union's Board of Directors for seventeen years and is the Assistant Treasurer. She is responsible for the session which the Credit Union runs each week at the Neighbourhood Centre. Pat's summing up of the aim of the Credit Union also expresses her personal commitment.

It's just people helping people, that is our motto... I'm saving, you're borrowing my money, but you're borrowing everybody else's money, so it's everybody. It's a community, everybody's helping one another... and it does give you a wee bit of pride when you've got money in your hand.<sup>120</sup>

Pat, perhaps not consciously, is living out the second commandment of Jesus to 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. After her parents died, she experienced financial hardship as the eldest child in a large family, and then again as a parent, after her husband died. Her work for the credit union helps people make ends meet, tries to prevent them from being exploited and gives them dignity. Pat's life has been marked by struggle and family tragedy, and the death of her husband was the last of a number of factors that brought about what she describes as her 'loss of faith'.<sup>121</sup> Her reflections about spirituality may be representative of many who have left the Church.

Saying that, I don't think I am a bad person. Because I do this (voluntary work with the credit union) and I would run from here to hell for anybody and I always mind to say my prayers at night for my lassies and thank God for my girls and all the rest of it, but I don't think there is any need personally to go to a chapel, or a church, to say your prayers or to be a, not a good person, cause I'm not a goody goody... to be an all right person.<sup>122</sup>

Seeing the interview as a whole, it became clear that what Pat described as her 'loss of faith' was really a loss of faith in the Roman Catholic Church, rather than in God. She had commented that church was not for her and then continued:

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Pat.

I believe one hundred per cent. There is a God and I pray every night before I sleep. If I could go and be interested, it would be nice, but I can't concentrate on it. I'd like to be like the lassies who have their faith as the stronghold of their lives.<sup>123</sup>

Pat's open and honest reflections about faith and church in the light of the way she lives, in serving and trying to bring dignity to the poor through her work with the credit union, need to be heard by the Church. It was a privilege to interview Pat who came across as a person of deep spirituality. The Minister recognised the spirituality of people who do not attend church.

I hear such incredibly deep spiritual insights from people who would never darken the door of a church, and, in a community based mission, we need to find ways to allow people to articulate those insights in a faith community, and for the faith community to be challenged by that. So worship is there as a very important element, but what form it will take, I have my doubts.<sup>124</sup>

He takes this a step further in affirming the relationship between church and people of spirituality in the community and challenging the spirituality of some of those who see themselves as part of the Church.

The Church is not the institutional church, and often that re-engagement of people of faith with people in the community is very often a spiritual conversation from people, who are people of the Church, some of whom have been able to express their spirituality within the institution and some of whom haven't. It's this thing that we live in a society where 5% of people go to church and 80% believe in God. Now, either that means that an awful lot of those who believe in God don't believe in the Church's God, or the Bible's God, or they do, but the Church doesn't recognise it. I think community involvement is sometimes a way when we can begin, again, a conversation about God, and we can both recognise that the real enemy of God are false gods, rather than no God, and that there are

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Pat.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with the Minister.

many in the Church, as an institution, who may well worship false gods. Perhaps what we are talking about is a conversation between the people of the Church because the institutional church and the Church is not the same.<sup>125</sup>

This represents a major challenge to the Christian Church in its attitude to, and assumptions about, the spirituality of people who do not relate to the institution. Before this is explored further Mandy's comment is included. As a young working mother, she may have spoken for many of her generation when she was asked what keeps her going in life.

I often wonder myself what keeps me going. You just have to, don't you, or you give up. Money drives me, I suppose, to work.<sup>126</sup>

Mandy wonders what keeps her going. She identifies the immediate need to care for, and provide for, her children and family, but she still expresses a sense of wondering. For Mandy, there is no reason at all to connect her sense of wondering about meaning and purpose in life with God or the Church. The Church is for other older people, not for her.

The evidence of the interviews is that, at the very least, some people, who are not linked at all with the Christian Church have a real sense of spirituality which challenges the Church in the assumptions which tend to be made about those who do not connect their spirituality with the institution. Jean spoke of her spirituality and interest in the Leavale Church and identified the importance of rites of passage. It is not uncommon for the Church to deny rites of passage to people in the community on the basis that they have not demonstrated commitment to the institution of the Church. However, Mandy represents, not only the present, but the future of people in the local community, who have some sense of wondering about meaning and purpose in life, but see no connection between this and God, or the Church. The practical community involvement of the Neighbourhood Centre meets a need for Mandy in the provision of child care, and through this she has a relationship with those at the Centre. Given this relationship, how can community involvement genuinely and appropriately offer Mandy the opportunity to

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with the Minister.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Mandy.



explore her sense of wondering about meaning and purpose in life further? This is a question which needs to be explored in relation to community involvement and mission, both in this thesis and in greater depth than is possible here.

### 3.4.2 Care, faith and funding

Another aspect of spirituality is that it is implicitly expressed by the staff and volunteers through the acceptance, friendship and care which they offer to those who use the Centre. Kate is a member of staff whose work in the community grows out of her personal thankfulness to God.<sup>127</sup> For her, the care offered to people through the Centre is the most important way in which faith is expressed and shared.

I'm not saying I don't care about the faith issues, but I care more about the care that people get and what they take from that, from being here...I just think, this is where people are. This is the type of environment I think Christ would have come into, to meet the people and help people...For me, I would like to think that it is sharing faith with people, but it is what people take out of it.<sup>128</sup>

Edith spoke about how she had changed through the process of the Theology Group and the development of the Centre.

Passages of the Bible that we had read time and time again sort of took on a different meaning. It made us think more about what we have to be doing. It's all right well saying, "Yes I accept you as my Saviour", but its got to effect the way we live our lives. It came to me more and more that people who were on the margins of society were just as valuable as everyone else... I just feel more in tune with people. I feel my commitment throughout the week is more, I want to serve I suppose. I feel more fulfilled in what I'm doing. My faith is more part of my life. It's not just going to church and being a good living sort of person. It's a way of life now rather than a bit that was tacked on at the end of the week.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See Kate's interview.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Kate.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Edith.

Edith went on to reflect on how she saw the relationship between faith and care in the appointment of Centre staff.

We had a lot of discussion about whether we should just employ Christians. We decided to employ the best person for the job. To me, if people are loving and caring, that is coming from God, whether or not they realise it.<sup>130</sup>

The Minister reflected on the nature of pastoral care in relation to the Centre and the community.

The reality is that, for most parish ministers, their only involvement with people in the community is really a point of crisis, and you can do something maybe at the point of crisis, but really it's almost what happens at the point of non-crisis which is about being pastorally good. And therefore what the Centre does is that it deals with people pastorally at the points of non-crisis in their life. It certainly enables people at points of crisis to have a much more immediate relationship into the Church or with the minister, or with someone else working in the Centre.<sup>131</sup>

Kate identified a tension between feeling free to express and discuss faith issues, and the limitations placed on this by the requirements of the Social Work Department and the Urban Programme.

Because we've got to follow certain regulations within the social work department for various things and funding issues, it's really something which we've not got to be seen to be promoting to any great profile. Maybe that means that sometimes we go the other way and deliberately don't discuss some of these things. You're almost reluctant on some occasions to maybe use faith examples for things because you're thinking, 'Am I allowed to say this in this context?' I think that it is quite interesting to think that maybe we should be sharing more in that way, but how do we do it in this context, when we've got to be seen to be neutral about some things, is quite difficult.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Edith.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with the Minister.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Kate.

The public funding which has enabled the Centre to be built and run has clearly, and perhaps rightly, placed limitations on the extent to which spirituality and faith can be discussed. The Centre's primary purposes are to help meet the needs of people in Leavale, to provide a common meeting place and to build the spirit of community. It may have arisen out of a desire to show the love of God for the community, but Christian evangelism is not a primary purpose of the Centre. It seems that in some way this has been, or is expressed, in a way that causes a certain degree of inhibition over raising, and discussing, spiritual and faith issues. This is unfortunate because some people in the community will most likely have spiritual needs which they want to explore, but those who work in the Centre may feel inhibited about responding to their need. This may be inevitable for a community initiative that benefits from considerable public funding, but its implications need to be carefully considered. This is an issue which could be explored further at Leavale, perhaps by the Theology Group. For the purpose of this thesis, it is noted that, where it is desired that community involvement should express authentic urban mission on the part of the local church, the implications of accepting public, or other funding, need to be clarified and explored in relation to the expression of faith and spirituality in an understanding of authentic Christian mission.

### 3.4.3 Tensions over daily worship

There are tensions concerning daily worship at the Centre. Tracy, the senior community worker responsible for supporting and supervising the Centre in relation to its Urban Programme Funding from the Scottish Office, drew attention to her concerns about worship.

People from the community bring it up in relation to Day Care about there being pressure over religious views. The Management Committee seem to raise it often and we seem to go back over the same kind of things...It was raised by the Management Committee about not enough people getting into worship.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with Tracy.

It is important to the Social Services Department, who refer people for Day Care, that people feel free to choose whether, or not, they attend worship. Some from the community had raised this issue with the social worker responsible for making referrals because they were aware of a pressure to attend worship. There is clearly an awareness of this among the Centre staff as one of them, who is not directly involved in Day Care, commented:

For daily worship, when Day Care ask the members if they would they like to go in to worship, they've got to be seen to be offering a choice. They can't just say, 'Right, we're all going into worship now.' That's something that they are aware of constantly.<sup>134</sup>

There is an ongoing tension in relation to daily worship and it is difficult to assess whether it presents a significant barrier for some people in relation to Day Care or to the Centre as a whole. The fact that the Centre is physically integrated with the Church building of one denomination is likely to make those on the other end of the sectarian divide wary. The danger of daily worship is that it adds to the impression that the Centre is for church people, or for those from one particular denomination and not another. In this way, daily worship may be partly undermining the aim of the Centre to be open for all. In the context of discussing community based mission, the minister raised the subject of the daily worship and gave something of the rationale for it.

I often think it does not work nearly as effectively as it should do, but one of the reasons why the worship is there is that we are not just a centre which is a community centre in addressing the social, physical, material needs of people. We are about being a community which says there is a spiritual dimension to living and that that spiritual dimension is part of each human being and that, for us, it has been fulfilled, or is in the process of being fulfilled, in a relationship with God and we cannot, or ought not, to wipe that away. That's got to be part of the conversation we have with people, not saying and 'therefore our way of doing things is right and your way is wrong', but how can we ever talk of spiritual things if we are unwilling to talk about them. To do that, humbly recognising that

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with Kate.

in reality, people outside the church might have more spiritual truths than those within it.<sup>135</sup>

The Minister reflects some concern about the effectiveness of daily worship as well as affirming its place. However, questions remain. It is not only whether or not worship should take place in the life of the Centre, but it is what form it should take and how often it should happen?

When the daily worship is seen to be mainly for Day Care people who are one of the most vulnerable groups, it could imply to other users of the Centre that they only go because they are encouraged to, or that worship is really only relevant to the elderly. The latter view came up earlier from the interview with Mandy when she said, 'Church is for grannies'<sup>136</sup>. She had probably never seen or attended daily worship in the Centre, but if she had, she would be unlikely to have had any reason to reconsider her view. Whilst it is good that the spiritual needs of the elderly who use Day Care are addressed and good that many of them seem to enjoy the daily worship, it may not be appropriate for the Centre as a whole. The case for worship in the Centre as a way of affirming the spiritual aspect of human living, and the fact that the Centre has arisen as an expression of the love of God for the community, can clearly be made. However, there are serious criticisms of the pattern and form of daily worship, and the conclusion here is that it is not appropriate for the life of the Centre as a whole.<sup>137</sup>

### **3.5 Challenges to the Church from Leavale**

The purpose here is to draw out the elements of the Leavale Case Study that need to be taken forward in the argument as to whether community involvement is an appropriate model of mission for the local urban church. This case study, and the process by which the Neighbourhood Centre has been initiated, demonstrates that the Leavale and Anderton churches have made a profound identification with Leavale through contextual community involvement.

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with the Minister.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Mandy.

<sup>137</sup> The theme of worship is explored on page 128.

Three factors have been identified to which people in the community responded in the community involvement of the Neighbourhood Centre. First, that people have a need that is met which may include the need to give service and care. Second, that their need is met in a welcoming, accepting, friendly and caring environment. Third, that the environment brings them together with a variety of other people from their community with whom they can socialise if they wish. In identifying these factors, the involvement of the community in the process which led to the concept and establishment of the Neighbourhood Centre must not be overlooked.

It has been shown that, despite negative general perceptions of the Christian Church people responded positively to the provision of the Neighbourhood Centre. Whilst the relationship of the Leavale Church to the Centre is ambiguous, it has strengths and weaknesses for the Centre, which could not have been established without the involvement of the church. However, the ambiguity of the relationship has the advantage that the Centre, as an organisation with which Leavale Church is informally very involved, has largely been able to leave behind nearly all the negative perceptions of the Christian Church in general. In partnership with others, this has enabled the community to be brought together through the Centre.

In contrast to concerns raised in Chapter One that spirituality can become marginal to community involvement, the Leavale Neighbourhood Centre demonstrates a commitment to the spiritual aspect of life. It challenges the wider Church to recognise and affirm the spirituality of people in the community, and to recognise that they may belong to the Body of Christ in a way which people who are in the institutional church, but who worship false gods, are not. The Church needs to take account of this in offering, and especially in denying, people access to rites of passage. The Church or the Church's community involvement also needs to provide non-threatening ways in which people can explore a sense of wondering about the meaning of life. The connection between spirituality and practical care has been demonstrated and the way in which the Centre has provided a new and more appropriate context for pastoral care in the community. One of the key issues raised in Chapter One about the place of faith, and faith-sharing in church community involvement, has been explored. It has been recognised that a tension exists between the commitments to give unconditional care, to affirm the spiritual dimension of life through Christian witness and to remain within the requirements of public funding

agencies. The Christian Church needs to consider the implications of this in community involvement. Tensions have been identified in relation to the daily worship of the Neighbourhood Centre with the conclusion that it does not represent appropriate worship for the Centre as a whole.

These elements from the study of Leavale Neighbourhood Centre will be taken into the argument about community involvement in Chapter Five. Before this, the other elements which are to contribute to that argument, must be drawn out from an examination of the second case study.

## **Chapter Four: The Tryst, Thorncliffe Church**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The research concerning the 'Opening Doors' community initiative of Thorncliffe Church, through the development of the Tryst, raises three particular issues in considering community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church. These are the response of people and groups in the community, the implications for the Church of living with open doors, and the significance of the 'go-between'. In this case study, the 'go-between' can be a person, a place, or a community. These key issues were identified from eight interviews which were carried out with people who were either formally, or informally, connected with the community involvement of Thorncliffe Church. An additional extended interview took place with the Project Leader at the conclusion of the research period and some of her insights are drawn into the chapter, particularly in the closing stages.

### **4.2 Going through the Open Doors**

The practical task of relating to one another as neighbours is central to the 'Opening Doors' approach, with its full title being 'Opening Doors, Opening Minds, Opening Hearts'. The commitment to welcome everyone, and the readiness to build neighbourly relationships, is the essence of the open door of the Tryst. This section explores the experiences of people and groups from the community who have gone through the open doors into the Tryst. While the Tryst is the focus of 'Opening Doors' it also provides the way for other doors to open which enable wider community use of the extensive church premises. There are a number of groups and activities which are run by the Church, but the main focus here is on community groups and individuals who have responded to the 'Opening Doors' Initiative.



#### 4.2.1 Community Groups and Organisations

The Nursery group came to Thorncliffe Church in August 1996, at a time when it had been seeking a new venue and at the same time as the church was in the process of adopting the 'Opening Doors' policy. Emma, the leader of the nursery group, attends another church, but was known to some of the members at Thorncliffe because her brother had once been the organist. She described the negotiations with the church.

Some people were not too sure about us coming. We had great help from the Church Secretary over inspections and regulations...He acted as the Co-ordinator. I think to be honest it helped that they knew me. They were welcoming to us. Then the other one that came in to play was the Treasurer. He was good at negotiating and listening to us.<sup>138</sup>

Survivor's Poetry Scotland (SPS) is an organisation which has an office in the Thorncliffe Church and which uses other rooms at different times during the week. The link between SPS and 'Opening Doors' was made in the run up to a local community festival, when the Project Leader invited SPS to give a poetry reading in the café. At the time SPS were looking for premises and the church had an office available which they agreed to let. Colin, the Project Manager described SPS.

SPS provides writing workshops for users of the mental health service for people who've recovered, or are recovering, from addictions, alcohol, substance abuse, whatever, people who've survived sexual abuse, people with disabilities. We draw the net as widely as possible. Basically it's an organisation for people who feel that they've got problems, they're messed up and they want to explore problems through writing and through creativity. We're very much about self empowerment, we're a user led movement and it's a crucial part of the organisation that it is survivors organising ourselves and everything that we do. We run three workshops a week here in the Tryst, we have a monthly performance ceilidh, in the old sense of the word, where everyone who comes stands up and does their piece.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Emma.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Colin.

Colin expressed his appreciation of the church facilities that were available for use by SPS and how significant this had been for the organisation.

It is a wonderful space, probably the only building in this area which has office space, performance space and which is accessible, with toilets which are accessible for disabled people, with level doorways and entrance halls... That is very important to us because we have people who come in wheelchairs... The value of the Tryst for us is that we can get a dedicated office space at a reasonable rent and also that it has got these other large spaces which we can hire and pay for on an 'as we use' basis, the big performance area in the café and the Memorial room for workshops... We have grown through being here because we have brought together our whole project under one roof and that's given the project an air of unity and togetherness which we certainly didn't have before and the number using our services have increased exponentially with that. We are now much, much bigger than we were before, all because of moving here. It has been tremendous for us and we are delighted to be here.<sup>140</sup>

The use of church facilities by the Nursery Group and SPS demonstrate the resource which a large church building can be to community organisations which need a low cost permanent base, and which may also need to use larger rooms and halls, either regularly or occasionally. In the second instance, use of the church building has enabled SPS to develop its work significantly and increase the use of under-used space in the building. In addition to these two groups, there is a Conservation Trust and an ecumenical initiative to help the homeless, which also have offices in the church building. This means that there are a number of people working for different organisations who are in the building throughout the week.

In addition to the four resident community organisations there are a variety of other community groups which meet regularly on the premises, as well as those which meet occasionally. Paul is involved in running two of these regular groups, Parent-Link and a Local Exchange Trading System (LETS), which both make use of rooms in the church

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with Colin.

and Tryst. He appreciates the facility, its modest costs and the 'Opening Doors' initiative.<sup>141</sup>

In a letter to user groups and organisations in March 1998, the Project Leader commented on the increased use of the Tryst.

Since the opening of the Tryst in October 1996, the usage of the various rooms and halls in 'Thorncliffe Church' has increased by 300%, both through regular bookings and occasional events... This increase, and the steady build-up of people using the Tryst lunch time café, means that the number of people coming and going through the building is considerable.<sup>142</sup>

This atmosphere of life and activity was, in itself, valued by Colin.

It's very good to be in a building that is used a lot by other people because there is a cross over of interests and people, and its good to be somewhere that feels quite vibrant and active.<sup>143</sup>

The 'Opening Doors' initiative, focused on the Tryst, has provided a home base for organisations who exist to serve pre-school children, survivors of the mental health system, those who are homeless, people who are interested in parenting issues, local conservation and alternative ways of trading. It has been shown that these 'formal' users of the Tryst and church building strongly appreciate the facilities which the Thorncliffe Church has made available to them. They perceive the facilities to be flexible and of good quality and value. Alongside the experience of those who are formally involved in organisations at the Tryst, there are those who come through the open doors on their own as newcomers.

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Paul.

<sup>142</sup> Project Leader's Letter to all user groups and organisations, 31 March, 1998.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Colin.

#### 4.2.2 A Personal Experience

Susan had recently moved into Thorncliffe and she was looking for a nursery for her younger daughter. It was her interest in the nursery that brought her to the doors of the Tryst and she explained what happened.

The first thing that happened when I knocked on the door the first day, to see if I could just go in to look around the nursery. The door was opened by a young woman, who was probably in her early twenties, I think, and she'd dyed blonde hair with green on top, and lots of nose rings and lots of earrings and earrings up on her eyebrows and she was really, really different looking, and I just thought, wow! If she's here working as a nursery nurse, then the place must be all right.<sup>144</sup>

In making her approach to the nursery, Susan was very conscious in her own mind that she was not a church person and that she was looking for a good nursery, rather than a church nursery. To find herself welcomed by someone with such an unusual appearance instantly provided a reassuring visual sign of openness and acceptance which was very important to Susan.

We have certainly felt very accepted through the nursery and the café, and particularly the nursery first of all, and seeing somebody so different open the door, just feeling there is a real acceptance here of people who don't look the same as each other.<sup>145</sup>

This may not have worked quite so well for someone in a different situation, but for Susan it was just right, and her initial experience of acceptance was confirmed by further contact.

So, I did know as soon as I came here, that I wasn't going to be rejected at one level and I think that's continued to be and since we've been here, people we've met who are attached to the church, like the Project Leader, like Fiona, like people who work in the café and the neighbours who come down to the café... I

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with Susan .

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Susan.

couldn't fault people for being pleasant and so friendly and going out of their way, and for really trying to engage you and make you feel welcome and such like has been very good. It makes you feel that you belong. I've made some very good friends through coming here, not attached to the church, but just by being able to use the space. The nursery has been a big start for that.<sup>146</sup>

It should be noted here that Susan thought she might be rejected and this will be taken up again later. For Susan, the convenient link between an independently run nursery and the lunch time café run by the church have been a great help to her and her family in socialising in their new community.

The fact of having nursery straight on to the café helps socialising to go on. It also means that the mothers and fathers who are around taking the kids to nursery can get to know each other a bit better as well. It's really helped me to forge some quite good friendships. So, having no interest at all in the religious aspect of it, I'd really miss the community facilities that are provided here.<sup>147</sup>

The Tryst has lived up to its name for Susan in providing a welcoming place to meet and to make friends. Her youngest daughter has benefited from the nursery provision and, having recently moved into 'Thorncliffe, it has helped Susan to feel that she belongs.

The Project Leader reflected on the response to 'Opening Doors'.

The Tryst has been open for two years and on the plan to 'Open Doors, Open minds, Open hearts', it has become clear that when you open your doors in a welcoming kind of way, people come in and a lot of people come in and there are a lot of people here.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

### 4.2.3 Wariness of the Church and Conversion

Despite the strong response of the community in coming through the open doors of the Tryst, the interviews show evidence of the wariness which people had of responding to a community initiative of the church. This was the case for Susan before she made contact with the nursery.

The one thing that held me back from it, for a while, for a few weeks, before we came in was because it was attached to the church. Because it was called Noah's Little Nursery, I didn't want her getting any religion through her nursery school at all.<sup>149</sup>

Susan describes why she, and other people who she knows, feel reticent about churches in general and how her perception of Thorncliffe Church now differs from her general view.

I don't think generally the church is very good at going out to people. They don't have a great reputation of being very community minded for altruistic reasons. People generally have a suspicion about churches...I think if you are in Glasgow it can be one of the things you learn to steer clear of if possible because of the great religious divides.<sup>150</sup>

My experience of church is that often, if there's a coffee morning or something on a regular basis, it can sometimes just be a reason to get you in to take part in church life. It's not about what the church can offer to the community. It is more about getting people in to work for the church, to build the church up... I remember the first time we went in for lunch. I thought someone would come over and try to persuade us to stay for the lunch time prayers or something, but they didn't of course. Then I would talk to other people at school and say, 'Oh it's really okay, it's not like that, honestly, it's okay.' So they're doing something

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Susan.

quite different from what people's expectation of what happens when they come to a church building. They're suspicious really.<sup>151</sup>

Initial suspicion and wariness of the church was expressed in the interviews in different ways. For instance, Jed, who is involved with SPS, was asked whether there were any tensions in relation to the church, and he replied, 'No, they never try to convert us'.<sup>152</sup> His reply suggests that if he had expected there to be a tension, it was that the church would try to convert the people from the community. As someone who works in the building from Monday to Friday for SPS, Colin reflected on what the church's purpose might be in opening its doors to the community.

If the church feels this is part of its mission then its very nice that they don't ram it down our throats. But in terms of winning over hearts and numbers for God then it is not doing that. Maybe it doesn't and I hope not, but I think of churches of a traditional evangelical nature who might count the numbers of people who start coming to worship. In the case of SPS it's likely to be nil.<sup>153</sup>

Paul alluded to a barrier between church and community which he felt Thorncliffe Church had helped to begin breaking down, by making it clear that it had other priorities. He had not found any evidence to suggest that people had found it difficult to come to the church premises. However, when asked whether he saw the church's opening up to the community as the church finding a way forward, he replied;

I think it is a positive way forward that is healthy for everyone. In the broadest terms it spreads the light of good feelings and optimism and shows that the church is not just about repression and 'thou shalt not'. I wouldn't try and make out that it was the way forward. I think it is good. It shows the church in a positive light, particularly in Scotland where the Church has a Puritan kind of image.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Jed.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Colin.

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Paul.

These perspectives of the people interviewed from the community show that the genuine spirit of openness and acceptance has largely overcome the initial sense of suspicion and wariness that the hidden agenda was to convert people. Instead, there is a strong appreciation of the church for opening itself up to the community and inviting people to make use of its improved facilities on what are regarded as generous terms. However, it is clear that people's response is to the community involvement of the church and that they draw a distinction between responding to this and responding to what they might see as the religious aspect of the church. This is an important insight which recurs throughout this chapter and which raises the question as to how church community involvement relates to the church as a whole?

For example, Susan appreciates Thorncliffe Church's role in, and contribution to, the community. She sees the potential for the Church in general to take on this kind of role, but she still sees the Church's readiness to give, rather than take, and to accept people, as its major challenges. Susan has a limit on how far she is willing to be involved with Thorncliffe Church. 'I'd stop short of wanting to join the church and get involved in the church, in terms of the service'.<sup>155</sup> Despite this, she was willing to extend her involvement as far as attending a special service, and speaking as a representative of the nursery group.

I've been to one service because it was the Thanksgiving and I was asked to go and talk about the Nursery and I was very happy to do that as a one off. It seemed quite busy that day.<sup>156</sup>

Susan's comments suggest that for her, and her friends, the community involvement of Thorncliffe Church has only gone so far in changing perceptions.

I think the impression of this church outside in the community, certainly among people I know, is much more positive, than it would have been before they started coming here. But there'd still be a lot of wariness, I don't think there's anybody I know who comes who has changed their minds and started using the church in terms of the spiritual side and started sending their children to Sunday

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Susan.



School, or coming along to church themselves. I think the church still has a long way to go to making people feel that there is a place for them, that they would be acceptable to the church. I think they still feel that it could be rules, and rules which you must live by in order to be accepted in the Church.<sup>157</sup>

The community has responded very positively to the community initiative of Thorncliffe Church through the Open Door of the Tryst. People and groups appreciate and value the church's open and creative contribution to life in the community. There is evidence to suggest that this has given the church a more positive profile in the local community. However, the interviews show that, because of their wariness of the Church and its perceived agenda of converting people, Thorncliffe Church would have been unlikely to make contact with this group of people through more conventional approaches to mission. The response of the community has been to the church's community involvement, rather than to the church as a whole. This has raised the question of the relationship of the church's community involvement to the church as a whole? This question is explored in the next section.

### **4.3 Living with Open Doors**

It has been shown that there has been a very positive response from the community to the 'Opening Doors' community initiative of Thorncliffe Church. This section explores the implications for the church of living with open doors. What are the costs and tensions which may need to be recognised in assessing community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church? In order to explore these questions, the perceptions of those people who are, or have been, involved in both the church's community involvement and the wider life of the church receive greater prominence in this section, so that their views can be brought into dialogue with those who speak from a community perspective.

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<sup>157</sup> Interview with Susan.

### 4.3.1 Sharing Space

An inevitable consequence of opening the church building to the community is that the space is now shared by a variety of organisations and groups, rather than simply by church related groups. The sheer increase in the level of use of the buildings and the extent to which they are shared makes for a variety of housekeeping issues. Emma from the nursery group reflected;

There are occasional grumps. We try very hard to keep the place as tidy and clean as we find it, but there are maybe one or two people who feel that maybe nursery is not doing its bit. This happens, it's human nature. It would happen in any accommodation. We've never had any really nasty points or crisis points. It has generally jogged along very nicely.<sup>158</sup>

Colin recognised that there are practical difficulties in a group like SPS being a significant user of the church building.

There are an infinite number of ways in which we could tread on each others toes. SPS, because we are a big organisation with lots of people who don't always behave in socially conventional ways, and don't always stick to rules as such, and because we're here all the week, we tend to start to regard it as our space, whereas the Church obviously regards it as their space. That means when we overflow into other rooms we can get in the way of people and forget things like washing up after us... The only conflicts we've had are over space. Things like mess, the photocopier, being in the wrong place. There's been no conflict with other users.<sup>159</sup>

Colin draws attention to an important implication of having community groups with a permanent base in the church building. Since the staff of these groups are in the building on a daily basis throughout the week, they naturally start to regard it as their space, their working home. They are in the building for more time each week than anyone else, including people from the church, who are in the building for periods of time, but not

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<sup>158</sup> Interview with Emma.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Colin.

from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Colin rightly recognises that people from the church tend to think of the building as their space. The reality is that while different organisations may have their own areas of dedicated space, most of the space is shared. Some conflict between these two understandable, but different senses, of thinking that this is 'our space' is probably inevitable. However, it could probably be reduced by enabling the community based users and the church users to explore their different perceptions of why this is 'our space'. There is a need for understanding and sensitivity on all sides. As Colin points out below, it is not simply the case that SPS inconveniences church use of the building.

There are also ways in which the church can get in our way... The church had a big meeting on and we had a workshop in the Memorial room and we couldn't get in to set up before because members of the church were drinking tea in there and the idea of checking to see if another organisation had booked that room was totally alien to the sweet elderly ladies who were in there. I didn't feel we could boot them out, so the workshop was delayed and we had a professional writer running it, who reports back to the Arts Council who fund us.<sup>160</sup>

Colin demonstrates awareness and sensitivity, and a willingness to put up with inconvenience despite the possible repercussions for his own organisation. That there is a concern in the Church about the giving up of space was confirmed by Dawn, when she was asked if she was aware of any tensions in relation to having other groups move into the premises on a permanent basis? She replied, 'At some stage, people worry about giving up space, but then we have lots.'<sup>161</sup>

#### 4.3.2 For everyone and anyone

The doors of the Tryst are open for everyone, and anyone, to come through. It is an open invitation. An important aspect of the community in Thorncliffe and the surrounding areas of the city is that there are people of many different nationalities. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that this international dimension of community life is part of the Church and the Tryst. One expression of this is that for many years the Korean

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with Colin.

Church has been worshipping on Sunday afternoons in the Thorncliffe Church building. There is also a very significant relationship with a group of Japanese people who come to Thorncliffe from as far away as Edinburgh and Livingston. Two Japanese people, who have been members of the church for a number of years, have been very important in facilitating these relationships. It began through some Japanese people bringing their children to Sunday School, as the Project Leader describes.

It was a good way for their children to practice for real school in Britain because it is a different style of learning from Japan. There is much more exchange in it and the Japanese children were being quite disadvantaged in Scottish schools because they weren't asking questions and expected quite a passive form of learning.<sup>162</sup>

Jessie, a Japanese church member, explained something of the context for Japanese people living in Scotland.

Inside the Japanese factories in Scotland, Japanese people use Japanese systems and the culture is Japanese. They see the scenery of Scotland, but do not get to know Scottish culture. Many don't learn English. Japanese mothers want to study Scottish and to understand Christianity because it is the background of Western culture and in Japan only 1% of the population are Christian, but the Bible is very popular.<sup>163</sup>

A relationship with some Japanese families in Scotland began which led to setting up an all age summer school for Japanese and Scots in the Tryst. The purpose of this was to learn about Japanese and Scottish culture. A Bible study has also been established for Japanese women who want to learn about Christianity. The Project Leader reflected;

I think it was initially a response to the church which has found an appropriate means of expression through the Tryst that it wouldn't have simply through the church, because the people involved are by and large not Christians...I think the advantage is of being a place where they can be together as Japanese people, but

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Dawn.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

they can also be together with Scots people, so it's not only a Japanese support or social club, but it gave them more opportunities to be involved and to participate and do something which reflected their culture along with the International Café.<sup>164</sup>

The International Café is run by members of the Church once a month on a Saturday afternoon in the Tryst, for people of all national backgrounds to come together and share aspects of their culture, including food, with one another. It is a further expression of how 'Opening Doors' is for everyone, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity. The summer school has since broadened its scope to include people of a variety of nationalities.

Some of the church are aware that 'Opening Doors' literally means that anyone can come in and that the church has to accept and work with the people and situations which may arise.<sup>165</sup> Annette spoke about some of the people who respond to the open door of the church on a Sunday and come to worship.

We do have some of these down and outs who come to our services and we are very lucky because these people can be, in certain situations, very disruptive, and whether it has been careful handling of them, but they are not in any way causing any embarrassment. There really is a genuine sense of fellowship and acceptance... In some churches they say we want to love everybody but not you, because you smell and make unpleasant sounds and then you fall asleep and start snoring the minute the sermon begins and I feel that in Thorncliffe there is a lightness of touch which enables us... I mean, if one of them did, and it is quite easy to fall asleep if you have been out in the cold all day, making a noise, people would just handle it discreetly and nicely and there wouldn't be embarrassment, there would be humour attached to it. There are some very good people in that church who bring a kind of sense of proportion to it and who've also got a firmness where they're not going to be taken for a ride by every sort of person in

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with Jessie.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

<sup>165</sup> See Interview with Dawn.

the street who is looking to make a buck. To my mind we have the balance about right.<sup>166</sup>

Susan is a strong advocate of the community involvement of the church through the open door of the Tryst. However, she still challenges the church over its acceptance of people.

I think the biggest area that the church has to get over is the apparent inability to tolerate, or freely accept, the range of people in the community. It's about trying to accept people for who they are, as opposed to people who follow a certain line. I don't how you get over that... Very often it comes down to who's leading the church at that particular time.<sup>167</sup>

It may be that Susan's expectation that she might be rejected by the church, grows out of two past experiences, one of a church which she attended in her youth which she came to see as being narrow, and a second where the minister refused to marry her because she was living with her fiancée, and finally because she feels her sexuality is not acceptable to the Church. This puts into context Susan's challenge to the Church to accept the range of people in the community.

#### 4.3.3 Relationships

Colin was asked whether the occasional conflicts over space and tidiness made for a tense relationship with the Church?

It could be, but I don't think it is. I think we get on well with almost all of the church people that we come regularly into contact with. I think sometimes we feel that we have to be on our best behaviour, but then we might feel that with any landlord around.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with Annette.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Colin.

Colin perceives good relationships between those involved in SPS and those involved in the church. His comment about 'best behaviour' suggests, perhaps, that he is aware of needing to be careful with certain people from the church. The Project Leader reflected on the changes which members of the church are dealing with, as a result of 'Opening Doors.'

It is a big thing to open the doors of your home. Someone was quoted as saying, in a most put out way, "Who are all these strangers in the church?" That is a shift and it is a process whereby you understand how you relate to that, what it means for you as a church, for the groups that come in, and what it means to relate to people... Then the question for people in the church is, 'How do you wish to relate to these people once they are here?' That was really my question at the end of my first two years here. I think that part of the task which was in my job remit is accomplished. The people are here. Now how do you see your relationship with them?<sup>169</sup>

This question about how the church relates to those who have responded to the open door is of crucial importance and it will be explored in a number of ways in the remainder of this chapter. In addition to the issues related to the sharing of space, two other issues arose in the study concerning the appropriateness of certain kinds of activity and behaviour on the church premises. They also bring in to focus the relationship of the church with people from the community.

Paul identified that there had been a problem over the provision of alcohol for a ceilidh run by LETS.<sup>170</sup> If a building is used for social gatherings and celebrations the possible provision and consumption of alcohol is bound to arise and the Church needs to have a clear policy if it is concerned about alcohol on Church premises. The second issue concerns use of language. This was observed when SPS gave a poetry reading in the Tryst café. Some of the poems contained swear words, and another explored sexual experience and imagery which were found offensive by some members of the Church who were serving in the café. It is inevitable that if the Church opens its doors to the community and people come in, they will bring with them their own codes of language

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<sup>169</sup> Interview with The Project Leader.

<sup>170</sup> See Interview with Paul.

and behaviour. This is part of the benefit of community involvement in that it exposes the Church to aspects of community life, behaviour and culture that would otherwise rarely arise in the sub-culture of the Church. This then raises the theological question of how the Church relates and responds to the language and behaviour of people from the community who do not understand or share the sub-culture of church. This becomes a more involved question still when the people concerned may be mentally ill or survivors of abuse.

These issues do not only raise the question of relationships, they also raise the question of boundaries. There are boundaries for both community groups and the church in their relating together. Nevertheless the boundaries become more blurred and less significant as relationships grow. Susan Hope, in a piece of writing entitled 'Sanctuary', encourages the Church to think in terms of relationships rather than boundaries.

As soon as we start thinking in relational rather than in doctrinal terms to describe the dynamic between the church and the community, two things happen. One is that the boundaries between church and community start to disappear, at least in our minds - what we are talking about is people being friends, being with and for each other.<sup>171</sup>

To put this in terms of the issues of swearing, sexually explicit language and the provision and consumption of alcohol, these are not only issues for the church which arise in relation to 'Opening Doors'. These are issues for people in the church already, just as they are for people in the community, but the fact that they are forced into the open by the community response to 'Opening Doors' gives the opportunity for them to be explored. When this is done, it becomes clear that in both church and community there are a variety of views about these issues and that some church people and some community people hold very similar views about them. This breaks down the sense of them being boundary issues and enables people to relate to one another as people, rather than as those defending a perceived boundary. This could have the effect on people in the community that they think again about God and the church. The effect of this on the church is to break down perceived boundaries between church and community, so that the church has to think again about what it really means to be a church in this community



context. Susan Hope affirms this in a second point about what happens when churches think in relational terms about the dynamic between church and community.

The second thing is that we are compelled to pay serious attention to what it is to 'be church' in a way which gives credence and authenticity to the things we most deeply believe... It is in a communal life, committed to the danger of holiness, in which doctrine, apparently long rendered irrelevant through lack of being lived, is taken from its theological closet, shaken out and applied radically to the life of the believing church - it is this life which makes theology accessible to the local community. This is incarnational theology, lived out by human beings in human terms which can be recognised, grasped and understood by other human beings.<sup>172</sup>

The question of how the church relates to the people who have come in through the open door presses it back to the vision of 'Opening Doors, Opening minds and Opening hearts' and how it as an expression of faith in God. The church has no right to expect people from the community to open their doors, minds and hearts to the church unless the church is willing to open its doors, mind and heart to the community. The church has clearly taken the first step by opening the doors of its building to the community and people in the community have taken a step by responding. The challenge of relating to these people is to now open the minds and hearts of the church to the community and invite the community to open minds and hearts to the church, breaking down traditional boundaries and relating as fellow human beings who can share with one another what is on their minds and in their hearts. It is in this context that people can share and receive each others insights about life, hope and faith.

#### 4.3.4 Mission, commerce or church growth?

A final area of tension about the Tryst and 'Opening Doors', which is evident in the church, concerns its aims, or purpose. Colin provided a perceptive community perspective on this.

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<sup>171</sup> Susan Hope, 'Sanctuary', 'in', *God in the City*, ed. Peter Sedgwick, Mowbray, 1995, 195.

<sup>172</sup> Susan Hope, 'Sanctuary', 'in' *God in the City*, ed. Peter Sedgwick, 195.

I think there is a tension in the Church's attitude to this place and I don't know whether the church has decided whether this is a commercial decision to enable them to employ a Project Leader and also to enable them to rent out empty rooms, or whether it is part of their mission, whether they are hoping to evangelise with us, or whether they see us as a commercial proposition. I feel as if they're somewhere between the two stools and I think they haven't quite decided amongst themselves which it is to be.<sup>173</sup>

This is a very interesting insight from Colin. In an earlier quote he expressed his appreciation that the church did not put pressure on people to become Christians and his awareness that some churches might be measuring the success of 'Opening Doors' by new people attending worship. Here he detects a tension as to whether the aim is a commercial one to make the building useful and viable, or whether there is still a hope of evangelising the community users.

Dawn's perspective as a church member, who had also been employed part time by the church to do community work, prior to the formal adoption of the 'Opening Doors' policy, was also aware of tensions.

There are different agendas. For some it is about bums on seats and more younger people, by which I mean my age. For others it is much more about being open as a church to the community. Some have an exciting vision of what that could mean. I think the Church has to think through together what 'Opening Doors' means for each of them on quite a deep level and feel that we are doing it together. The whole concept is quite vague to me and I know that I should know, but it is still vague. I'm pretty sure that a lot of people would be unclear. Some would have a well defined idea of what it is. We all need to catch that vision. I think we are getting there.<sup>174</sup>

Susan's experience of 'Opening Doors' suggests to her that the primary aim is to play an active part in the life of the local community.

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Colin.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Dawn.

It seems to me that Thorncliffe Church, I mean I don't know, I presume they would hope that more people will come along, but it seems to me that they see themselves as being part of the community life here, and that stands on its own, and they seem to be happy with that.

Annette, also a church member, was asked whether the church was at ease with the 'Opening Doors' approach or whether there was a sense of tension about it?

It's interesting, there are this couple who give me one hundred pounds for the Disabled Guides and they say what you're doing is what it's all about. What the rest of them are doing is not what it is all about. They don't like this 'Opening Doors' to all these people. I'm sure there must be mutterings, but I don't hear them directly.<sup>175</sup>

Annette outlined the rationale, as she saw it, which is offered to the congregation of the church to explain 'Opening Doors'.

I think largely it is that this is part of our mission. It is not any longer about going out and trying to bring more Christians in and save more souls. It is about being neighbourly and that's what appeals to me. We are here and we want to be friends. We want to provide for the community something that will be useful. I would not be comfortable if it was actually that the hidden agenda is that we are trying to chalk up more members. Definitely not. We have a problem of course like all churches with membership, but I'm sure that's the right way to go about it and if by chance you get one or two additional members then that is a bonus, but it is not what you set out to do.<sup>176</sup>

So there are a variety of perceptions of the aim of 'Opening Doors'. Is it a commercial venture? Is there a long term plan to evangelise the community? Is the aim to increase the number of people who go to worship, particularly among the younger generations? Is it mission? Is it simply a contribution to the life of the local community? Is it an

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<sup>175</sup> Interview with Annette.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Annette.

experiment to find out what happens when the church is open the community? Is it simply misguided? There are seven different views here as to what 'Opening Doors' is really about. Some of them are related, but there is a lack of clarity and consensus that could develop into serious misunderstanding and conflict in the future. 'Opening Doors' may have a number of aims, but it seems that the Thorncliffe Church needs to think through and clarify what they are. The evidence of peoples' perceptions of the church in this case study certainly suggest that it is naïve to expect that people will start coming to worship in church as a response to 'Opening Doors'.

This section as a whole has explored some of the tensions for Thorncliffe Church in adopting the 'Opening Doors' approach to community involvement. There is a change of culture when a church has been used to having the run of its building all week, but then gives up this freedom in order to share the space with community groups. Inevitably this leads to housekeeping issues and a sense that perhaps others will, take over our space. The different sense of ownership between members of the church and resident community groups has been identified.

'Opening Doors' has led some of the people of Thorncliffe Church to recognise that everyone and anyone can come in. The relationships which have been established with Japanese families across the Central Belt of Scotland, and the way in which the church has responded is remarkable. The help and initiative of a Japanese couple who are part of Thorncliffe Church has been a great resource for this. The sheer variety of people linked with Thorncliffe Church which embraces pre-school children, homeless people, survivors of the mental health system, professionals, families and people of a variety of nationalities, testify to its intention to be open for everyone and anyone. 'Opening Doors' demonstrates the commitment to accepting people despite the tensions which have already been recognised. This remains an ongoing challenge for the church to work through in all aspects of its life how it accepts the variety of people in the community.

Having accepted and welcomed people into the Tryst, this research poses the question of how Thorncliffe Church would like to develop its relationships with people from the community? This question is inextricably linked with how they see the aims, or overall purpose, of 'Opening Doors', which was explored in the concluding section. This requires some clarification by the church as a whole, which in itself may present a

challenge as to how much everyone at Thorncliffe supports 'Opening Doors'. Part of the beauty of such community involvement is that, to some extent, it can be different things for different people. However, if it is to be more than a commercial enterprise in good stewardship of a large church building, and more than an experiment in openness to the community, if it is to be seen as an expression of the mission of the church, then the relationships with the users from the community must be developed. Part of this must be to consider how Christian faith and spirituality are shared and explored in a genuinely open and reciprocal way. The experience of the 'Opening Doors' Conference held in September 1998, where those who spoke for the church naturally included the resource and challenge of their faith, in the wider context of their work with 'Opening Doors', suggests that this work has begun.

#### **4.4 A Go-between person, place and community**

The significance of the 'go-between' arises from the community involvement represented by the open doors of the Tryst. There are three inter-related elements which together comprise the go-between nature of the 'Opening Doors' initiative. These are a go-between person, a go-between place and a go-between community.

##### **4.4.1 A Go-between person**

Although the interviewees were not asked any questions about the Project Leader, her role and work were identified as being very important by both community users and church members. In answer to a question about how he would describe the relationship of SPS with the church, Colin said;

Well, what allows us to survive here and for the Tryst to work, is the leadership of the Project Leader who understands the needs of both organisations and is able to mediate between the two of them.<sup>177</sup>

In explaining how he had found making the link with the church Paul commented;

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<sup>177</sup> Interview with Colin.

Dawn was very welcoming and then there was a hiatus and then the Project Leader came. It made it clear that she was there to work with the community. Contact is limited to the Project Leader...If the Project Leader weren't there with a community role, it would be more difficult because we would feel that we had to justify our use.<sup>178</sup>

This shows that, for formal users of the church building, it is very important, even crucial, that there is a person who is designated as being responsible for, and to, community users. Colin recognises the work of the Project Leader as a mediator between community users and the church. At times she may act as an advocate of the church to the users and at other times as an advocate of the users to the church. As Project Leader she is paid by, and responsible to, the church, yet also responsible to the community users. It is clear that the person in this go-between role will, to some extent, need to defuse and absorb the tensions which were identified earlier on a day to day basis. However, it is important that such a person does not do so on their own and that they have the support of a wider group.

As an informal user of the café, Susan identifies the important community work carried out by the Project Leader.

In the café it gets quite riotous sometimes because the children come in, and the Project Leader has gone out of her way, I think, to work with people who run the café to not put barriers up there, because a woman with children could easily feel frozen out, excluded, because there are a lot of elderly people who want to use the café and the kids are noisy, but she'll go and get them crayons and paper and such like. So, rather than making people feel that they are not welcome she will go the extra mile and say, "It's great to see you here. Why don't you come over and do this." What a difference of an attitude that is really. I can see her working, maybe it is because I'm a community worker, with people behind the counter on that. Because sometimes the kids are a bit wild, my own included, and you do see people get a bit up tight because it is noisy, and they're elderly, and they're adding up and it's not what they are used too. I get the feeling that sometimes

when the Project Leader comes in they are thinking, 'What are you going to do about this riot here?' But she says, 'Okay, well we'll sought it' or 'Here's a good idea' and she's saying, 'We need this to be here, we're providing this for the community and this is the community we have here.'<sup>179</sup>

From the perspective of church members who are in sympathy with 'Opening Doors', Dawn and Annette recognise the importance of the role of Project Leader in making people welcome<sup>180</sup> and relating to the groups who use the building on behalf of the church.<sup>181</sup>

The role of the Project Leader in going between community and church is very important and calls for particular skills and abilities. The person in the post of Project Leader at the time of this study was in many ways an ideal person to fulfil the role of go-between. She is not a member of Thorncliffe Church, but is significantly involved in wider Church life as a minister, worship leader and community theologian. She lives in and knows the local area. She has many years experience of church-related community work, as well as an interest in community activities beyond the Church and the arts. Her blend of experience, skills, interest and status make her a near ideal person to win the respect and confidence of both the community and the church in this go-between role. In her part-time work as Project Leader, she must take a significant amount of credit for the success and rapid development of the 'Opening Doors' initiative through the Tryst. The skills, time, energy and commitment of such a go-between person are certainly very important, and possibly essential to a community initiative such as 'Opening Doors'.

#### 4.4.2 A Go-between place

While it is an integral part of the church building, the re-development of the Tryst has given it a different, and distinctive identity, from the rest of the church building. It has its own entrance, toilets, kitchen and servery as well as a stage and raised lounge area.

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Paul.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>180</sup> See Interview with Annette.

<sup>181</sup> See Interview with Dawn.

Much thought, effort and finance has gone into developing the Tryst as an attractive, welcoming and go-between place.

Emma, who runs the nursery group sees the 'Opening Doors' approach of the church as providing a go-between place in which all are welcome.

I think they are trying very hard to bring people in to the church building to make them aware that the church isn't just a place that functions on Sunday and has certain religious guidelines. They are trying very hard to bring in people who would normally have nothing to do with a church building and hopefully from that, encourage them in one way or another, and from that pick up some of the Christian atmosphere that exists within the building, whether or not they ever attend church on a Sunday. Personally, I don't think that is altogether important. I think as a Christian community if people can feel that they are welcome within the confines of a church building, no matter who they are, what they are, where they've come from or where they are going to, if they feel that they come here for whatever reason and find something here that suits them and gives them a good feeling, then I think the church has done a very good job and has moved out and moved away from a static Sunday where more or less the church doors are shut except for church organisations. The image of these is a problem. 'Opening Doors' has brought other people in and they have contact with the Christian community... I think it is a very big step forward. If we keep the Church as it stands with this image of being a certain group of people that are blinkered maybe, to the outsider, in the way that we look at it, then I don't know that it will necessarily survive another hundred years.<sup>182</sup>

The 'Opening Doors' initiative seeks to make the Tryst, and to a lesser extent the whole church building, into a go-between place which is both for church people and for the local community. In the Tryst, the lunch time café which is open from Tuesday to Friday provides a drop in facility which can be used by anyone and it acts as a social space where people can meet and relax over lunch. The cafe has an important function within the Open Door of the Tryst because it brings together people from the different community organisations and groups, as well as people who drop in. Volunteers from



Thorncliffe Church are there to serve them all. In this context relationships can be made and developed in a gradual way between all those involved. Without it, many of the people using the Tryst and the church would never have the opportunity to meet one another properly.

Susan, who has a daughter in the nursery, and uses the café regularly, commented on the importance of the Café.

This is a nice building to come to. That really matters because quite often churches are grotty places. The renovations they have done in the café area are wonderful. It's very nice to go to a building, when you've got young children, and times might be a bit hard, its very nice to go somewhere that is bright and airy and just feels nice and is warm and comfortable. You should never underestimate the fabric of a building and how important that can be.<sup>183</sup>

Susan describes how she has become an advocate of the Tryst in the community.

In the early days the café was very quiet and not well used at all. I was concerned to see that people used it. I've advocated for people to use the building. I've spent a lot of time saying to folk, "It's a great atmosphere at the nursery and the café's a great place to come. Don't worry that it is a church building." Because having been a community worker, I see the value of what the provision can be and would hate to see it not being used, or being withdrawn because its not being used. Often people wouldn't be using it because they would have the same kind of view as I'd had that it would be very churchy and it wouldn't have anything for them.<sup>184</sup>

The Nursery Leader identified the important role of the café for other nursery parents.

Our parents do support the lunch time café. Parents have become involved in meeting together for lunch different days of the week and meeting people from the church who are involved in the café. May be in the long run that is stretching

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with Emma.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Susan.

out a hand to the community and to people who wouldn't otherwise be here at all.<sup>185</sup>

The Open Door of the Café provides the opportunity for all those involved in the groups who are available over lunch time to meet one another and people from the community who drop in for lunch. The effect of the 'Opening Doors' approach has been to bring together a variety of groups and services for the local community under the one roof of the Tryst/Church, and enable them to relate to one another through their shared use of the facilities. The café which is run by church volunteers for everyone, has a particular go-between role as a place of hospitality and as a social space.

#### 4.4.3 A Go-between community

The Project Leader describes the 'Opening Doors' initiative through the Tryst as follows:

It's opening the doors of the church to the community in service and looking at building community along with other people. So in that sense it is quite a standard community development task... I appreciate it as being more than just managing a community centre because it has a spiritual base, because there is the possibility for theological reflection both with the people of the church, but also hopefully with people within the whole community of the Tryst... In a way what we are trying to do is build a Tryst community. It's not just a church community and not just a secular, you know, but to have a community of the Tryst. I've said that, but I've only just thought it.<sup>186</sup>

It may be that this was a moment when something which was implicit to the 'Opening Doors' initiative began to become explicit. Thorncliffe Church had long since seen 'Opening Doors' as a contribution to the wider community and perhaps, in a small way, to building that wider community. The idea of a 'Tryst Community' was a new one, although a sense of community in the Tryst had been growing and had perhaps found

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Emma.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

expression in the Conference which had been held nine days before the interview with the Project Leader. It brought together many of the users of the Tryst, including people from the church, to share information, reflections, ideas, common concerns and activities, while getting to know one another better. This identification around the common shared space of the Tryst reflected a sense of the community of the Tryst. Expressing this as 'the Tryst Community' makes a connection with Peter Sedgwick's concept of the 'intermediate institution'.<sup>187</sup>

The task of the church in an urban area is to be a place where moral strength can still be found in compassionate identification with its local community. 'The local community must flow in and out of the church, which is a problem for churches which are not part of their local society, but have a gathered congregation. Equally a local church should cultivate intermediate institutions. It should stress the value of relatedness, participation and responsibility. Moral strength is found in a myriad of small scale relationships where there is a genuine understanding and sharing. Alongside that moral sharing there will need to be an encouragement of risk. Enterprise is a proper arena for displaying that moral sensitivity. Urban areas need people to take risks, and show what is possible. Nevertheless those risks are only meaningful if they enable the existence of hope in a brittle consumer society that is politically estranged.'<sup>188</sup>

Sedgwick does not define what he means by an 'intermediate institution' and it is not the purpose here to encourage the cultivation of institutions. It is more appropriate to think in terms of a local church cultivating an intermediate organisation where the church and the community can come together in partnership. The Tryst is an intermediate place which has come into being through the enterprise and risk taking of Thorncliffe Church. The Tryst has its own identity and the church is part of it, along with a variety of people and community groups and organisations who certainly do 'flow in and out'. This has to some extent overcome the difficulty of being a gathered congregation and made the church part of the local community. Brought together by this intermediate place, this group of people constitute, at least an intermediate network, and at best an 'intermediate community'. The Project leader describes the sense of community in the Tryst.

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<sup>187</sup> Peter Sedgwick, ed, *'Enterprise and Estrangement'*, 'in', *God in the City*, 176.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

I mean the church both as an organisation, and particular people within that who are very involved in things, would be part of that community. It's interesting, last Saturday I could see that happening, that there are actually people in the church who are involved in the Tryst, like folk who work on the lunches and so on, who are actually now closer, and know better, some of the people in the Tryst than people from the church because they see them, they're working with them, they are engaging with them. So much of what happens in community and in faith is not about being Christian, it's about being human, fully human.<sup>189</sup>

This intermediate community, or organisation, plays an important role in affirming, preserving and constructing a sense of humanity and community. Jed, a member of Survivor's Poetry who has lived in Thorncliffe for twenty years, reflected on what community meant to him when he was asked about his hopes for Survivor's Poetry.

It's really uncertain because the Tory Government and the new Labour Government are intent on closing down many of these institutions and putting the people back into the community. Tony Blair uses this word community, but I think I see the word differently from what he means. I'm all for community but where are all the community centres, especially in a big city? We can't pay for them for now. These are vital things... Now I see more and more alienation whether it comes from the car, television, whatever, I don't know. Young people live in commercial youth culture. It is alienating. People are becoming islands.<sup>190</sup>

Jed illustrates the feelings of many about the loss of a sense of community and the growth of isolation and alienation. The 'Opening Doors' of the Tryst seek to help to create an open, intermediate community, which welcomes everyone and tries to make them feel at home affirming their human value as people. In this it is a community centre in one part of the big city.

Susan describes what she has learnt from experience about the approach to the community of the Tryst.

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<sup>189</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

<sup>190</sup> Interview with Jed.

To my mind it seems to be about the church saying, 'Well yes, we have a wonderful building here, but we have a responsibility to allow a wider part of the population to come and use our facility here because we can make a contribution to the wider community apart from those who normally come in and listen to the minister. I think that, probably from a spiritual point of view, its greatest ministry is the fact that it is here with its open doors and is providing cheap and very reasonably priced services and free services to people in the local community and accepting of anybody.'<sup>191</sup>

The Tryst Community is an intermediate community which brings together people, groups and organisations from the community with people from the church. It provides a way in which hopes and concerns can be shared, relating and learning from people whom they would probably not otherwise meet, certainly not with the same level of contact. It is a go-between community which people can be part of, where they can meet folk from the church, without having to be in direct contact with the church. It is a community in which the church has played an initiating role and to which the church can contribute in partnership without having to shoulder sole responsibility for everything that takes place. It may go some way towards contributing to a new and appropriate model of contemporary Church which the Project Leader hints at below.

One of the things that I think is important, because there are so many people who are living out of a post-Christian generation where they are living out of a childhood memory or a parental memory of the church as being one thing, is in a way to present them not just with the message but with a model of the Church that is different from what they thought it was.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with Susan.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

#### **4.5 Challenges to the wider Church from Thorncliffe**

The task here is to gather together the key elements from the study of the 'Opening Doors' initiative through the Tryst which should be taken forward in the argument that community involvement is an appropriate model of mission for the local urban church.

It has been shown that when Thorncliffe Church opened its doors to the community in a welcoming way the community responded and came to value the church's contribution to community life. This points to the possibility of a developing role for the Church in Britain where there are under-used church buildings in most local communities. Churches could play a key role in establishing go-between communities in their localities in resistance to the forces of alienation and isolation in a fragmenting British society. The principles of welcoming, hospitality and friendship, employed in 'Opening Doors', are part of the Christian tradition which need to be renewed by the local urban church in openness to its community. It has been shown in this case study that this can reduce the wariness and suspicion of the Church to the point where people are willing to respond to the community involvement of a local church. The relationships which are established, create new friendships, and contribute to the wider life of the community. They also create a foundation of relationships between people in the church and community in which traditional boundaries between church and community can be broken down. This presses the church to re-assess its role, relationships and boundaries in the light of its real contemporary situation in the locality. This points to the need for churches to know their surrounding locality well and to use their knowledge and experience of the community as a resource for theological reflection, which feeds the contextual development of the church.

The tensions of living with church community involvement must be recognised, accepted and minimised, if community involvement is to be offered as an appropriate model of mission for the urban church. Notions of ownership of church buildings need to be re-evaluated in the light of whether a church exists for its members or its non-members. There needs to be a new spirit of accepting the people and cultures of a locality and a commitment to work with people and groups in the community.

This research shows the significance of the go-between, the intermediate, in enabling the community and the church to come together. There is a strength in the three aspects of the go-between at 'Thorncliffe where it is located in the go-between person of the Project Leader, the go-between place of the Tryst and the go-between community who share the Tryst. 'Opening Doors' demonstrates the significance of creating a go-between identity that is both distinct from the church in having a community identity and yet is related to the church. This enables people from the church and the community to both relate to it, and feel at ease.

## Chapter Five:

### Community involvement as a model for urban mission

#### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this concluding chapter is to consider the thesis that community involvement can be an appropriate model of mission for the local urban church. Three sources are drawn upon; the findings of the case studies, the relevant literature on the theology of mission and community, and the writer's three key questions which were identified in chapter one. From bringing these three sources into dialogue, pointers towards a practical theology of church community involvement are identified, along with limitations and the need for further work.

By listening to the perceptions of those in the community who come into contact with the church through community involvement, this research has identified the go-between nature of community involvement. This insight emerged from reflection on the Thorncliffe case study. It connects with the concepts of boundary, threshold and liminality. Hannah Wild and Jennifer Ward have pointed out that a boundary is not a fine line separating inside from outside. Rather it can be seen as,

A gap that must be traversed with care, that can provide at least a temporary home, and that is full of creative potential as well as threatened disintegration and breakdown. Those who find themselves on or near the boundary - those we call 'boundary dwellers' - are not necessarily 'marginal' but rather are on a threshold, signifying the end of something old, the beginning of something new.<sup>193</sup>

Involvement with the local community can be seen as a gap that 'must be traversed with care' by the local church. It does represent creative potential and it does represent the threat of uncharted territory and uncertain relationships and responses. The community involvement of the church can be seen as a boundary, or rather a threshold, at which

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<sup>193</sup> Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, *Guard the Chaos*, Darlow, Longmann and Todd, 1995, 2.



church and community meet. It is 'in between' the church and the community. It may signify the end of something old and the beginning of something new.

Wild and Ward seek to map the experience of being 'betwixt and between - in a state of chaos, being neither one thing nor another'.<sup>194</sup> They draw on the concept of the 'liminal', from the Latin word '*limen*' meaning threshold, used in the work of the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep.<sup>195</sup> To be in a liminal position is to have stepped outside an established social structure, in this case that of the church. Central characteristics of the liminal position are that it is 'the place and time of the in-between' and it is ambiguous. It threatens our identity and our patterns of relationships.

We do not know how to relate to the person who is liminal: they collect both our fears and our awe; there is a certain mystique which surrounds them.<sup>196</sup>

This mixture of fear and awe seems to express something of the wariness of the church towards the community and of the community towards the church. It is argued here that community involvement represents an in-between, or rather, a go-between, a threshold where church and community can meet and work with their wariness of one another and potentially find new ways of relating that could be mutually beneficial.

The go-between nature of community involvement is explored in this chapter in two main sections. First, community involvement is considered from the perspective of the community and then second, community involvement is considered as a model of mission from the perspective of the Church.

The problem with the term 'Church' is that it can be understood in many different ways and it carries with it the idea of the institution of the Church. In this chapter the term 'Christian community' will be used instead of 'Church' where it is desired to avoid the concept of the institution.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>195</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960.

<sup>196</sup> Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, 23.

## **5.2 Community Involvement as go-between with the local community**

The aim of this section is to consider church community involvement as a go-between with the local community, from community perspective. This will include consideration of the following key question which was raised at the close of chapter one.

If community involvement was adopted as a model of mission by a local urban church, how could the experience of that involvement and the perceptions of the community make a significant contribution to the transformation of the community?

### **5.2.1 Community provision which is based on need and is used**

The strength and scale of the response to the community involvement of the churches in Leavale and Thorncliffe confirms the need which was perceived in each community for a suitable community venue to offer a variety of facilities and services. The Theology Group at Leavale took great care in assessing the needs and resources of the community and consulting the community about the appropriateness of the Neighbourhood Centre. The Thorncliffe Church had surveyed the community in the past and knew that space for community groups to meet was scarce in the area. The nature of the residential accommodation around the church meant it would have to provide a venue in order to meet local people. By different methods, both churches established that there was need in their community and allowed this to shape their thinking about how to proceed.

Three main reasons why people in Leavale responded to the Neighbourhood Centre were first, that they had a need which was met; second, their need was met in a welcoming, accepting, friendly and caring environment; third, that they were brought together with other people from their community, with whom they had an opportunity to socialise, in a comfortable place, if they so wished. These reasons were echoed by users of the Tryst in Thorncliffe and they represent three basic things which those communities have gained from community involvement. The response from the communities, in terms of the use made of what is offered, confirms these as benefits to the community as a whole.

### 5.2.2 Go-between places with and for the community

There are strong similarities in the way that the Leavale and Thorncliffe churches have proceeded in organising their community involvement. Their communities needed centre-based approaches to community involvement, and each recognised that their existing buildings and facilities were not adequate as attractive and welcoming places to invite their community. Both churches developed their premises, one by extension, the other by modification and refurbishment, to make them appropriate for what are termed here, go-between places. In each case, part or the whole of the building, was given a new identity as the Neighbourhood Centre or the Tryst. This links with the experience of churches in relation to church halls, where the community often see the hall as being different from the church building and will readily use it for all manner of activities, in a way that they may not use the church building. Such places are on the threshold of church and community. The refurbishment of such a place, to make it attractive and comfortable with good facilities, is basically what was done to create the Tryst. Giving the converted buildings new names enhanced their identity as attractive, go-between places, or liminal spaces.

### 5.2.3 Go-between community organisations

In addition to having a distinctive identity from the Leavale Church, the Neighbourhood Centre was established as a separate organisation, with its finances handled through a charitable company and with a Board appointed to oversee its management. From April 1998 the Tryst also became a trading company. The way in which both churches created, not only new identities, but new organisations to express their community involvement connects with Sedgwick's concept of an intermediate institution.<sup>197</sup> It also coheres with what is being recognised as good community development practice. Doreen Finnernon in a study of three Anglican, church based, community development projects in urban priority areas of Manchester concludes;

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<sup>197</sup> See page 100.

It is clear that attempts to use the church itself as the primary agency for development have not been successful in the long-term. There seems to be a need for the church, if it is to take a role in the development of the community, to move outside church structures. This may be either to collaborate with others or to set up new structures for development. Alternatively, it may be to establish organisations which, whilst being primarily influenced by the church, are nevertheless separate from normal church structures.<sup>198</sup>

Leavale Neighbourhood Centre is a clear example of this and the Tryst bears some similarity, but remains more directly under the control of the Church. Finnernon goes on to explain her conclusion.

The structures of the church primarily function in terms of their own maintenance. The resources of the Church are largely orientated towards ecclesiastical values whereas the values on which church related community development is based are Kingdom orientated.<sup>199</sup>

In addition to this distinction in the orientation of values between the Church and church related community development, the case studies both show that people in the community are suspicious and wary of the Church. This was particularly clear at Leavale where the positive perceptions of the Neighbourhood Centre contrasted so strongly with the negative perceptions of the Christian Church in general. The creation of new, go-between organisations, which are linked with the development of buildings with a go-between identity, are both factors which are likely to build confidence in the community so that people feel able to take the risk of entering the threshold of church community involvement.

The Kingdom orientation of the values of church based community development leads on to discussion of the key question as to whether community involvement, in partnership with the community, can contribute to community development and community action which aim at change, leading to transformation. Given that the go-between community organisations in the case-studies are in the early stages of their existence and work, what

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<sup>198</sup> Doreen Finnernon, *Faith in Community Development*, University of Manchester, 1993, 89.

<sup>199</sup> Doreen Finnernon, 91.

evidence is there, if any, that they contribute a significant element towards Kingdom transformation of the community?

#### 5.2.4 Evidence of Community Transformation

In the marginal and deprived community of Leavale, where unemployment, poverty and sectarianism combine to fragment and isolate people, the Neighbourhood Centre is a symbol of openness. It works to bring together members of different groups in the community: the young and the elderly; the Protestant and the Catholic; the employed and the unemployed; the poor and the reasonably off; the able bodied and the disabled; those who can readily learn and those who have difficulties. The Centre is open for people from all these groups, and works to offer activities and services which are relevant to their lives and cater for their interests and needs. Some of the services which are provided, like the Community Café and the Out of School Child Care, would not have previously been available in Leavale, but now they are readily accessible. It offers a place for the community to meet. It offers people the opportunity to work at building community, by helping to meet the needs of others. In these ways it fulfils its mission statement in contributing to a sense of community in Leavale and it does make a difference to the lives of people who are involved.

Some of the differences that the work of the Centre makes to peoples' lives can be said to represent a personal sense of transformation. For example, a woman who had just moved to Leavale was welcomed to the Centre and is found there, most days, meeting local people and beginning the process of making friends. This is transforming what would otherwise be the extremely difficult and isolating task of trying to settle into a new area. Some men, who had all recently lost their partner, each began having lunch in the Centre café and when they met they started having lunch together. A woman who used not to go out at all has had her life transformed by going to day care and being able to meet the variety of people who are part of the daily life of the Centre. These are all simple examples of people being enabled to meet others through the Centre, but which makes a great difference to their lives.

These are some of the early signs that the Neighbourhood Centre, after being open just three years, is contributing to the transformation of the community. This, in no way, seeks to trivialise the mass of economic, political, social and religious forces acting against transformation of a community like Leavale, largely from outside. It is vital that these signs do not become signs of false hope, that enable people to accept living with the deprivation and injustice caused by unseen forces and powers.

There is an ongoing need for the Centre and perhaps the Theology Group, to reflect on its work and activities, and to consider how the community can be empowered to take effective social and political action to engage with the causes of injustice in society in pursuit of justice and transformation. If the Centre is able to develop this aspect of its work and gain a longer term future, beyond its current funding limits, there is no reason why it should not become a potent resource and force towards the transformation of Leavale and a more just society.

The sheer diversity and greater overall affluence of Thorncliffe make it harder to assess whether community involvement there is contributing to Kingdom transformation of the community. A strong similarity between Leavale and the 'Opening Doors' of the Tryst is that both are bringing, under one roof, services for all ages and for a number of marginalised groups. At different times, the Tryst provides a meeting place for children of nursery age and other ages, for adults, for people of a variety of nationalities, for children with physical and learning disabilities and adults with mental health problems, for people with problems related to alcohol, for homeless people, for Japanese people, for Korean people, for parents, for people concerned about the environment and, no doubt, others. Some of these services and activities are run by the church, but many are run by independent people and organisations. The great variety of people and activities is a reflection of the diversity of the community in Thorncliffe. That so many groups, who are actively concerned for people in the community, use the Tryst reflects acceptance, boundary-crossing, concern for the marginalised in particular, and for the community as a whole.

It is a very significant achievement to have brought together the work of so many groups in one place and it can have a transforming effect on peoples lives, relationships and sense of belonging as was so evident from Susan's story in the last chapter and in a

different way for the Japanese families. Equally, it can have a transforming effect on the work of a community group. For instance, for a relatively new organisation like Survivor's Poetry, its base in the building has facilitated a dramatic increase in the number of people using its services.

The, as yet, untapped aspect of the potential to contribute to transformation in Thorncliffe, and possibly further a field, lies in exploring how these community groups and organisations and the church may be able to make partnerships and alliances to strengthen existing work and tackle new challenges. This is an exciting prospect and the 'Opening Doors' conference, held in September 1998, provided indications that the openness and spirit needed to take this forward are present in the Tryst Community.

Both case studies, and especially that of Leavale Neighbourhood Centre, suggest that community involvement can contribute a significant element to the transformation of local communities. It is unrealistic to suggest that one church or go-between community organisation acting alone can do any more than this. The scope for a more significant Kingdom contribution to the transformation of society lies in wider networks of organisations co-operating together. This is also part of the potential of church community involvement. However, the particular contribution which the research for this thesis has sought to make, is to listen to the voices of those who are part of, or have responded to, the community involvement of the church in each case study. It has been demonstrated that they value the community involvement which is already offered, even though its main work is in the provision of services and activities, and building community spirit. The argument here is that this will always be valid work and that is a good place to start, as long as it is not seen as the only aim of community involvement. Community development work and community action can be developed as later stages, as can political action at local, regional, national and international level.

#### 5.2.6 Towards Community Transformation

Both the Leavale and Thorncliffe initiatives are vulnerable to the criticism that, whilst in partnership with others they are able to offer services and activities for the community

which meet a need, they will not bring about fundamental change in and with their communities. Finnernon recognises this tendency in church based community development, as do others who have reflected on this issue.

*Faith in the City and Involvement in Community* point to the propensity of the Church to be involved in the Community Service style, rather than in Community Development and Community Action which both work for change.<sup>200</sup>

The Project Leader at Thorncliffe responded to this kind of criticism.

The need is clearly demonstrated by the use we have. There is a real shortage of community venues in the area. It is offering the possibility for exchange and networking through the different groups and for friendship for people who come in. I think it is still quite early to look beyond that. In terms of greater community development impact I would see that as operating within an ecumenical framework, through things like the Key Fund<sup>201</sup> and so on and the inter-faith things and other things that we do with the other churches in the area. Because in terms of the significant needs in this area, they are not specifically going to be met or shaped in one place.<sup>202</sup>

The minister at Leavale was asked if he was disappointed that the Theology Group's use of a Liberation Theology model had led to a caring community project which the church tends to be good at, rather than being more politically engaged. His answer is worth quoting at length.

I think there's a micro and a macro... As long as things like the Centre are not seen as providing the whole answer but as part of a journey for people. People here, and I include myself, have often had a life times experience of failing, so the importance of succeeding is very important and it gives you the courage to go on to the next stage. Now it is very hard for the Church to move from that good Christian caring on to the next stage of addressing injustice, but I think this way is the better way of trying to go about it. Had we as a small community tried to

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<sup>200</sup> Doreen Finnernon, 90.

<sup>201</sup> The Key Fund enables homeless people to gain access to housing in the private rented sector.



change the macro policies we would have constantly failed. What we have tried in a very small way to do is to change some of the micro policies.

It was very interesting, and I take no credit for this whatsoever, that when we first developed the concept of the Centre and we spoke with the Chief Executive's department, they told us we were totally wrong. We were just going the wrong way, and what we should be doing if we wanted funding was to be going for a single interest activity, like a day care unit or a youth café and not trying to do everything because it wasn't the way things are done. We said, 'Okay' and we went away and looked at it and went back and said, 'For here, it is the right way of operating. One of the massive issues here is of a fragmented society and we think that's a general problem, so we want to go for something which will bring people of all ages together'. We had a major battle which went on for a number of months and we overcame that, I suspect, by getting money from outwith government to help us. Now for me, one of the fascinating things over the last year has been all the talk, and it remains to be seen whether it is just talk, about social exclusion and social inclusion and the putting forward of a model which says that what we need to do is bring together all of those at the margins, not just treating people on the margins as single interests. Now it fails often, but in a way the Centre, I think, attempts to be that model of a community centre... What the Centre tries to do is put forward a model of community centre which is about the bringing together of those who, in many cases, are not those who are motivated to come. Therefore, ironically, by understanding our local community very well and trying to change policy at a micro level we have played a tiny part in changing policy at a macro level and that is an ongoing thing... I don't think you can change the world until you've changed a wee bit of your local community.<sup>203</sup>

The point about the need for some success at the micro level to build the confidence to go forward to the next stage is understandable. The great danger is that community involvement remains at the stage of giving service to people who are the victims of an unjust society, without taking action to challenge and change society. Perhaps part of the

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<sup>202</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with the Minister.

answer is that community involvement must work in partnership with those outside the church who are committed to community development and action. This will ensure that the go-between organisation does not simply remain at the community service stage, but works for local change and makes the connections with work for macro change.

#### 5.2.7 A wider role for go-between community involvement

This research has focused on just two instances of centre-based church community involvement where the response from the community in terms of use and appreciation has been very strong. There is nothing particularly unusual about Leavale or Thorncliffe. There are estates similar to Leavale all over Britain. Thorncliffe is arguably a more unusual, cosmopolitan and affluent city community, but most cities have districts which are similar. Part of the argument of this thesis, though it is not possible to substantiate it here, is that many, if not most, urban communities in the towns and cities of Britain have needs which are similar to those of Leavale and Thorncliffe. Each will have their own special characteristics, local culture and distinctive needs to discover. However, there is no fundamental reason why a church, or a group of churches in each community, which adopted the above kind of process, should receive a lesser response than has been the case at Leavale and Thorncliffe. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to demonstrate this potential. To do so requires a further piece of work. However, the reader can consider this possibility and reach their own conclusion based on their knowledge of urban communities.

Community involvement can act as a go-between for the church and community to meet needs, and help people hold or develop a sense of common humanity and community in urban life, in resistance to the forces of isolation, alienation and fragmentation. Politically, our society does not have the collective will to release the resources to build, develop and maintain community centres. Even if it did, such provision is often vulnerable in an urban community. The strength of church community involvement is that buildings which are already in use, and are maintained for church activity, but are under-used, can be given a new lease of life as centres of community care and development. The response of each community in the case studies at Leavale and Thorncliffe demonstrate this.

### 5.2.8 Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates that the community involvement, which the churches in the case studies have initiated, has been welcomed and responded to by the wider community. Despite wariness and suspicion of the Church in general, through the threshold of community involvement, Christians and others are working together to offer service to their communities and they are receiving a positive response. This is the first stage of community involvement, and the importance of moving on to incorporate community development and action which work towards change and transformation has been identified. The thesis points to the much greater potential for this kind of church community involvement throughout Britain as a contribution to community welfare and justice, though it is beyond the scope of this work to demonstrate it. As British society faces a new millennium it may be that the subject of 'Community' becomes increasingly important as the effects of fragmentation in post-modern urban society are more keenly felt. Urban communities need churches to open up their dwindling, but valuable resources of buildings, people and finance, and release them for involvement with the local community. The Church is the only agency in Britain which has buildings, staff and volunteers in virtually every neighbourhood in the land. Many such resources are already made available through go-between community involvement, but the potential is much greater.

### **5.3 Community Involvement as go-between with the local urban church**

The aim of this section is to draw conclusions about community involvement as a model of mission from the perspective of the local church. This will include consideration of all three key questions which were raised at the end of chapter one. If community involvement was adopted as a model of mission by a local church:

How could the whole local church be open to partners from the community who do not share Christian faith?

How could the experience of involvement and the perceptions received from the community make a significant contribution to the transformation of the church and its participation in mission?

How could it integrate appropriate opportunities to explore Christian discipleship?

### 5.3.1 Accepting Partnership with the Community

Can a local church enter into partnership in community involvement with people and organisations in the local community who do not share Christian faith? In answering this question there are some missiological and theological issues about how churches, Christians and church leaders understand their faith which effect the response.

The Leavale Neighbourhood Centre did not begin with concerns about mission. It began with local people telling their stories and thinking about God and the community in which they lived. Their methods for analysis and reflection were drawn from Urban Theology and Liberation Theology, not explicitly missiology.

#### *A Theological Challenge*

The possibility of a local church adopting community involvement as a model of mission will rightly depend on their understanding of God. If the people of a local church believe that the Church is the central purpose of God, and that the Church is the primary, or only, sphere of God's activity, then they are likely to believe that God has called them into the Church to build up the Church. Such a local church is likely to find it difficult to embrace a model of mission as community involvement because God is understood as only being interested in people in the community in so far as they have the potential to join the Church. By contrast, community involvement asks the Church to give time, energy and resources to serving God in the community for the sake of the Kingdom, not for the sake of the Church. Even in churches which choose to adopt community involvement, there is likely to be a tension between the church's own ecclesiastical agenda and its wider Kingdom agenda within the community. Inevitably some people will feel this tension more than others. There are two clear reasons for this. The first is the theological one which has been outlined. The second is a human one that those who

are part of a church will naturally be concerned about the viability and future of that church, particularly in a culture where the decline and closure of churches is increasingly common. This tension is exhibited in both of the case studies. When the minister at Leavale was asked about it, he gave this response.

In this age of post-modernity, whatever it is, lots of us have got a foot in the past and some of us have got a foot in the future. This sort of age makes it virtually impossible that everyone will feel that this is the right model.<sup>204</sup>

The concept of the Kingdom of God, is the theological bridge which brings together church and community. It was the Good News of the Kingdom of God which was the primary content and motivation of the mission and ministry of Jesus. It is a vision of the Kingdom which theologically enables people to see God's presence among people with no church connection in the community. In this sense a commitment to community involvement theologically hinges on the recognition that the Kingdom is just as much about the world as it is the Church and that the purpose of the Church is to continue the mission of Jesus in proclaiming and embodying the Kingdom. In this sense the Kingdom takes theological precedence over both the Church and the community.<sup>205</sup>

This poses a theological challenge which is all the more pressing given the Church's struggle to address its decline in a confused cultural climate. If the Church's primary concern is with its own survival, future and development, then it is not any different from any other institution in the West which is facing decline. The theological challenge of the Kingdom is that it is only when the Church gives itself up and spends itself in God's service to the world, that it will find life. It is also the Christological challenge to the Church that it is in the giving up of life for the Kingdom that the promise of resurrection is fulfilled. Community involvement as a model of mission invites the Church to give itself to the service of God in the world, or to put it in local terms, for the local church to give itself up to the service of God in the local community. God loves the people of the community irrespective of whether they ever join the Church and the Church needs to reflect and express this outgoing love of God.

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<sup>204</sup> Interview with the Minister.

<sup>205</sup> See 3.3.1

### *A Relational Approach to Community*

It is the practical outcome of this theology that enables Christians to work with non-Christians in community involvement. Morisy recognises that this will be a new idea for some.

This requirement that the commitment and effort of non-Christians are on a par with that of Christians may be resisted by some. The assumption that God, through the Holy Spirit, works through Christians alone cannot be justified theologically, but it certainly prevails in the practice of many churches. Countless 'caring' initiatives spawned by local churches have boasted that all those involved in expressing care are fully paid-up Christians... Community ministry requires Christians and non-Christians to work alongside each other, because through the dialogue which develops and the experiences which are shared, a new integrity results, and this provides a rich environment to share personal credos.<sup>206</sup>

In the Neighbourhood Centre and the Tryst, good working relationships have been established between those who are connected with each church and those who are not. The opportunity of this is that the Christians can, if they need to, re-locate themselves in the local community and culture from which they have, too often, become separated. Relationships can be built as people work together in the local community. The wariness which many people have of Christians and the Church gradually breaks down in the mutual recognition that we are all human, we are all people. Christians are not superior.

In terms of the work of Ward and Wild on boundaries, relationships with community partners can be seen as discovering our fellow boundary-dwellers.

It does not matter in the end whether we regard ourselves as having been called together by God or thrown together by circumstance: the task is to make community and to learn how to relate to other communities. Perhaps the making of community is a particular task for boundary-dwellers, because they live in the place of meeting. There we must learn to meet not only with one another, but with those who enter the place of boundary from different directions.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ann Morisy, 11.

<sup>207</sup> Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, 118.

In these relationships both parties give and receive, and share their insights, hopes and fears. In this way Christian people grow in their understanding of the needs of their neighbours and communities, the issues they face and the questions which they are asking. Through the growth of relationships and the discovery of common ground in working together with the community, the Christian community finds itself in a network of relationships which provide a new context in which pastoral care can be offered.

These issues and questions discovered, by working alongside community partners with the community, stimulate theological reflection in an ongoing process of contextualising the Gospel for local people in the struggles and hopes of their lives, amidst the struggles and hopes of their community of which the Christian community is part. This theological reflection may take place within the Christian community, or more challengingly, in the context of community involvement where the issues and questions of everyone can be shared directly. This relational approach breaks down barriers.

### *Boundary Breaking*

As community involvement is shared, as relationships grow and as theology is practised, perceived boundaries between church and community, Christian and other, are increasingly found to be inappropriate and break down. This is likely to be a threatening experience which will press Christians to re-consider what constitutes post-modern Christian identity in a given context. The view taken here is that in future the Christian community will not be identified by boundaries of doctrine and church tradition as it is now. What the main characteristics of such Christian identity will be is as yet unclear. This is part of what it means to live through the liminal, in-between, time. It is to live through an uncertain and ongoing process, but this living must not be passive existence. This would signal the terminal decline, not only of the Church, but possibly Christian community in Western culture. This living must engage with the chaos of uncertainty, seeing it is an opportunity to play a part in shaping the future of human community and Christian identity. The future of community and the Christian community will only emerge by the active participation of doing theology at the threshold of church and community. It is through living, working and relating at the boundary that Christian identity can be re-formed and re-expressed for the post-modern era.

### 5.3.2 Transforming the Church

The profiles of both churches in their respective communities has changed dramatically. Both churches are perceived as open, active, busy and part of the life of the local community. This is especially significant for the Thorncliffe church which is from a 'gathered church' tradition, where the links between the church and its surrounding community can often be quite weak. This sense of activity throughout the week benefits people from the church, in that they know that their building is not idle, but well used and many are directly involved in 'Opening Doors'.

Both churches have gained from the redevelopment of their premises which, in the case of Leavale, certainly would not have taken place without the Neighbourhood Centre. On Sundays, the Neighbourhood Centre and Tryst are available for church use, and children and adults attending worship benefit from the more attractive and comfortable facilities. Buildings which are attractive for community use are, by and large, attractive to church members as well, and rooms can be available for church use during the week, subject to availability. Since the upkeep of buildings has become a shared task for each church with its respective community involvement organisation, the church community no longer shoulders responsibility for its building alone. This frees some church resources for more creative use. In the case of Thorncliffe Church, which is very large and is a listed building, this is a great advantage.

For both churches, community involvement has given members a way to express their faith in action. By serving God, through serving the community, the Leavale Church has become more purposeful, hopeful and confident. It is able to feel that it is taking the Gospel as Good News for the poor seriously. The church volunteers who are involved during the week meet new people, make new friends and develop their skills in making people of all ages welcome, especially with those who like to be awkward.

People from both churches now encounter a wide variety of people from the community in the Tryst and at the Neighbourhood Centre. This creates friendships and relationships where perceptions of people from the church and people from the community change, and become based on reality rather than stereotypes. At Leavale in particular, the Minister observed a change in the decision making of the church, how it had become



more 'rooted in the community' and in thinking about nurturing the faith of those who don't come to church.

It cannot be claimed that the worshipping congregations of either church have increased numerically as a direct result of community involvement during the last two or three years. However, the membership of the Leavale Church has increased for the first time in many years, and the congregation of Thorncliffe has increased a little in recent years. What is more important is to recognise that these worshipping communities have been sustained and that the number of peoples' lives, who are touched by their community involvement, are many times greater than the number of Sunday worshippers. There are much larger churches who do not touch the lives of many people outside the immediate circle of members. It must also be recognised that these churches have only been engaged in their present form of community involvement for two and three years, and that the process of a person coming to Christian faith takes, on average, about four years.<sup>208</sup> So it is still very early days to assess how the living out of faith through community involvement enables people to explore faith in a way that could be recognised by church attendance or membership. The whole future of church attendance in terms of worship and the concept of church membership as they have been known this century are very likely to change considerably or to disappear, as we move from the modern to the post-modern era. New forms of Christian community will emerge and it may be that the Neighbourhood Centre is a step in that direction.

### *Tensions*

A strength of the Leavale Church was the clear methodology which led to the establishment of the Neighbourhood Centre and the way in which the whole church had the opportunity to be involved in the decision about moving further. Each time this was achieved with a very high level of agreement. However, there were a few people who left the church and there are remaining tensions in the joint charge with Anderton Church.

The areas of tension in Thorncliffe Church were identified in Chapter Four, and there is some concern about whether Thorncliffe Church, as a whole, is maintaining its interest in the 'Opening Doors' community initiative. At the 'Opening Doors' Conference in September 1998, which was a joint occasion for both members of the church and

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<sup>208</sup> See John Finney, *Finding faith Today*, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992, 25

community users, there was a good turn out from the community users, but not so good from the church. However, it should be recognised that the church was without a minister at the time and that leadership and the setting out of the vision for 'Opening Doors' would almost certainly have brought a fuller church response.

The conclusion here is that these churches are serving the Kingdom in their communities and that a process of change is underway in response to what they learn and receive from their community involvement. This makes the churches and their mission increasingly contextually appropriate. However, it has to be recognised that this is a long term process and, at the stage of two and three years, it is too early to be looking for major changes in these churches as a result of their community involvement.

### 5.3.3 Spirituality, Worship and Faith Exploration

The case studies demonstrate the commitment of the churches to include the spiritual dimension of life in their community involvement. This happens in a variety of ways, but finds particular expression through worship. The aim of this section is to consider the exploration of faith through spirituality and worship in church community involvement. Can community involvement, as a way of going between a church and its community, provide opportunities for people to express spirituality and worship in ways that they would not do otherwise? Can community involvement stimulate people to explore Christian discipleship and, if so, how could they go about doing so? Consideration will also be given to the question raised by Hall at the end of Chapter One as to whether evangelism, or faith exploration, need to be kept separate from community work, lest they undermine one another.

#### *Community Involvement with Faith Exploration*

Both case studies demonstrate a resistance to the notion that community development and faith exploration should be separated and they seek to integrate both in their community involvement. In this they concur with Fung<sup>209</sup> and Morisy,<sup>210</sup> and take issue

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<sup>209</sup> See 1.7

<sup>210</sup> See 1.7

with Hall's view that community work and evangelism should be kept quite separate.<sup>211</sup> The Project Leader of the Tryst makes a clear response to Hall's position.

It presupposes too much of a different agenda on the part of the community. In a way that presupposes that it is only people in the church who explore faith which I think is a basic mistake. This is part of the problem that we do not have enough respect. We have to get away from the idea that just because people don't come to church, they are not religious people, in whatever sense that you understand that. I don't actually think that. I think that any human development worth its salt will always explore faith, will always explore core values and attempt to share these.<sup>212</sup>

This rejection of Hall's position connects closely with the challenge to the Church from Chapter Three, to recognise and affirm the spirituality of people in the community and to recognise that they may belong to the Body of Christ. By separating evangelism from community work, Hall makes a hidden assumption that people in the community are unaware of God. His model screens out the opportunity for Christians to meet God in the people of the community through their community work. This means that in his evangelism he can bring in his own view of God from outside and avoid being evangelised by the God who is already at work in the lives of people in the community. This thesis therefore rejects the separation of community involvement and evangelism because it separates actions from faith and prevents the evangeliser from being evangelised.

Nevertheless, the challenge to community involvement, as it has often been practised, is that whilst it may demonstrate the love of God, it does not speak of the love of God, or offer people the opportunity to explore Christian faith and discipleship. What evidence is there from the case studies that spirituality, worship and faith exploration are integral parts of community involvement? When the Minister at Leavale was asked specifically how he saw faith exploration taking place in the Centre he gave this response.

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<sup>211</sup> See 1.7

<sup>212</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

It happens quasi formally and quasi informally...It happens informally in the conversations which occur with people all the time just by virtue of people coming about a place which has been initiated as an expression of faith and which is located in a building that seeks to proclaim, or is perceived to proclaim faith. So those conversations happen with people very naturally all the time... More formally they happen, I think, partly through the worship. Whether or not people come, the worship happens and that evokes conversation. We've also, on a few occasions, run what we call 'Faith Encounter' which was a wee series of four or five afternoon things, over an hour, which were to encourage people to think about their experiences of faith and those worked reasonably well with six or seven folk there. It was a very genuine attempt to have a more formal, let's speak about spiritual issues.<sup>213</sup>

This everyday way of talking about God through the life of the Centre needs to be seen alongside the tension which was identified in Chapter Three between affirming the spiritual dimension of life and remaining within the requirements of public funding agencies. The Daily Worship is available to everyone and the 'Faith Encounter' experience has been offered. In these ways there are opportunities to express spirituality through worship and to explore faith, both formally and informally. However, a conclusion from the case study at Leavale was that the Daily Worship is an inappropriate form of worship for the Centre as a whole. It reflects too much of the traditional forms and practices of conventional church worship. So, spirituality and faith exploration is part of the life of the Neighbourhood Centre, but it is limited by the tensions in relation to funding and the inappropriateness of worship.

At Thorncliffe, the Tryst is a context through which people can discover a number of different opportunities to explore faith. There are the daily Pause Points, a Wednesday Evening Liturgy, the Japanese Bible Study Group and Friday Friendship. At the 'Opening Doors' Conference, the church folk who spoke, included, in a very natural way, the significant resource that faith was for them, whilst also pointing out that they were very human, with human struggles and that faith by no means provided them with all the answers. This was done very appropriately in the context of all the Tryst groups sharing what they did. This was Christian witness. In Morisy's terms it was people being

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with the Minister.

open and up front about their Christian faith in the context of community involvement. There is scope to take this further and explore Morisy's distinctive emphasis of inviting any and all of those involved in community work and groups, to reflect together on their experiences and motivation and values. To facilitate this would require a great deal of skill and Morisy seems to offer little guidance. However the Project Leader herself expressed the hope of doing theological reflection with the Tryst community and has the skills and experience needed to enable it. This has the potential to open minds and hearts.

So there are ways in which faith is shared and explored through the community involvement at Leavale and Thorncliffe, but it is motivated by the desire to be Christian, to be faithful to Christ in actions and words, rather than with a specific aim to evangelise. Some of the opportunities, cited above, of exploring faith are aspects of the life of the church which, in one sense, would happen anyway without community involvement. In this sense they cannot be claimed as an intentional part of the church's community involvement and would not be seen as such by most community users. People from the community, who may be quite tentative about exploring Christianity may not feel confident about attending a group run by a church. They are likely to more readily be part of a group which has a go-between identity, which relates to the community as much as to the church. In this more accessible way people from the community are more likely to explore Christian faith and discipleship. The challenge for people in the church is to be willing to be part of this exploration, not only in assisting others to explore faith, but by being willing to receive from them, allowing their faith to be disturbed and enriched by the questions and insights of those who may not call themselves Christians. Each of the case studies has this kind of approach, but have not yet worked it out as explicitly as this thesis requires to offer community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church.

### *The language of faith*

The Project Leader at Thorncliffe recognises that the church is perhaps on the verge of something new in its relationships with those in the Tryst community, in moving towards a more explicit exploration of faith.

I think that very often people need encouragement and a language in which to be able to talk about their faith, because traditional evangelical language was born out of a time and a context where the thought form and the concepts and the images were readily understood by everybody in that society. That is not the case today. The language is, to some it is offensive. But to many more its just none sense, it's just meaningless. So I think there is a struggle to articulate a new language for faith. I think that that is an area where people need encouragement, methodologies and confidence building and so on. I think that is part of the next stage of this place. If we are to engage with people and to be more explicit, then people have to be much more confident about how they talk about their faith.<sup>214</sup>

These reflections, about the difficulty which Christians find in articulating their faith, confirm the writer's own experience as a Christian and the reflections on faith sharing and community involvement in ministry in Manchester.<sup>215</sup> The relationships made through community involvement do provide a context in which faith can be explored, but the people of God need to be enabled to participate in faith exploration. This may mean that they need to be freed from the expectation that they will have the answers. Part of the fear of faith exploration for people in the churches is that, after years in the church, they feel that there are answers to the questions of life and faith which they don't know and which someone else does. This is why in many churches, the task of sharing faith is left to someone else. The trouble is often that someone else does not exist. The people of the church need to know that there are not such answers on a journey of faith so they cannot be expected to know them. In exploring faith, they are invited to primarily ask and engage with questions about life in relation to their experience and understanding of God.

Christians need to be able to be themselves and express themselves naturally as people of faith. The Project Leader is right in identifying the issue of confidence and the need to explore appropriate language, concepts and images for articulating faith and she points to a way forward.

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<sup>214</sup> Interview with the Project Leader.

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One of the things that I believe is that to proclaim Good News, to be asked to do that for other people, that is how people become theologically educated, that's how people become mature in faith because they have to answer these questions first for themselves in order to share them with other people.<sup>216</sup>

So, the integration of faith sharing and exploration with community involvement, will not happen unaided. It has to be an explicit part of the model where issues, particularly of language, concepts and images, can be explored. It is an open question as to whether this is best facilitated by Christians doing this together first, as preparation for joining with people from the community in faith exploration, or whether to simply bring together people from church and community and get started? The former has the danger that the Christians may spend their time working at issues and questions which people in the community are not asking. The latter requires courage and openness, qualities which are always required of explorers and perhaps also of missionaries. The latter is at least likely to provide a genuine engagement with the issues and questions of those who will not be found in church. It must also be very clearly recognised that non-church people have faith and spirituality, and that sharing faith is therefore a dialogue in which insights are received as well as offered, in a common search for truth which is as likely to effect the faith of those who identify with the institutional church, as much as those who don't.

### *Worship as Local Liturgy*

Margaret Walsh has written about the development of local liturgy through the Hope Community in Heath Town in Wolverhampton. This small community practices community involvement with the same kind of theological understanding which has been developed here, although it does not operate a Centre or intermediate organisation, and is not the initiative of a local church in the manner of the case studies in this research. The experience of discovering the spirituality of people in the community is similar to that in the Leavale case study as Walsh describes.

We find that many, despite the apparent hopelessness of their situation, are full of faith, which is a deep, childlike trust in a God who cares and is in everything...Working and praying with the people here has taught me more

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with the Project Leader

about what it means to follow Christ than any other spiritual formation I have ever had. I feel we are more evangelized than evangelizers.<sup>217</sup>

Walsh believes that the needs of the people in the community are best met by helping them to recognise God in their own experience and she describes their approach.

We have developed a local liturgy, which reflects God's action in our lives and experiences. This is known as a 'Community Celebration' and takes place in the local community centre about every six weeks. The theme is decided by the local people; also its style, content and symbols. We choose our favourite gospel passages and hymns and make up our own prayers. The programme usually includes some drama, occasionally a slide presentation, and one of the adults gives a talk on what the theme means in their life, and there is always an opportunity for spontaneous contribution. Signs of peace and reconciliation also feature. It is interesting to note how many elements of the Church's liturgy have emerged since we began our local liturgy... The people enjoy coming together and have numbered over a hundred on a few occasions. They feel relaxed and at home in one another's company and in their own environment... For most, it is the only experience of church that they have.<sup>218</sup>

This is an example of the kind of appropriate liturgy which needs to be developed as an integral part of community involvement. It is consistent with recognising the spirituality of people who are on the edge, or not a part, of the Church. Their experience needs to be allowed and enabled to shape the development of contextual liturgy which could be transforming for community and church.

Numbers attending these liturgies continue to grow and many are expressing a desire to make a commitment to Christ and to belong to Christian community. They know that they would be unable to fulfil some of the promises made in our baptismal services or keep many of the other rules. Because I have been so evangelized by these people myself, I am convinced that by listening to them, learning from them and by being creative in our response to meet their needs, the

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<sup>217</sup> Margaret Walsh, *'Here's hoping: the Hope Community, Wolverhampton'*, 'in' Peter Sedgwick ed. *God in the City*, 58.



whole Church could be renewed. Many of our friends here are more free to explore new models of church and of liturgy, since they are not bound by norms and conventions which others of us may find hard to abandon after years of practice.<sup>219</sup>

The development of local liturgy as an integral part of community involvement can be seen as a way for people in the community to discover God in their experience and for the Church to listen, learn, respond creatively and discover new contextual forms of worship and models of church.

It has been argued in this section that faith exploration need not be separated from community work since they do not necessarily undermine one another. Community involvement can provide opportunities to express and explore spirituality and faith, through the shared reflections of Christians and non-Christians. In this there is a challenge for those Christians who participate, to work at the development of contemporary and contextual language, concepts and images to express faith. The development of local liturgy with the community can enable people to discover God in their experience and for the Church to discover new contextual models of worship and local church.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

There are two aspects to the conclusion of this thesis. The first aspect points towards a model of community involvement as mission. The second aspect identifies the change which has taken place in the researcher. The exploration of community involvement as a model of mission has led to the conclusion that community involvement can be seen as a 'go-between' in relation to the local church and the local community. This is a threshold which is both threatening and full of creative potential. It is threatening for both church and community, to step outside of their usual social structures and to meet in this in-between place. It is full of creative potential for new expressions of community and Christian community to emerge. The pointers towards a model of community involvement which are drawn from this thesis can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>218</sup> Margaret Walsh, 64 & 66.

It begins with a local church taking the decision to listen to its local community and identify the variety of needs of the people. This could be initiated by a group of local people from the church reflecting on their experiences of living in the community, or the whole church could be involved. They identify common themes of need and struggle. These needs and struggles are brought to God in some form of worship. This may be very simple, but it is important that the needs and struggles, identified from experience, shape worship as an essential part of reflection. The group then go out into the community to listen to people who have such needs, and to listen to those who are working to address those needs. Having grown in awareness of the community, the group reflect on what they have discovered and how Christian faith and discipleship relate to the needs and issues of the community. Worship is again part of the reflection. They identify what action should be taken and how they could initiate it. As at Leavale, it may be important to work at small scale initiatives and reflect on this experience. Then the major needs and issues of the community are considered and how these might be met or addressed.

It may be that the use of buildings is not relevant to the needs and issues of the local community, and that community involvement will take an entirely different direction from that taken in the case studies. A cycle of experience, reflection, worship and action is established as a basic method of community involvement. As involvement in the community grows, more time and energy are likely to be devoted to action, but the cycle must remain with reflection and worship as part of it. People from the community and community partners are invited to join in the reflection and the worship, so that their experience shapes the worship, develops it as local liturgy and gives people the opportunity to discover God in their experience.

As the cycle is repeated, community involvement develops with reflection and local liturgy as an integral part of it, in which spirituality and faith are naturally explored. As people discover God in their experience and realise that faith is good news, they may wish to explore Christianity in a more purposeful way. Providing that Christians have remained involved with whatever form of community involvement has developed, they are the ones with whom people can explore Christian faith. This all happens in the go-

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<sup>219</sup> Margaret Walsh, 67.

between context of community involvement. If people then reach a point or time of coming to faith, it raises the question of how and where this should be recognised and celebrated. Should it be in the Church, or should it be in the local liturgy? Which is the focus of Christian community? Is the go-between community which gathers to celebrate the local liturgy a new expression of Christian community, a new expression of church? This is part of the potential of community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with these questions. They can only be explored when they arise out of the practice of this model in a local church and community.

The second aspect of this conclusion considers how this research has effected the researcher? The experience of interviewing people from the community about church community involvement was fascinating. I shall treasure those conversations as precious gifts. The recognition of the faith and spirituality of some of the people beyond the Church has changed my attitude, assumptions and approach to people in the community. I have met God in people who I thought were not part of the Church and I have been made to think again. I have been evangelised. My assumption that an incarnational approach to the local community will eventually lead some people to embrace Christian faith has been exposed as inadequate. For one thing there are already those who believe without belonging and for another, if I and the people of the local church of which I am part do not speak naturally of the role which faith plays in our lives in understandable terms we have no right to expect anyone to embrace faith. I am convinced that in my practice of community involvement, I must naturally relate to people as a person of faith who is working with the community.

Community involvement can be an appropriate model of mission for a local urban church, but it is costly and challenging, and raises many issues and some tensions. To some extent these would arise with any model of mission which challenges the Church as to whether it exists for itself or for others. Community involvement is not a quick fix approach to urban mission. To practice community involvement as described here is as much a way of being a contextual and authentic church in an urban area in the service of the Kingdom of God as it is a model of mission. If participation in God's mission in the world is the calling of the Church, then participation in God's mission in its community is the calling of the local church. For me, at least, this thesis demonstrates that community

involvement can be an appropriate model of mission for a local urban church and I am committed to putting it into practice. Others must criticise this thesis and draw their own conclusions, which may lead on to further development of community involvement as a model of mission for the local urban church.

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