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A local church – a gathered people

A congregational study of St Margaret's Newlands, a traditional gathered congregation on the Southside of Glasgow

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Declaration of originality

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Abstract

This thesis is a congregational study based in St Margaret's Newlands, a gathered congregation that belongs to the Scottish Episcopal Church, located in the south of Glasgow. For nearly ten years, I was first curate, then assistant priest in the congregation, and increasingly interested in how the congregation related to its local area. The study was designed in order to explore the ongoing role of traditional congregations in a suburban Scottish context in the twenty-first century, particularly in the light of Mission Shaped Church and its proposal for a mixed economy of traditional congregations and fresh expressions of church.

The methodology the study applies is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. I conducted and analysed semi-structured interviews with eight members of the congregation This approach enabled me to present the experience of the congregation members interviewed, and also to reflect theologically on the themes that emerged. There were three overarching themes. The first of these was the participants' experience of worship and the sense they made of the liturgy, an area that has received surprisingly little research attention in congregational studies. Participants valued how the liturgy engaged them as actors not passive observers. The second theme was the participants' experience of the congregation as a community, and the spiritual and social support they experienced there. Participants identified the significance of the relationships they found there and were committed to playing their part in the life of the congregation. The third theme was the sense of disconnect between the congregation and its local area. Participants expressed a desire to bridge this through responding to social need in the area and beyond, while acknowledging the challenges in putting this into practice.

The picture of the congregation that emerged from the study was of a worshipping community that was committed to God and to one another, and concerned for the needs of the congregation's local area and beyond. The study highlights the challenge of defining a "local" congregation, in which many members live some distance from the church building. This is an important finding since in contemporary urban settings, many parish churches are

increasingly operating with characteristics that are typical of gathered congregations. By reflecting on what this gathered congregation offers to its members and the local area, I am able to offer some insights into how traditional congregations, whether parish or gathered, may operate within the mixed economy of church in a way that is both faithful to their tradition and relevant to their social context.

Acknowledgements

This thesis quite literally could not have been completed without the support and co-operation of the congregation at St Margaret's Newlands. They gave me permission to study the congregation, eight members gave me their stories to listen to and reflect on, and they all gave me their encouragement along the way – I sometimes joked that if I ever finished the thesis they would all deserve a part share in it! I may not be able to offer you all that, but I offer you my heartfelt thanks for all I have learnt, from this study and in my time serving as your priest.

My time on the DPT at Glasgow University has been a joy, and I am thankful for the work of the staff team who helped make this such a rewarding piece of work. In particular, my supervisor Charlotte Methuen has been a steadfast encourager. You have walked alongside me – occasionally pushing me forward – and I could not have completed this without you.

There are so many family and friends who have, over the past few years, listened patiently as I tried to articulate a thought, discern an idea, or express my frustration or excitement, depending on the stage of development of my thesis. You know who you are and what you did, and I will pay you all back in beer or cake, your choice. An honourable mention goes to Ros and Chris, who let me stay in their house from time to time as a quiet place to study, and talked through various sections of the thesis. Goodness only knows what we will talk about next time I visit.

The thesis is dedicated to my mum and dad, Veronica and Allen McTernan. My dad studied at Glasgow in the 1950s, the first person in his family to go to university. Mum has told me on numerous occasions how proud he would be to see me complete my doctorate at his alma mater, and she assures me we should be 95% happy about that, and only 5% sad that he's not here to share it. My mum has never doubted that I would finish, a confidence that kept me going – I look forward to sharing a glass of fizz with you, mum, when this is all done.

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Chapter one – introduction

My parents, born in the 1930s, both went to church regularly during their childhood, my mother to the Roman Catholic Church and my father to the Church of Scotland. They met and married in the late 1950s, and due to their different denominational backgrounds, they went through a form of marriage preparation to permit them to be married in the Roman Catholic Church. This process led them to decide not to continue going to either church. My siblings and I were therefore brought up with no habit of church attendance. We were all baptised Roman Catholic – my mum always said that if we hadn't been, Granny would have just turned up with a bottle of holy water and done it herself – but apart from that, we were a non-religious family. It must have been a surprise, then, to my parents, when at fifteen I began attending an independent evangelical church. I often say that, at the young end of a big family, I had to think of something to do that no-one else had done before, although I suspect it had more to do with the fact that a friend invited me along to the youth club and it was something to do on a Friday night. Within a few months I had made my own commitment to follow Christ, and I have been a member of a church ever since.

My parents' and my experiences tell a story behind the numbers on church attendance in Scotland. My parents' decision not to go to church represents the beginning of a trend away from church attendance.[1] From a high point in 1956, when almost half of all Scots had a formal church connection, this number has been in constant decline (Brown 1997, 158), and in 2016, only 7.2% of the population were regular church attenders (Brierley 2017, 4). My choice to start going to church as a teenager, and my subsequent choices to attend churches of different denominations, first the Church of Scotland and then the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), represent what Grace Davie has described as "a gradual

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[1] My parents were married in London but moved up to Scotland shortly afterwards, in the early 1960s.

shift from a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice" in relation to church attendance (Davie 2015, 5).

Church has remained a constant in my life since my teenage years, and in 2012 I was ordained a priest to serve in the SEC. Since that time, I have been first a curate, and then assistant priest (both non-stipendiary positions) at St Margaret's Newlands, a congregation located in an affluent suburb in the south side of Glasgow. Prior to my ordination, and for a while after, I worked as a children and families social worker, first in the local authority and then in the third sector, and in 2017, I was elected as a councillor on Glasgow City Council. Given my background, it is perhaps not surprising that my interest turned towards the relationship between the congregation and its local social context. At that time, St Margaret's had seventy or eighty people who gathered on a Sunday morning, a reasonably mixed group if tending towards the older and more middle class. I wanted to know more about why these people kept coming, what it meant to them to be part of this congregation, and how they felt the congregation related to its local area.

And so I decided to do a doctorate.

The SEC

The focus of my study is a congregation that belongs the SEC. Although part of the Anglican Communion, the SEC did not derive from the Church of England, but has its own distinct origin. Following the Scottish Reformation in 1560, the Church of Scotland alternated between an Episcopal and Presbyterian structure, only settling on the Presbyterian structure after the accession of William and Mary to the throne in 1688. From 1690 onwards, the presbyterian Church of Scotland operated as the national church in Scotland, loyal to the new monarchs, although it did not become established in the same way as the Church of England. Several of the Scottish bishops, however, remained loyal to the Stuart monarchy, as did a significant minority of congregations (Goldie 1976, 29). The bishops continued to oversee these congregations unlawfully until the 1712 Act of Toleration, which gave permission for episcopal congregations to meet as long as they swore an oath of allegiance to the Hanoverian monarchs.

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Some congregations still refused to do so, leading to a split between the so-called jurors and non-jurors; that is, between those congregations that swore loyalty to the Hanoverian monarchy and those that remained loyal to the Stuarts. This was only resolved with the abandonment of the Stuart claim to the throne in 1792 when the two strands reunited (Goldie 1976, 74).

The SEC therefore forms one strand of the dissenting protestant church in Scotland. This tradition has historically been stronger in Scotland than in England. There were two major secessions from the Church of Scotland due to debates over church polity, first in 1733 and then in 1843, as well as several minor secessions. By the time of the Religious Census of 1851, only three in ten Scots churchgoers were attending the Church of Scotland, with a similar number attending the Free Church of Scotland, and around one in four attending other dissenting protestant or evangelical churches (Brown 1997, 22). It was not uncommon at this time for Scots churchgoers to have a choice of several churches within walking distance of their home, thereby effectively establishing a principle of voluntarism in relation to church affiliation (Gay 2017, 74).

While the episcopalian tradition had a consistent presence in many parts of Scotland following the reformation, it had all but disappeared in Glasgow. In 1837, a decision was made to consecrate an Episcopalian bishop to the diocese of Glasgow and Galloway, this diocese having been under the oversight of the Bishop of Edinburgh since 1697. At that time "the number of worshipping [Episcopalian] churchpeople in the diocese was said to be so small that they could all be accommodated in a reasonably large drawing-room" (Goldie 1976, 88). However, the mission work of the local Episcopalians had been energised by the arrival of Anglicans from Ireland and England following the industrial revolution and the growth of Glasgow. The influence of the Oxford Movement on its worship style attracted some to the Episcopal Church (Goldie 1976, 86). By the end of the nineteenth century the SEC had an attendance across Scotland of 116,000 (Goldie 1976, 124) and it was in this context that St Margaret's was established.

St Margaret's Newlands

Glasgow grew significantly after the industrial revolution, and over the course of the nineteenth century its population increased tenfold (Hanlon, Walsh and Whyte 2006, 28). The population growth led to a significant expansion of the city, and as the suburbs were built, so churches were established to serve the new communities. St Margaret's was established in 1898, initially meeting in a shop front in Shawlands on the south side of Glasgow. The church buildings were erected over the course of the next twenty years in Newlands, an emerging middle-class suburb just south of Shawlands, with much of the funding for the buildings coming from wealthy Glasgow merchants. The church building is Romanesque-style with a double apse, and is connected by a corridor to a church hall and several ancillary rooms.

The first rector established a high Anglican worship tradition, but over time the congregation developed a more middle of the road Anglican style. In 2016 when the interviews for this study were conducted, the church membership was around 160. On a typical Sunday morning, around six people gathered at 9am for a spoken eucharist, followed by around seventy who attended at 10.30am for a choral eucharist, with robed clergy and choir, and a small Sunday School meeting at the same time. The church hall was used during the week by a variety of groups, including ballroom dancers, exercise classes, and guitar classes, though most of the groups had no connection with the congregation.

My research question

The question that drove this study relates to understanding why the members of the congregation kept coming to St Margaret's, what it meant to them to be part of this congregation, and how they felt the congregation related to its local context. The underlying question went back and forth in my head, as I am sure it does for most researchers, but I gradually settled on a simple question, asking those who have chosen St Margaret's as their congregation:

What does it mean to you to be a member of the congregation of St Margaret's, a Scottish Episcopal Church congregation in the south side of Glasgow?

Listening to these experiences, I hoped, would allow me to offer some insight into a wider ecclesiological discussion, and so to consider a broader research question:

What is the continuing role of traditional congregations, in a Scottish suburban context, in the twenty-first century? [2]

The key literature, to which this study contributes, is set out in chapter two. Mission Shaped Church (*MSC*) proposed the model of a mixed economy of church, with fresh expressions of church developing alongside traditional parish churches. Following *MSC*, a body of literature has developed that considers the ongoing role of the parish alongside fresh expressions. Within this, a strand of literature has begun to consider how the parish church itself can adapt to the changed social context of the twenty-first century. It is with this literature that my study engages. Parish churches are increasingly operating in ways that share characteristics with gathered congregations. This is partly due to the mobility of church goers, making it easier choose to attend a congregation further afield than their local parish church, and partly due to the gradual weakening of the ties between the parish church and its local neighbourhood. My study presents a picture of a gathered congregation, which offers an insight into the experience of those who choose to be part of the congregation, which in turn provides material for reflection on practice, and an understanding of the role of the local traditional congregation in the twenty-first century.

Chapter three sets out the research methodology. This is a congregational study, using social science methods to observe the church but with a theological focus. It is also a piece of ordinary theology, presenting the experience of members of the congregation in their words and discerning the theology in this,

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[2] The research questions is presented in two parts. This is a feature of the methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which will be explained further in chapter three when outlining the methodology.

in order to bring it into conversation with wider theology of the church, and to transform practice. The methodology used, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is set out there. IPA is a qualitative methodology developed in the field of psychology, which has been designed to be transferable into other fields.

The findings of the study are set out in chapters four to six, each exploring a different theme that emerged from the data. Chapter four describes the participants' experiences of the liturgical form of worship at St Margaret's. The experience of worshippers and the sense they make of the liturgy is an area that has received little research attention. Chapter five discusses the participants' experience of the congregation as a community. This was experienced differently by the different participants, but for all the participants the personal relationships, and the spiritual and social support they received within the congregation, were a significant element for them of congregational life. Chapter six presents the perceptions of the participants of the relationship between the congregation and its neighbourhood. All the participants identified a sense of disconnect between the congregation and its neighbourhood, and most had a vision for how the congregation might begin to bridge this, particularly focusing on addressing social need in the local area and wider issues of social justice.

Chapter seven returns to the literature and draws together some conclusions about the ongoing role of traditional congregations. By reflecting on what this gathered congregation offers both to its members and to the local area, the thesis offers some insights into how traditional congregations may operate within the mixed economy of church, serving the needs of the people who gather to worship, and also having a commitment to the local area where the church is based. The thesis concludes with a short personal afterword in chapter eight.

Chapter two – literature review

Introduction – setting the ecclesiological scene

Avis, in his introduction to the Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology, explores the question of whether the church is a divine or a human creation. On the one hand, the church originates with God, called into being by the Holy Spirit, inaugurated by Christ, and shaped by Scripture. On the other hand, the church as it has developed in history is contingent on its socio-historic context and the choices made by generations of followers of Christ, including their errors and failings. Avis brings these together by saying that, like Christ, the church is incarnational by its nature: "Although it comes from God and depends on God, it is fully embedded in creaturely reality, in all the changes and chances, the risks and dilemmas of this world" (Avis 2018a, 9). Ecclesiology, then, is the study of both the church as it should be, in its divine institution, and the church as it is, in its human initiative.

These two strands can both be seen in the ecclesiology of the past half century. Ormerod characterises the two strands as a Platonic (idealist) and an Aristotelian (realist) approach. The former generally begins with a theological symbol or metaphor and can be valuable for opening up and exploring different perspectives. The latter starts with the historically existing worshipping communities, learning from the experience of the church through history. What both formal ecclesiology and congregational studies share is the same purpose, that is, not simply to describe the church but to transform it, whether by learning lessons from practice or by reflecting on theological ideas (Ormerod 2008, 58). Nieman and Haight propose that the study of the church "must attend simultaneously to the historical and theological character of the church" (Nieman and Haight 2012, 13). While most people's experience of church begins in the historical community, which can be observed through congregational studies, the church's nature and mission originates from God, as analysed through formal ecclesiology, and the relationship between the two is mutually influential. Formal ecclesiology offers a normative vision of the church to shape

congregations, while congregational studies test the authenticity of the theological language about the church (Nieman and Haight 2012, 18).

This study is concerned with the ongoing role of traditional congregations in urban settings in the twenty-first century. Hopewell (1987, 12-13) describes the congregation as:

> a group that possesses a special name and recognised members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practiced worship but who communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of conduct, outlook, and story.

A congregation is more than simply the sum of its members, having an identity that endures despite changes in leadership and membership. It can be distinguished from other larger organisational units such as a diocese, presbytery or denomination, or smaller, more informal gatherings of family or friends. Within Christianity, it is the place that most people find their primary connection with the church, whether as members or occasional attenders at a congregation, or the congregation as a presence in their local neighbourhood (Hopewell 1987, 14).

Cameron identifies two forms of congregation that are typical in the traditional denominations in the UK (Cameron 2010, 24).[3] The first of these is the parish church congregation. This is a congregation with a specific geographical remit, which is part of a denominational structure offering comprehensive coverage of a territory. Membership of the congregation is generally drawn from within the parish boundaries, and the church is available to all in the parish area. Cameron draws an analogy between the parish church system and the cultural form of the public utility, that is, a service such as the water or electricity supply that offers complete coverage of a territory and is available to all within that territory.[4] The second form of congregation which Cameron identifies is the gathered congregation, typical in the dissenting Protestant denominations. Membership is

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[3] Cameron also describes three other forms of congregation, typical of fresh expressions or emerging church congregations.
[4] Cameron acknowledges that this analogy was first drawn by Grace Davie.

made up of those who choose to associate themselves with the congregation, whether they live locally to the congregation or travel to attend. Cameron draws an analogy between the gathered congregation and the cultural form of the voluntary association. These are organisations with a specific and self-selecting membership, which operate either for the benefit of the members or for a wider public benefit (or in many cases for a combination of both). The SEC has seven dioceses covering the whole of Scotland, although it has never sought to maintain a comprehensive parish church system across its territory. SEC congregations are therefore gathered congregations, albeit they often have a clear sense of connection to their local area.

Cameron argues that the cultural form of the congregation will affect how it is understood by those around it (Cameron 2010, 23). One of the most significant contributions to the development of congregational forms in the twenty-first century is the Church of England report *Mission Shaped Church (MSC)*, produced by a working group of the Church of England's Board of Mission, established to review developments in relation to church planting. In particular, it had been recognised that new forms of missional congregations were emerging, and the working group was asked to review these (*MSC* 2004, xi). The working group was composed mostly of clergy of the Church of England, joined by two lay members, and also a Methodist minister. The resulting report was published in 2004. This report has led to significant changes to the ministry structures of the Church of England, and has also influenced practice in denominations across the United Kingdom and internationally. [5] *MSC* recognised the need for a "mixed economy of church" (*MSC* 2004, 8), with traditional parish churches operating in partnership with fresh expressions of church, to meet the needs of the social context in Britain in the twenty-first century. Although *MSC* focuses on the Church of England, the contextual analysis it offered sought to address the situation in Britain as a whole,[6] and model of the mixed economy of church has

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[5] Ten years after the publication of *MSC* it was estimated that around 15% of all Church of England diocesan church communities were fresh expressions (Lings 2016, 10) and the role of pioneer minister, both lay and ordained, has been developed in order to develop new ministry opportunities in both parish and fresh expressions of church.

[6] The data used in the report were taken from Social Trends, an annual series produced by Office for National Statistics until 2012, which drew together social and economic data from government departments and other organisations, in order to present a picture of UK society.

influenced practice beyond that church's territory, including in Scotland, where there has been no comparable report written addressing the situation of the church in Scotland.[7]

While *MSC* proposes the model of a mixed economy of church, the report itself does not significantly discuss the ongoing role of traditional congregations into the twenty-first century. The literature responding to *MSC* does discuss the role of traditional congregations in the mixed economy of church, particularly focusing on the role of the parish church. Much of this literature presumes the continuation of the parish structure as it operated in the twentieth century. However, the role of the parish church in its neighbourhood has not been unaffected by the changing social context, particularly in urban settings. Members attend from beyond the parish boundaries, and within the parish boundaries there are often gathered congregations belonging to other denominations, meaning that the parish church is not the only church in the area. At the same time, the ways that people engage socially are increasingly varied, and no longer tied to the place where they live. The parish church is still a part of the community, but it is no longer at the heart of the community, and in practice, many parish churches operate in ways that share characteristics with gathered congregations.

This change in patterns of social engagement is discussed in *MSC*, providing the rationale for the emergence of fresh expressions of church. Nevertheless, the changes also have implications for the ongoing role of traditional congregations located in a particular place, and this has not been fully explored in the literature. My study has been conducted to contribute to this gap, that is, the implications of this changed social context for the ongoing role of traditional congregations. My study focuses on a suburban gathered congregation, a type of congregation that has received less attention in the literature. If parish churches are increasingly operating with some of the characteristics of gathered congregations, then it is valuable to consider how a gathered congregation can

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[7] In 2001 the Church of Scotland produced the report *Church Without Walls,* which considered the purpose and shape of the church going into the twenty-first century. However, this did not offer the same level of contextual analysis, and has not had the same influence beyond its own situation.

respond to the needs of those who gather to worship from various places, as well as being open and available to the local area where it is situated. The study presents, and reflects on, the experiences of eight members of the congregation of St Margaret's, and offers insight from this into how traditional congregations, both gathered and parish, may operate in the changed social context of the twenty-first century.

This literature review is presented in three sections. The first section briefly summarises the argument presented in *MSC*. The second section presents a selection of the literature that responds to *MSC*, selected for their focus on the role of traditional congregations in the mixed economy of church. The third section presents literature relating to the changing patterns of social capital, identified in *MSC* as a motivating factor for the evolution of fresh expressions of church. There is a significant body of literature on social capital, so I have selected particular elements that are relevant to the continuing role of traditional congregations.

Mission Shaped Church – shaping the discussion

MSC set out to explore the social context of Britain at the start of the twenty-first century, and to consider the variety of forms that churches might take within this context. It argued that patterns of social engagement across Britain had changed significantly over the previous thirty years, and that it was necessary for the church to rethink its mission in response to these changes. While in previous decades, the place where someone lived had been a foundational element in their social networks, this had changed during the second half of the twentieth century. Greater mobility, and latterly online connectivity, had created more opportunities for people to connect with others beyond their local area. Increasingly, people could connect through a variety of social networks which might be based on shared interest or identity, and were not limited to the geographical area where they lived: "Few people belong to 'no place' – many now belong to a variety of 'places' simultaneously. The social and personal significance of the place where they live has diminished" (*MSC* 2004, 6). A consequence of this fragmentation was a "drastic decline in social

capital" (*MSC* 2004, 7). A second cultural shift identified in *MSC* was the rise of consumer culture. Choice had become a core value of society, with people increasingly finding their identity in what they consume, rather than in what they produce (*MSC* 2004, 10). The importance of choice had impacted on the way that people thought about belief, increasingly perceiving it as a commodity to be chosen rather than a proposition to be evaluated (*MSC* 2004, 11). At the same time as these social changes, *MSC* observed that the significance of Christianity in British society had declined. Increasingly, faith was seen as a matter of personal choice. While British society was historically and culturally shaped by Christianity, most people no longer identified any particular connection with Christianity by virtue of living in Britain (*MSC* 2004, 10).

In response to these social changes, *MSC* argued that the parish model of church was no longer a sufficient model to fulfil the church's mission. The report proposed that fresh expressions of church should be allowed to develop and sit alongside traditional forms, in order to engage with people through social networks other than place (*MSC* 2004, 34). The report offered no specific definition of a fresh expression, but rather gave a set of examples of different forms of church gatherings that have emerged in order to reflect the more diverse cultural patterns of life, and to connect with people who have no church connection (*MSC* 2004, 43-83). The term "fresh expressions" was chosen to describe these forms of church, referring back to the Declaration of Assent which Church of England ministers make at their licensing, which states "The Church of England … professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation" (cited in *MSC* 2004, 34). This term was chosen in order to affirm that these expressions of church are both something new, and are also connected to the history of God's work in the world through the church (*MSC* 2004, 34). The report envisaged the development of a mixed economy of church, with traditional congregations located in parishes operating alongside and in partnership with fresh expressions of church (*MSC* 2004, xi).

While the working group that produced *MSC* included a member from the Methodist church, the report focused on the structures of Church of England.

Nevertheless, the report addressed itself to the social context of the United Kingdom, and it has influenced church practice in various British denominations, and internationally (Martin 2019, 288). The Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and the Baptist Union have all become partners in the Fresh Expressions network. While not a network partner, the Scottish Episcopal Church has been influenced by the Fresh Expressions movement. For example, the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway held a day conference on fresh expressions in 2014 led by Graham Cray, which was followed up by the diocese co-facilitating a Mission Shaped Church course in conjunction with the Church of Scotland.

Where next for the parish?

The mixed economy of church

The concept of unity in diversity within the church is one that has been explored in the Church of England throughout the twentieth century, both in the context of the wider church through Anglican involvement with the ecumenical movement, and within the Church of England through its liturgical revision leading to a greater variety of authorised liturgical forms for worship (Müller 2020, 34). Towards the end of the twentieth century, a growing number of new congregations were being planted alongside parishes, which led Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Wales, to refer to "a mixed economy of church life" which he described as "ways of being church alongside the inherited parochial pattern" (cited in Müller 2020, 37). The term "economy" was not intended to be a financial metaphor, but is rooted in the Greek word οικονομια, and the biblical image of the household of God:

> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20)

The mixed economy of church is therefore not simply describing the structures of the church, but offers a theological understanding of the church as a

collection of different households, each with their own forms and practices, but united in the extended household of God. This image also echoes the unity in diversity that is the Trinity (Müller 2020, 38). Others have since suggested the term "mixed ecology", as a term that avoids the modern connotations of the financial or commercial world, but rather offers a picture of new growth emerging as the work of the creator (Tilby 2008, 83).[8]

MSC made it clear that the development of fresh expressions was not intended to challenge or replace the parish structure but to complement it, operating in partnership with each other in a mixed economy of church (*MSC* 2004, xi). *MSC* also acknowledged the reality that there are generally several congregations of different denominations in any area (*MSC* 2004, 142) and that "local ecumenical cooperation is critical to the Church's mission" (*MSC* 2004, 146). However, the report did not explore how the parish system and its congregations might need to adapt in order to operate effectively alongside fresh expressions and ecumenical partners in the local area. Graham James, then Bishop of Norwich, while commending the parish system as a means of mission alongside fresh expressions, acknowledged that it "needs reformation and renewal, as it has done in every previous age" (James 2006, 3). In the decade and a half since the publication of *MSC*, there has been a growing body of literature which addresses the question of the ongoing role traditional congregations, some of which is a direct response to the report.

MSC was followed up by a series of books published by the Church of England, entitled *Mission-Shaped …*, each of which expanded on various aspects of the report. One of these, entitled *Mission-Shaped Questions* (Croft 2008), seeks to engage with some of the theological questions arising from *MSC*. The book arose from a series of day conferences which addressed some of the questions raised by *MSC*. Fourteen theologians, selected to offer a breadth of theological opinion, [9] presented papers at the conferences which have been developed into the essays in this publication, several of which comment on the notion of the mixed economy of church. In the first essay, Stephen Croft presents a

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[8] The term mixed ecology has in recent years begun to be used more commonly. For this thesis, I will continue to use the term mixed economy as this was the term used in *MSC*.
[9] Twelve Anglicans, two Methodists

perspective on fresh expressions in a mixed economy of church. He considers the notion of the mixed economy to be helpful, offering a picture of a parish where traditional congregations and fresh expressions "are likely to overlap and be interconnected but also to have their own distinct common life" (Croft 2008, 3). Nevertheless, in his essay, Croft focuses on the definition of, and organisational structures supporting, fresh expressions, without exploring how the structures and practices of the parish might be impacted by the development of the mixed economy of church.

Martyn Atkins' essay asks "What is the essence of the Church?", recognising this as a question not simply to test the new model of fresh expressions, but an essential question for both traditional and fresh expressions of church going forward. He identifies that the essence of the church does not lie in itself, but in the nature and purposes of God, as revealed in Scripture, and in its identity as God's partner in mission: "the church derives its being from the missionary God and is created and shaped to share in the *missio Dei*, the goal of which is the coming of the kingdom" (Atkins 2008, 19, italics original). Atkins observes that throughout history, the church has expressed itself in a variety of ways (Atkins 2008, 23). The essence of the church is expressed through its practices, and the challenge, for both traditional congregations and fresh expressions of church alike, is to distinguish between the practices that express this essence from the traditions and the structures within which they take place (Atkins 2008, 27). Graham Tomlin, in considering how churches can transform culture, also addresses the issue of what is expressed through practices, saying:

> If church is oriented not primarily towards the world but towards the kingdom of God, then a crucial task will be to ask first of all the question of how it can exhibit the patterns of behaviour, values, expectations and practices of the culture of that kingdom rather than the culture of twenty-first secular middle-class life (Tomlin 2008, 69).

In order to do this, Tomlin suggests, the culture of a congregation is more significant than its form, that is, one that cultivates habits of life, or virtues, that reflect the character of God and of God's kingdom (Tomlin 2008, 73).

Tomlin also suggests that congregations should identify characteristics of the culture in their local social context that run counter to the values of the kingdom, so that the congregation may give particular attention to kingdom values that can most sharply distinguish them from those characteristics (Tomlin 2008, 73). The contributions from both Atkins and Tomlin are helpful in reminding congregations that their primary orientation is towards God, and their calling is to live as a community of God's people. Nevertheless, while Tomlin identifies the importance for a congregation of being seen to be distinct from the characteristics of the world that run counter to the values of the kingdom, he does not discuss how a congregation might actively challenge the injustices that arise from these values, nor how a congregation might engage with others where their values align. This is an issue that came up for participants in my research, and I will discuss this in chapter six.

A further book in the *Mission shaped …* series, *Mission Shaped Parish* (Bayes and Sledge 2006) explicitly focuses on the ongoing role of the parish, exploring the opportunities within a parish situation for missional practice. The two authors are both Church of England clergy who have experience of parish ministry and the book is written from their practice experience, with three chapters contributed by other Church of England clerics. The book affirms the place of the parish church in the mixed economy of church, and also acknowledges that mission is central the parish church, not something separate from the work of the parish, or an activity or an initiative to be added to the work of the parish. Mission is described as an expression of God's love, a defining value of all that happens in the church which should shape all congregational practices (Bayes 2006a, 5). The theme of relationality weaves across the book, particularly in the chapter on friendship, community and mission, where Bayes argues that in an increasingly privatised and fragmented society, the offer of friendliness to all who come to the parish church can be profoundly counter-cultural (Bayes 2006b, 80). He describes this as being about more than simply offering words of welcome when people arrive, but about creating a culture where there is an open and authentic offer of relationship, at whatever level, without ulterior motive or pressure (Bayes 2006b, 83). The relational dimension is also brought out in the discussion on worship. Sledge emphasise the relational aspect of

worship, both with God and between the worshippers, which grounds worship in mission: "communicating a common humanity in the presence of a holy God who himself became flesh" (Sledge 2006, 46). Those leading worship should consider "how we can turn passive observers into active participants so that everyone is drawn into the experience" (Sledge 2006, 35). This attention to the relational aspects of congregational life was evident in my study, both in relation to worship (which will be discussed in chapter four) and in the wider activity of the congregation (discussed in chapter five).

The book does consider aspects of how to develop outward facing relationships, such as the opportunities offered by the occasional offices (Bayes and Sledge 2006, 47). Nevertheless, the focus of the book is on activity within the congregation. By maintaining this focus, the writers fail to comment on the opportunities that parish churches may have to engage with local community groups in the neighbourhood, both those that make use of the church building, and those operating in the local area. Given that one of the key claims of parish ministry is its offer to all who live in the parish, it would have been useful to have considered the particular ways the parish church is placed to respond to social need in its neighbourhood. It is also notable that the authors barely mention fresh expressions of church, other than in the introduction and the afterword, despite being part of a series following on from *MSC*. Neither does the book consider any engagement with other denominational churches within the neighbourhood, which would surely present another opportunity for mission through working together. Ultimately, then, the authors provide useful material for how congregations might refresh their practices within the context of a parish church, while offering little discussion of how traditional churches could develop their activities to relate to their social context, or how they might adapt to operate within the mixed economy of church.

One of the strongest critiques of *MSC* and the model of the mixed economy of church, was made by Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank in their book *For the Parish* (Davison and Milbank 2010). The authors are both Church of England priests who work in academic theology, and the book grew out of a conference exploring the traditions and mission of the Church of England. Both authors

presented papers at the conference, which were subsequently developed into the material for the book. The main contention of the book is that the content of the church (that is, its message, purpose, and identity) is embodied in its form (that is, the way this is lived and expressed). While the two may be distinguished, they cannot be separated (Davison and Milbank 2010, 2).   The inherited forms of the church cannot, the authors claim, be given up without something being lost. They root their argument in a view of the church as a sacrament, which mediates the grace that it signifies. Salvation is to be found in the church, which they identify as "the visible Church, historical and tangible" (Davison and Milbank 2010, 56). They contrast this with the position they ascribe to the writers of *MSC* and the literature that has followed it, which is that while the church acts as a sign to point people to God, salvation comes from a direct encounter between the individual and God: "once the sinner stands before God, the Church fades into the background" (Davison and Milbank 2010, 55). This, they claim, views the church as an instrument rather than the agent of salvation (Davison and Milbank 2010, 55). Traditionally, however, Anglicanism does not claim that any particular visible structures of the church are divinely instituted, and it acknowledges that the church exists beyond its own church structures. (Avis 2013, 79). Rather, the church can be identified as where the word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered in line with the ordinance of Christ (Avis 2013, 83). It seems hard to argue, then, that the church can be diminished simply by the changing of the structure.

In discussing the relationship between parish churches and fresh expressions, Davison and Milbank appear to be setting them up against each other, rather than considering whether they can operate alongside each other. They claim that, in *MSC* "it seemed that the parish was being asked to die so that new forms of 'being church' might live" (Davison and Milbank 2010, 144), despite the fact that *MSC* explicitly affirms the ongoing role of the parish system. The authors also present a picture of fresh expressions that is something of a caricature, using examples such as skateboarders or sewing circle church. They claim that the term fresh expressions is taken from the discourse of food advertising, with the word "fresh" connoting novelty without any specific content (Davison and Milbank 2010, 127). This ignores *MSC*'s given reason for using the term, echoing

the words in the Declaration of Assent made by Church of England ministers at their licensing, that the church is called upon "to proclaim afresh" the Gospel in every generation, as noted above (at p12). The authors' presentation of the relationship between fresh expressions and traditional forms of church in oppositional terms is frustrating, as it takes away from the important critiques that Davison and Milbank offer. In particular, they highlight how fresh expressions can risk separating people into different groups according to their identity, which they point out is counter to the gospel which reconciles people across difference, and is expressed in the "mixed and reconciled community" of the church (Davison and Milbank 2010, 68).

In the second half of the book, the authors offer a defence of the inherited parish system, which they describe as a "central emblem of Anglicanism" (Davison and Milbank 2010, 144) although they do not acknowledge that there are provinces in the Anglican communion, including the SEC, which do not operate a parish system. Neither do they engage with the argument made in *MSC* regarding the changing social context of Britain in the twenty-first century. The authors claim that the parish church "intends to be in the community as long as the community exists" (Davison and Milbank 2010, 10), without discussing whether there is such a thing as a parish-type community any more. Nevertheless, they offer useful ideas of how parish congregations might respond to secularism and rebuild "a hospitable and celebratory Christian culture" (Davison and Milbank 2010, 173). In particular, chapter nine discusses the significance of the traditional eucharistic form of worship offered by the parish church, which is something that participants in my study noted as being important to them, discussed in chapter four. Ultimately, despite their reservations, the authors do acknowledge a potential for fresh expressions and parishes to work together for their mutual benefit (Davison and Milbank 2010, 227).

While the texts discussed so far consider the relationship between fresh expressions of church and the parish system, whether affirmative or critiquing the mixed economy, they do not explore in detail any changes or developments that might be needed to traditional church structures in order to operate

effectively in their twenty-first century context. At the same time, another strand of literature was growing which was addressing this question, which I will consider in the next section.

Renewing the parish

Shortly after the publication of *MSC*, the Church of England produced a book called *The Future of the Parish System* (Croft 2006). The book is a collection of essays by Anglican academics and ministers who are all supportive of the "both-and" approach of the mixed economy of church, that is, "in order to share the mission of God in our own generation, we are called to develop our existing churches and communities within their own traditions but we are also called to encourage and begin fresh expressions of church" (Croft 2006, ix). Within this collection are two essays which explicitly address the relationship between the parish church and its wider social context. The first of these is the opening essay by Martyn Percy, "Many rooms in my father's house", which ask a fundamental question of the parish church: "What does it stand for? Whom is it for?" (Percy 2006, 8-9).   These are powerful questions, though Percy does not directly answer them in his essay, instead presenting a brief historical view of the relationship between the parish church and its social context. He looks back at the origins of the parish system which, as he observes, emerged as a matter of historical chance. During Saxon and Mediaeval times, the parish church was at the heart of the local community, combining civic and welfare functions alongside its religious functions. By early modern times, however, these functions were already beginning to diverge, and this divergence accelerated following industrialisation. At the same time, the variety of social spaces in the community began to increase. Over time, this has led to social changes that mean "the parish church is losing its identity because the concept and feel of parish-type communities has been lost first" (Percy 2006, 12). It could be argued that this has been a more significant change in urban settings than in rural settings, although both settings have experienced change in recent decades. Percy does not claim that this means the end for parish churches, but rather they need to evolve to adapt to the changing context, just as the parish church has done throughout its history. He argues for a shift "from the parochial

to the local" (Percy 2006, 12) with the ministry and mission of the church not limited by its geography but open to developing new spaces where people may be welcomed. There will still be opportunities of serving the local area, particularly through what he characterises as "vernacular religion", that is, Christian celebrations that remain culturally significant such as Christmas (Percy 2006, 13). Percy also notes the importance of ecumenical co-operation in a local area, recognising this as part of the mixed economy of church. Where other churches are operating in the area, then rather than trying to be all things to all people, the parish church could collaborate with other congregations to serve the needs of the local area (Percy 2006, 13).

The other essay in this collection that addresses the relationship between the church and its social context is by Grace Davie. In her essay, Davie outlines two terms that she has coined in the course of her work. The first of these is "believing without belonging", that is, a recognition that while membership of religious organisations has declined sharply in the UK over the past half century, there remains a significantly higher level of individual belief in something beyond the material world (Davie 2006, 33). Davie acknowledges the view held by some sociologists, that this is a short-term position and that a decline in belief will follow the decline in religious belonging, although she herself is unsure if this will be the case (Davie 2006, 35). Nevertheless, she recognises this as the context in which churches are operating in Britain today. This leads her to her second term, "vicarious religion", that is, "the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number *who (implicitly at least) not only understand but quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing*" (Davie 2006, 36, italics original). She offers the examples of the church offering rituals for birth, marriage, and death, and church leaders and churchgoers holding beliefs and moral codes on behalf of others (Davie 2006, 37). She suggests that churches are seen by the wider public as "public utilities maintained for the common good" (Davie 2006, 40). Nevertheless, she also observes that attendance at church has ceased to be any sort of cultural obligation and has become a matter of choice, and that "voluntarism is beginning to establish itself *de facto,* regardless of the constitutional position of

the [church] in question" (Davie 2006, 42, italics original) and as Gay noted, this has been the case for longer in Scotland (at p3).

There is a tension in Davie's claim that attendance at church is becoming a matter of choice, and the presumption that a significant proportion of those who choose not to attend church accept that the religion practised in church is done so on their behalf. It is one thing to say that people who do not attend church appreciate that churches are available, and value what churches contribute to society. This is a different matter from claiming that people who do not attend church accept and approve that the activities of the church are carried out on their behalf. Nevertheless, both Davie and Percy helpfully open up the discussion on how the parish church may rethink its role in society. Their two concepts, "vernacular" or "vicarious" religion, both speak to an intention to practice a tradition in a way that connects in some way with its social context, and I shall come back to these in chapter seven.

Will Foulger, in his doctoral thesis completed in 2018, offers a defence of the principle of the parish system, without tying it to the parochial structure. He describes the principle of the parish as "the ministry of presence in a place" (Foulger 2018, 13). The parish principle, so understood, combines a universal offer and availability to all through the comprehensive coverage of the church organisation across a territory, with a grounding in a particular and local place incarnated in the local parish church, with an obligation to that place. Nevertheless, he proposes that "to maintain its commitment to presence, [the church] may well need to embrace non-parochial and extra-parochial church forms" (Foulger 2018, 176). Foulger's study looks at four different congregations, two parish churches and two fresh expressions. One parish church operates on a traditional parochial model within its parish area, while the other relates to its neighbourhood as it is recognised by those who live in the area, and not according to the parish bounds. One of the fresh expressions operates in a small, bounded place, in a way that is similar to a parish congregation, while the other fresh expression is substantially "de-placed" but with a commitment to the city where it is located, thus offering somewhere to residents who felt a commitment to the city rather than any local area within

the city (Foulger 2018, 177). In all four cases, the congregations related to a particular place as it was experienced by people who live there, although not necessarily as the traditional parish structures would designate the places.

One of Foulger's key findings was that presence is about becoming, that is: "each church displayed a desire to *become* present to its place" (Foulger 2018, 182, italics original). Presence is not about the location of a building, but about the relationships that grow between the members of the church and the local community:

> In each case, the church held perceived goods that it in turn sought to bring into the life of the wider community. There was a desire for connection, for the church's presence to be apparent and to make a difference. (Foulger 2018, 183)

Foulger argues for a distinction between *being* present simply by virtue of having a church located in a particular area, and *becoming* present by growing and nurturing relationship. It is this understanding of presence – that is, rooted in relationship not just locatedness – which is embodied in the principle of the parish. Foulger's emphasis on the intentionality of presence, an active desire to turn out and connect, is a helpful response to the changing nature of the relationship between the parish and its local area.

Andrew Rumsey, in his book *Parish: an Anglican theology of place* (2017), sets out to present a theological understanding of the Anglican parish as a place. His focus is not on the practices of the parish church, but on the geographical place that is the parish. He intentionally avoids focusing on the church and the congregation, but instead seeks to, as he puts it, "describe how 'place' looks when viewed from the parish church and not vice versa: if the Church is obscured from where I am standing, this is only because I have my back to its door" (Rumsey 2017, 6). Rumsey views place through a Christological focus. In Christ, he argues, God is made available universally to all, and at the same time, God is available to each person whenever and wherever they are. It is in the local that God is perceived: "not because *he* is local, but because we are, and God elects to be known *by us*" (Rumsey 2017, 36, italics original). It is from this

Christological position that Rumsey develops his theological understanding of the parish as "a particular cultural expression of 'Christ in our place'" (Rumsey 2017, 80).

In developing his theological understanding of the parish as place, Rumsey uses the metaphor of "common ground". If the gathered worship that takes place is common prayer, then the geographical place shared by all the parishioners is common ground, that is: "the field of proximate social relations in which the Christian ethic of love for neighbour is realized" (Rumsey 2017, 86). The metaphor of "common ground" is helpful in thinking how those who gather to worship relate to those who live in the local area. It resonates with Foulger's emphasis on not simply being in a place but becoming present through developing relationships. However, by focusing on the physical place, Rumsey does not address how the shifting patterns of social engagement in the twenty-first century have impacted on social relations within a place, both the increased mobility leading to people living and working across wider geographical distances, and the wider range of social networks people are involved with, both in person and online.

Martin Robinson's book, *The Place of the Parish*, offers a vision of how the parish might evolve into the twenty-first century in light of these changed patterns of social engagement. Robinson, principal of ForMission College, and who has a background in parish ministry, offers a similar analysis to that of *MSC* in relation to the ways that people engage socially. He acknowledges that patterns of life are increasingly mobile, with people moving to live in different places, and travelling beyond their local neighbourhood to engage with social networks. Nevertheless, he does not consider that this renders place unimportant:

> it is impossible to have a social structure that is entirely abstract; there needs to be a physical location. Equally, places draw much of their significance from a complex interaction with people – their beliefs, their stories, their history, their lives. (Robinson 2020, 5%)

Places and networks are not, then, set up against one another, but are different ways of connecting that layer on top of one another, giving meaning to one another in people's experience.

Robinson acknowledges that the term "parish" is used by different denominations to mean different things, and his intention is to use it in a broad sense, although he does not offer any specific definition of this. He does offer a historical survey of the parish in England that demonstrates ways that it has adapted over time to its social context (Robinson 2020, 10%). He argues that churchgoers, particularly in urban contexts, are increasingly likely choose to attend congregation that is not their parish church for theology, worship style, or many other more personal reasons,[10] and that in practice "it can feel as if the whole system of parish life becomes more like that of a series of gathered congregations, mirroring the theory and practice of non-conformist denominations and networks" (Robinson 2020, 16%). At the same time, he acknowledges that gathered congregations are often strongly connected to the geographical place they are located: "they may not use the language of parish, but nevertheless they have a strong sense of the 'patch' that they view as their primary area of ministry" (Robinson 2020, 16%).

Robinson argues that for the church to be present in people's lives, this will mean being present in the places that people live, that is the geographical places they inhabit, their networks and relationships, and also the stories that people tell that weave these together (Robinson 2020, 5%). The picture that Robinson presents, of networks of relationship and place weaving together in people's lives, avoids compartmentalising people into those who are connected through place, and those who are connected through networks. He recognises the similarities between parish and gathered congregations, rather than their distinctions, which offers a helpful framework to consider how traditional congregations can operate, being both a particular group of people who choose to be part of the congregation, and also a church in a particular place, bringing a

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[10] When I moved to Glasgow, I chose to attend a particular congregation because my then flatmate went to that church, and it meant I had someone to turn up with, and I subsequently remained at that church for nearly ten years.

faithful presence of God's love in that place through their witness and service, available to all.

The literature highlighted in this section, that is, the literature that asks how the parish may need to adapt to operate well in the mixed economy of church, is the literature to which this thesis contributes. As Robinson identifies, parish churches increasingly share characteristics with gathered congregations. By reflecting on a gathered congregation – both the ways it is valued by those who attend, and the challenges it faces in connecting with its local area – this study offers useful insight for both gathered and parish congregations, and makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion about the role of traditional congregations going forward into the twenty-first century.

Social Capital

MSC made several claims regarding the social context of Britain at the start of the twenty-first century, outlined above (at p11). On the whole, the literature responding to *MSC* has not critiqued these claims and focussed on questions of theology or church practice. Nevertheless, I want to pick up on one point that *MSC* made regarding the social context, which has relevance to the ongoing role of traditional congregational forms and the relationship between congregations in the mixed economy of church. *MSC* claimed that, at the start of the twenty-first century, there had been a drastic decline in social capital in Britain, as a consequence of the changed patterns of social engagement. In order to respond to this, *MSC* proposed that congregations would need to build social capital: "both the establishing of bonds within networks and the bridging between networks will be crucial" (*MSC* 2004, 7). *MSC* identified fresh expressions of church as a model of congregation for people with a strong shared identity, thereby building bonding social capital within a group. This then invites a question, not addressed by *MSC*, as to how traditional congregations might build social capital.

While the term social capital has been used by theorists throughout the twentieth century, it was the work of Robert Putnam that brought the term into popular use. Putnam describes social capital as the social networks that arise

from connections between individuals, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness within these networks (Putnam 2000, 19). Putnam's view of social capital is a civic notion, built through voluntary association within the formal and informal structures of civic society (Tzanakis 2013, 6). It can be both a private and a public good, benefiting the individuals themselves and also the communities to which they are connected, establishing reliable expectations of behaviour towards one another and within the group (Putnam 2000, 20). Nevertheless, as Putnam acknowledges, networks may benefit the members but have anti-social ends, which may have a negative impact on those beyond the network (Putnam 2000, 21).

Putnam identifies a difference between the way social capital works within a group, and how it works between members of different groups. Putnam describes these as "bonding" and "bridging" social capital. Bonding capital promotes solidarity and trust within a particular group. This creates clear expectations of behaviour within the group, and direct expectations of reciprocity. Bridging capital creates connections and opportunities between different groups, with lower and more general shared expectations of behaviour, which nevertheless help provide predictable social norms to manage more distant relationships. The expectations of reciprocity will not necessarily be direct, with a good turn often repaid at another time to a different person (Newton 1997, 576). As Putnam says, "bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40" (Putnam 2000, 23).

This distinction between bonding and bridging social capital is reflected in the distinction observed by Mark Granovetter between "weak ties" or acquaintance relationships, and "strong ties" of friendships (Granovetter 1973, 1373). While strong ties build trust within a small group, weak ties provide links that help to create a sense of community between groups, and help to develop a sense of connectedness on a wider scale.[11] The language used to describe acquaintance relationships – "weak ties" – might initially be taken to imply a lesser status in

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[11] Granovetter also noted that people may interact where there is no social relationship, and he described these as "absent ties" to distinguish them from the interactions with some form of reciprocal relationship.

relation to strong ties. However, Granovetter emphasises the cohesive power of weak ties, which offer greater information and opportunities than strong ties alone. He demonstrates this through a study of workers who had recently found a new job through a personal contact. The contact was more likely to be an acquaintance than a close friend, as acquaintances were likely to have access to different information than that available to friends. Sandstrom and Dunn (2014, 920) identify that weak tie interactions can also promote a sense of subjective wellbeing and belonging. The experience of being recognised and acknowledged by another, with whom one has a slight relationship, showed evidence of contributing to individual perceptions of wellbeing. On days when people had more weak tie interactions than usual, they reported greater feelings of belonging (Sandstrom and Dunn 2014, 919). Weak ties can therefore offer relational as well as instrumental benefits. Both strong and weak ties, therefore, have a part to play in creating social capital, within groups and between groups.

Chris Baker and Hannah Skinner identified two other types of social capital: spiritual capital and religious capital. These definitions came out of a three year research project conducted in Manchester by the William Temple Foundation. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews and group discussions with over eighty people from nine different churches and church-based projects, in order to explore their experiences and views of how churches were responding to social, economic, and cultural changes in their local context (Baker and Skinner 2006, 7). The authors observed that churches were making a distinctive contribution to social capital in their communities, through "their own brand of social capital" (Baker and Skinner 2006, 9).

The authors defined religious capital as: "the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups". Spiritual capital in turn "energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis of faith" (Baker and Skinner 2006, 4). The authors characterise spiritual capital as the "why", that is, the motivating values, often expressed through individual and corporate worship practices, and religious capital as the "what", that is, the concrete resources provided by faith

communities, such as buildings or activities (Baker and Skinner 2006, 5). Members of faith communities were able to access these forms of capital for their own personal well-being, and also contribute to it through their engagement with the faith group and the wider community (Barker and Skinner 2006, 11).

The participants in my study spoke of the significance of both the weak and strong ties they have in the congregation, which will be discussed in chapter five. Participants also discussed how the congregation might engage with its neighbourhood, in ways that could be described as both spiritual capital in their motivations, and religious capital in its practical outworking, and this will be discussed in chapter six.

Conclusions

Following *MSC*, there has been a significant amount of research and discussion on the place of fresh expressions of church. However, there has been less of a focus on how parish and other traditional congregations might operate alongside fresh expressions in the mixed economy of church, or of how such congregations themselves might adapt to respond to their changed social context. Percy argues that the type of communities that the parish system developed to serve, do not exist in the same way as they have in the past, and so the parish will need to adapt to respond to this. Robinson suggests that this adaptation has been happening in practice, with many parish churches, particularly in urban settings, operating a model that increasingly shares characteristics with gathered congregations, serving the members who associate with the congregation, whilst also retaining a commitment to the place where it is located. Davie also recognises a trend towards voluntarism in relation to church affiliation. Nevertheless, she proposes that traditional churches can still offer a vicarious religion on behalf of those who live in the local area and continues to serve their needs, even if they do not attend the church. Foulger argues for a distinction to be made between the practice of the parochial system, and the principle that lies behind it, which he describes as "the principle of presence in place". This principle embodies an offer that is both universal in that the

church is open and available to all, while also being particular in making the offer to this place and these people.

The congregation I am studying is an Anglican church but it is not a parish church. Rather it is a gathered congregation in the south side of Glasgow. My study presents the experience of members of this congregation, what it means to them to be part of a congregation and how they perceive the congregation engaging with its local neighbourhood. In reflecting on their experience, I will offer insights for the transformation of practice in a traditional congregation, and I will also offer a perspective on how a traditional gathered congregation can operate within a Scottish urban context, that will contribute to the discussion of the way forward for traditional congregations within the mixed economy of church.

Chapter three – methodology

Congregational Studies

James Hopewell was one of a group of American scholars who helped establish congregational studies as a distinct field of study within theology (Nieman 2012, 133). They were not the first to study congregations, but they came together as an informal research group which supported the development of the field, and continues to operate today as the Congregational Studies Team (Studying Congregations 2022). In his book *Congregation,* Hopewell emphasised the significance of narrative in understanding congregations, arguing that each congregation has its own "idiom" that shapes its identity and distinguishes it from other congregations (Hopewell 1987, 5). Congregational self-understanding, says Hopewell, is primarily narrative: it is through stories that members of a congregation communicate their shared identity, and also locate themselves in their wider social context (Hopewell 1987, 46). In order to understand a congregation, then, we should start by listening to the stories told by its members, both individually and collectively. It is by listening to these stories that we can begin to understand what it means to its members to be part of a particular congregation.

Hopewell utilised methods of literary interpretation in order to make sense of these stories. Over time, congregational studies has emerged as a strongly interdisciplinary field, utilising multiple methods, increasingly from the social sciences, in order to give a holistic picture of a congregation (Nieman 2012, 133). The field of congregational studies employs a diverse set of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, generally drawn from the social sciences. Studies may be carried out from a social science perspective, or within an explicitly Christian theological context (Nieman and Haight 2012, 23). Guest, Tusting and Woodhead (2004) identify two types of study: extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic studies are conducted for their own sake, to gain an understanding of congregations as a social unit or locating them within their sociocultural context. Extrinsic studies are conducted for some wider purpose, such as church health or growth, community development, or theological reflection. In practice

most studies contain elements of both types, but they generally tend towards one or the other (Guest, Tusting and Woodhead 2004, 2).

Guest, Tusting and Woodhead identify two distinct phases in the field of congregational studies in the United Kingdom in the latter part of the twentieth century. The first phase was in the 1950s and '60s. Churches in the UK still had a significant place in civic and community life at this time, but it was also a time of social and industrial change. Most studies had an extrinsic focus, identifying the place of the congregation in community life, whether from a Christian or a secular perspective, and exploring how congregations could support social cohesion in a time of social change. From the 1970s onwards, congregational studies in the UK tended towards an intrinsic focus, studying congregations as an end in itself. Some studies aimed to present one or more congregations, offering a detailed description of congregational life. An example of this is Leslie J. Francis's study *Church Watch,* which aims to "observe the rural church in all its variety … *displaying* the strengths and weaknesses of rural chapels and rural churches, rather than … *judging* their performance" (1996, 1, italics original). Guest, Tusting and Woodhead contrast this with the situation in the USA, where extrinsic studies continued to be more prominent. These often focused on evaluating strategies for congregational growth or more generally on supporting churches to manage change and grow spiritually (Guest, Tusting and Woodhead 2004, 7). Congregations were also encouraged to research and learn from their own situation. An example of this was the publication of *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook,* written as a tool to support congregations conducting studies themselves to promote growth and renewal (Ammerman et al. 1998). The book is written for a broad audience of scholars and theologians, but "most importantly, perhaps, this [book] is also an invitation to people who inhabit and lead congregations to take their own habitat seriously" (1998, 9).

In the twenty-first century, a third movement in congregational studies has emerged, using social science methods to observe the church, but with an ecclesiological focus. This is developed in two collections of essays under the heading "Ecclesiology and Ethnography", edited by Pete Ward and Christian Scharen. They suggest that theological doctrines of the church are not always

connected with the lived experience of those in congregations (Ward 2012, 5). As a response to this, they propose using ethnographic methods to observe the church, in order critically to inform theological models of church (Ward 2012, 4). Nieman and Haight, in their contribution to the collections, propose that: "through congregational studies one can critically measure the credibility and ultimately the authenticity of the theological language about the church" (Nieman and Haight 2012,18). Paul Fiddes, another contributor, highlights that such studies can also lead to transformed practice, as: "insights gained through the use of models and from the making of theory are put back again into action" (Fiddes 2012, 35).

The key, for Ward, is to recognise that the church is at the same time theological and social/cultural, and so should not be viewed as one or the other, but always as both (Ward 2012, 2). Both of these ways of understanding the church are rooted in a Christological view, as expressed in the Christological prayer of Colossians 1, which declares "in him [Christ] all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Therefore, Ward says:

> We want to speak simultaneously about the theological and the social/cultural reality of the church because of Christ who is at once the one in whom "all things" hold together and "head of the church". We see understanding as an ecclesial act that is both theological and social/cultural, and this is because of Christ. (Ward 2012, 3)

Ecclesiology finds its origin in the church – and therefore in Christ, the head of the church – and also its purpose: "if we practice [sic] ethnographic research as ecclesial theologians, we do so in order to share in the 'holding together' and 'reconciling' that is attributed to Christ" (Ward 2012, 3). Using ethnographic methods both brings a perspective to ecclesiology from the practice of the church, and also supports the potential for ecclesiology to transform practice in congregations.

Avis believes that the developing relationship between ecclesiology and ethnography is making significant contributions to our understanding of the church. Nevertheless, he has highlighted some tensions in the way that Ward

and his colleagues have presented the relationship between the two disciplines (Avis 2018b, 337). Avis highlights that the distinction made by Ward and his colleagues between ecclesiology as a deductive, theoretical discipline, and ethnography, as an inductive, observational discipline, is presented as more clear cut than it is in practice. Avis points out that ecclesiology has its own artefacts, in the Scriptures and traditions of the church, which can be used as an empirical basis for theological reflection. At the same time, ethnography has its own theoretical aspects, which will shape the researcher's observations (Avis 2018b, 334). Avis also notes that at times there seems to be an implication that ethnography is not an academic discipline on a par with theology (Avis 2018b, 331). This perhaps relates to a habit that Fiddes acknowledges in the original collection of essays, that is, a tendency within practical theology to use the term "ethnography" to cover a range of qualitative approaches to empirical research that include some form of participant observation (Fiddes 2012, 15). Phillips challenges this broad use, pointing out that ethnography in fact describes a particular methodology within anthropology. She suggests that those describing their work as ethnography are often in practice engaging in "theological practices of thick description" (Phillips 2012, 102). Taking on board Avis' and Phillips' critique, it is vital for any researcher to be explicit about the methodology they are using, and its theoretical basis and assumptions, when engaging in observational research on the church.

My study fits into this recent movement, using social science methods in order to conduct a theological study of the church, and reflecting on the church as both a theological and a social/cultural institution. It has an extrinsic purpose, to reflect on practice in the congregation and to contribute to theological understandings of the church. Nevertheless, I also want my study to offer a faithful description of the experience of being part of a congregation, and to give voice to the members of the congregation, so that their voices are brought into the theological discussion. To this end, I have used the approach of ordinary theology.

Ordinary theology

If congregational studies looks at congregation as a group, ordinary theology attends to voices of members of the congregation. Jeff Astley, who developed the approach, emphasises the importance of attending to the voices of ordinary members of the congregation. His interest is in the "ordinary theology" of those in the pews, that is, "the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no theological education" (Astley 2002, 55). Astley is particularly interested in how people talk about their beliefs rather than that which is embodied in their actions: "I want *literally to hear* the theological voice of those who call themselves 'just ordinary'" (Astley 2013, 5, italics original). For Astley, ordinary theology begins with the task of theological listening to how people without theological training talk reflectively about their faith (Astley 2002, 144). This listening becomes a conversation, as the hearer seeks to reflect back to the speaker the theology the hearer discerns in what has been said. This descriptive process can be followed by a more critical engagement, as the hearer engages in theological reflection with the emerging ordinary theology of the speaker, bringing this into conversation with wider theological discourse. Astley clearly distinguishes ordinary theology, as expressed in people's words, from the theology that is embodied in their practice, discerned through observation. This correlates with Helen Cameron's distinction between operant theology, embedded in the practices of a group; and espoused theology, which explores how they articulate their beliefs (Cameron et al. 2010, 54). These two aspects can be brought into critical conversation with one another, and also with what Cameron describes as normative and formal theology, that is, the authoritative teachings of the church and the theology of the academy.

Astley and Christie argue that all those in leadership in the church should be attending to ordinary theology:

> We need to know about the beliefs and values of those for whom we care and those who are forced to listen to *us*, and get some sort of handle on

their patterns and modes of thinking, believing and valuing. And the only way to do that is to listen (Astley and Christie 2007, 5).

For this study, I wanted to listen to the voices of "ordinary" members of the congregation at St Margaret's in order to discern the theology contained in their words. This in turn would provide the basis for my reflections on the wider theological question on the ongoing role of traditional congregations, ensuring that the voices of those who are ordinary members of congregations are part of the conversation about the way forward for the church.

Methodology

Theology and the social sciences

In the second half of the twentieth century, practical theology began to look at practice, not simply as the application of theology, but as a place where theology is embodied, through words, actions, and symbols. One strand in this development was the use of qualitative research methods imported from the social sciences, which allowed the close study of human behaviour. Phillips observes that over this time, social science methodologies shifted away from positivism towards an interpretative or constructivist approach (Phillips 2012, 101). This move from seeking generalised truth, to acknowledging the situatedness of research, permits an easier dialogue between theology and the social sciences.

For some theologians, theology as contained in the teachings and traditions of the church and human experience as observed through the social sciences have an equal place in the dialogue, neither having priority over the other (Swinton and Mowat 2016, 73). Swinton and Mowat, however, argue that theology is an independent source of knowledge, utilising methods from the social sciences but not dependent on them. Within the field of practical theology, they propose that theology is "logically prior to and independent of" the social sciences (Swinton and Mowat 2016, 83). Nevertheless, "theology is something that human beings produce" (Tanner 1997, 63). Even the self-revelation of God is mediated through human experience and located in history and culture. Human

attempts to understand God and God's engagement with the world may well be fruitful but will ultimately be partial (Scharen and Vigen 2011, 19). Therefore, theology may be prior, but should also be subject to critical reflection (Swinton and Mowat 2016, 85). This is the approach that I have taken in my research.

Selecting a methodology

For my study I wanted to use an inductive approach to explore my practice situation. I considered using ethnography as an approach, and I also considered action research, another method that has been used by theologians to research the church (Cameron et al. 2010, 63). In this section, I will briefly outline these two methodologies and explain why I did not choose to use them, despite their established use in the field of practical theology, and I will then discuss Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a methodology that has been developed over the past twenty five years in psychology but has been little used so far in theology, and I will explain why I selected it for this study.

Ethnography

Ethnography as a social science research method originated in nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology (Atkinson and Hammersley 2019, 1). Initially it was used by western anthropologists who were studying cultures different from their own, however, in the latter half of the twentieth century, it began to be more commonly used for study within a researcher's own culture, and was also taken up as a method across other social sciences (Atkinson and Hammersley 2019, 2). An ethnographer would locate herself within a particular group of people, often over a long period of time, in order to produce a detailed description of the culture of the community, and to make sense of their shared practices and symbols. The aim of ethnography is to study a situation as it appears naturally, rather than seeking to replicate it experimentally in the laboratory (Atkinson and Hammersley 2019, 7). Ethnography is underpinned by an interpretative paradigm. People create meanings to make sense of the world around them, and they share these meanings within communities through symbols and practices (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 67). The ethnographer is seeking to discern that meaning through observing the symbols and practices.

A key consideration in choosing not to follow this method was my role as a participant observer. I was already a participant in the congregation, which is an accepted stance in an ethnographic study, with a member of an existing group taking up a stance of observer in order to investigate an aspect of the group's life (Kawulich 2005, 8). However, doing so would increase the possibility of my own interpretation of the situation influencing my analysis. My role in the congregation as assistant priest, was a leadership role, and I wanted to hear from those who were not in leadership. In addition, ethnography is a non-directive method, and I wished to focus my attention on a particular aspect of the congregation, that is, its engagement with its local community, and so for both of these reasons, I chose not to use this method.

Action Research

Action Research has been developed within the fields of education and organisational studies as a means for practitioners to research professional practice (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005, 560) and also within international development, as a way of enabling local communities to participate in their own development projects (Cameron et al. 2010, 40). Typically, an action research project will identify a problem within a situation, and the researcher(s) will work with the practitioners to find a solution to the problem through a process of reflecting on practice. Kemmis and McTaggart argue that action research should utilise a variety of methods to gather data, both qualitative and quantitative. In this way practice can be viewed from different perspectives and the research will provide a holistic view of practice (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005, 572).

Action research relates well to practical theology, enabling a positive and critical engagement between theory and practice. Cameron et al. have developed a particular model of action research, which they have called theological action research (Cameron et al. 2010, 49). This is explicitly shaped around the action research spiral of reflection identified above and uses social science methods for gathering data. Theology is not simply brought in at the reflection stage; rather, theological action research aims to be "theological all

the way through" (Cameron et al. 2010, 51). The questions asked are theological, and the practices that are observed and the data gathered are considered potential sources of theology. This model could provide a fruitful framework for a congregational study. However, both the processes and the timescales of action research are led by the needs of the organisation, not the research. The research is also collaborative, which makes it challenging to identify any one particular person's contribution (Cameron et al 2010, 44). This flexibility makes it challenging to use for a particular piece of academic research, and so I did not choose it for this study.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The methodology I chose for my study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a relatively recent methodology, developed within the field of psychology (Smith 1996). Traditionally, psychology has been concerned with measuring observable patterns of behaviour through quantitative research. Increasingly, however, psychologists have also turned to qualitative methods in order to recognise human intention and insight into their own behaviour. IPA was developed in order to provide a qualitative approach which was distinctly psychological, rather than importing approaches from other social sciences. Although developed particularly for use in psychology, its developers have welcomed its use in other disciplines (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 5). IPA aims to explore how people make sense of particular experiences in their lives, by describing in detail their own reflections on the meaning of the experience. The methodology is phenomenological, interpretative, and idiographic (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 29).

Phenomenology aims to "study experience and how the world appears to people" (Langdridge 2007, 5). It is a descriptive approach, aiming to explore and understand the world from the point of view of the person or people who are the subjects of the study (Moran 2013, 349). Experience is not simply cognitive, but is embodied, as our bodies are the means by which we engage with the world. The researcher is seeking to describe how the research participant experiences a particular situation, and how they make sense of that

experience. Through understanding this experience, the researcher can gain insight into the situation (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio 2019, 91). The aim of the researcher is to present, as far as she is able, the experience of her research participants. This can only be partially achieved; each person has their own situated viewpoint, and one person can never fully describe another person's viewpoint. For the one, it is a lived experience; for the other, it is something observed. The description will therefore be a co-construction of the researcher and the participant (Larkin, Watts and Clifton 2006, 104).

The interpretative aspect of IPA is concerned with interpreting an experience at different levels. The primary interpretation is that which is made by the participant themselves. The researcher must therefore bracket off her own experiences, and any preconceptions of what she will find. Smith, Flowers and Larkin identify bracketing with the practice of reflexivity, and they suggest that this is a cyclical process. Some of a researcher's preconceptions may only become apparent in the process of the research, and so she must periodically review these, in order to set them to one side as far as she is able, and to focus on the interpretation of the participant. The researcher is also engaged in a secondary interpretative process, as "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 3). She may be able to offer insight into the experience from outside that the participant is not able to notice from within the situation (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 23). She is also able to notice similarities and differences between the experiences of different participants, and to bring these into conversation with academic literature on the topic, while always coming back to the original experience as understood by the participant(s). The researcher uses both a hermeneutics of empathy, as she seeks to describe the participants own experience, and a hermeneutics of questioning, as she makes her own sense of the experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 36).

Finally, IPA is idiographic in its approach. It is not looking at large scale populations to observe emerging patterns, in order to establish general norms of human behaviour. Rather it is focusing in on a particular situation. IPA seeks to

understand an experience from the perspective of particular people in a particular context, and to provide a detailed, in depth analysis of this experience, in order to better understand the situation. IPA therefore uses small samples, or even individual case studies, in order to allow this depth of analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 29). Such small-scale case analyses are not intended establish general principles. However, a small, in depth study may provide insight that can refine a hypothesis which can then be further tested (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 31). This is similar to the way that action research brings practice and theory together, outlined above.

While IPA has become a well-used methodology in psychology, some critiques have been made of it. Tuffour raises the question of how fully it can present the experience of the participant rather than the opinion of the researcher (Tuffour 2017, 4). It is essential, then, that the researcher develops her skills as an interviewer, so she is able to guide the interview without leading the participant, in order to collect an authentic description of their experience.[12] Tuffour is also concerned that IPA focuses on describing and understanding lived experience, but does not explore why these experiences occur, or explore the conditions and the context in which the experiences occurred. In contrast, Larkin, Watts and Clifton propose that the interpretative stage allows the researcher to do this, bringing in other sources, including theoretical concepts, in order to contextualise the experience (Larkin, Watts and Clifton 2008, 116). This can provide context, although this must always be rooted back to the words of the participants, which establish a limit to the scope of the interpretation.

Another critique, which could be made of any methodology that relies on the self-report of participants, is the question of the reliability of memory. Each time a person tells a story of their experience they will reconstruct the memory of that experience, and details may be reshaped, distorted or missed out, whether intentionally or not (Thelen 1989, 1120). Each participant will remember from their own point of view, and over time their recollection of a

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[12] I drew on the skills I developed conducting, and delivering training for practitioners conducting investigative interviews with children who may have witnessed a criminal offence, which I have described below at p46.

particular event or situation may change. Nevertheless, this does not invalidate their recollection as a source of evidence, as Ritchie says:

> People regularly reevaluate and reexplain their past decisions and actions. Just as historians rewrite history to incorporate new evidence and fit different theories, individuals use the insights gained from current events to help reshape them and make new sense out of past experiences. There is nothing invalidating about this reflectivity, so long as interviewers and researchers understand what is occurring and take it into account. (Ritchie 2015, 17)

In the context of IPA, the two-stage model allows the researcher first to present the experience as recalled and described by the participant, and then to interpret this herself. At this second stage, if the researcher is aware of any factual errors or partiality in the recall of the participant, she is able to reflect on this, and what it may say about the meaning being made by the participant about the experience.

I have found that IPA is a methodology that lends itself to practical theology. It shares with practical theology a focus on the importance of human experience (Swinton and Mowat 2016, 5). Its aim is to offer a close examination of human experiences, to describe as far as possible the experience from a particular person's point of view, and so understand their experience within its context. This ties in well with Astley's model of ordinary theology, described above. IPA contains the possibility of transforming practice. While not aiming to develop models of practice, a phenomenological approach can provide insight that prompts critical reflection on practice. It allows people to see the world from another point of view, and so to act differently in the world (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 102). It can also be useful for paying attention to power relations. Ammerman et al. (1998, 14) highlight the importance of attending to voices of both women and men, and how congregations both oppress and empower women. This principle can equally apply to other groups who are traditionally disempowered or under-represented, whether within society in general or in the church in particular. IPA aims at uncovering the experience of small groups of

people in similar situations. This makes it an approach that could be used to give voice to the experiences of marginalised groups.

Ormerod highlights that when engaging with human science methods,

> such an engagement will not take the existing understandings of the human sciences simply at face value. Rather it will involve a reorientation of the human sciences, theologically motivated, but drawing on their own natural dynamism. (Ormerod 2002, 11)

The shape of a study using IPA, with the stages of phenomenology and interpretation distinguished, creates space for the researcher to present participants' experiences in their own terms, and to bring her own, explicitly theologically grounded interpretation, to the data. For the purpose of my study IPA cannot tell me definitively what it is like to be part of a congregation. It can, however, assist me to understand the particular experiences of some people who are part of a congregation. This can then be contrasted with other experiences described in congregational studies and other church-based research, compared and contrasted with the claims of ecclesiology; and the insights that emerge from this may be offered back to the congregation of St Margaret's, to the SEC, and more widely to the research field of congregational studies.

Research Model

The standard method of IPA is set out in detail in Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) at pages 40-118. It is not a prescriptive method and researchers may vary aspects of it. I have substantially followed the method described in Smith et al which is outlined below, together with a description of how I utilised it for my study. [13]

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[13] The method is outlined in the pages referenced. I have not given individual page references.

Stage one – establishing a research question.

An IPA research question does not aim to establish causal links between events, but rather to describe and analyse experience. The question should be as open as possible, focusing on people's experiences and understandings of a particular situation. For this reason, the research question is separated into two parts. The primary question is one of experience, asking the participants to describe an experience, and the meaning they have made of it. The secondary question is theory driven, seeking to make connections between the experiences of the participants and the wider academic and research literature, in order to provide insight to the theory question from the participants' experience. An experiential study cannot give definitive answers to a theory question, and the researchers should be open to the possibility that the theory question she is exploring may not be addressed in the data, hence the primary focus is on the participants' experience. My broad area of interest, as outlined in chapter one, was to what extent traditional forms of church still had a role into the twenty-first century, in a Scottish suburban context. This provided the theoretical question. In keeping with the method, my experiential question was open, asking about the experience of being a member of this congregation.

As set out in chapter one, my primary, experiential question is:

> What does it mean to you to be a member of the congregation of St Margaret's, a Scottish Episcopal Church congregation in the south side of Glasgow?

I am asking this experiential question in order to illuminate a second, theory driven question:

> What is the continuing role of traditional congregations, in a Scottish suburban context, in the twenty-first century?

A short literature review may be conducted at this stage, to introduce the field of study and demonstrate how the research will make a useful contribution. This has been done in chapter two, in order to expand the theory question.

Further literature may be brought into the discussion, at stage five, in response to issues arising from the data. This has been done in chapters four to six, where the data are analysed. I drew on congregational studies from the UK, the USA and Canada, and also research from other fields, notably from voluntary sector studies. As discussed in chapter two, the church is both a theological and a socio-historical entity. In its socio-historical form, congregations in the UK operate as a form of voluntary sector organisation, and so studies from this field can offer insight into some of the practical organisational issues facing congregations, both in how they operate, and in their engagement with their wider social context.

Stage two – finding a sample.

In IPA, samples are small, as the aim is to give a detailed rather than a broad picture. A single case study may be used, and it is not recommended to go beyond a sample of ten, as this can generate too much data to allow for detailed analysis. Participants are generally selected deliberately, rather than randomly, from people who have experienced a particular situation. The selection will tend towards those with similar characteristics, rather than aiming for diversity, in order to allow patterns of similarity and difference between participants to emerge.

The primary characteristic of my sample was the specific set of members of the congregation at St Margaret's. I wanted to speak to people who were regular worshippers in the congregation but were not involved in any strategic position of leadership. I therefore applied the following criteria:

- Have attended St Margaret's for over a year,
- Attend a worship service on at least a monthly basis,
- Not currently members of the vestry,
- Are over 18, and
- Are not vulnerable adults, as defined by Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007, s.94.

I requested and received permission from the vestry of St Margaret's to conduct research in the congregation. The Rector of the church agreed to act as a gatekeeper to access participants on my behalf. He identified potential participants who met my criteria, and approached them, giving them full information about the research. If they consented, their name was passed on to me. Thich allowed them to choose whether or not to participate without my knowledge.

My research was subject to ethical approval, as I was researching human participants. Participants were given written information about the aims of the research, what would be involved in participating, and the anticipated outcomes of the research, including who may access the completed research, and their right to withdraw consent to the use of their data at any time.[14] In qualitative research, participants are generally offered anonymity. However, this is difficult to guarantee, particularly in small studies and within closed settings. It is the personal experience of the participants that forms the focus of the study, and more the individual characteristics of the participants or the location of the study are anonymised, the more their individual experiences are diluted (van den Hoonaard 2003, 146). For this study, participants were not guaranteed anonymity, as it would be possible that they could be recognised from their comments by someone who is familiar with St Margaret's. However, they were all given an alternative name – four participants selected their own alternative name, and I selected names for the other four.

Stage three – gathering data.

Most commonly in IPA, data are gathered through in-depth, semi structured one-to-one interviews. This allows the researcher and participant to develop a dialogue. The researcher should set the scene and direct the participant towards the situation being researched. She will have a set of open questions and prompts in order to draw out the participant. However, most of the talking will be done by the participant, and the researcher should follow where the participant goes, within the scope of the research question. While the

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[14] The participant information sheet and consent form are set out in appendix one.

interview(s) provide the main source of data, secondary data may be gathered in order to provide context. These can include documentary sources or the researcher's observations of the situation.

I designed my schedule of questions drawing on my previous experience of training police officers and social workers on conducting investigative interviews with children. Investigative interviews are conducted with children if there is a reason to believe they may be witnesses to an offence. The purpose of such interviews is to obtain from the child their account of any events they have witnessed, in a form that is both credible and reliable. In order to achieve this, interviewers must ask their questions in an open way that allows the child to tell their own version of events, even if – indeed, especially if – the interviewers have an idea of what may have happened. The interviewer must orientate the child towards the topic of the interview whilst not leading them in any way, and at all times being sensitive to any distress that might be caused to the child in discussing the topic of the interview.

Powell, Fisher and Wright (2005, 13) identify four elements of investigative interviewing practice, which are supported by research, that are likely to obtain a credible and reliable interview. Firstly, the interviewer should give a clear description of how the interview will be conducted. For example, the interviewee should be clear that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, and that it is okay if they don't know how to, or don't want to, answer a question. Secondly, the interviewer should take time to establish a good rapport with the interviewee, particularly where there is no prior relationship. Thirdly, the interviewer should use an open-ended questioning style. This will encourage the interviewee to offer a free narrative rather than responding to particular questions, which generally elicits a fuller response. This can then be followed up with more detailed questioning on particular aspects of the narrative, to obtain full detail. Fourthly, the interviewer must be willing to explore alternative hypotheses. The interviewer should be aware of her own assumptions approaching the interview, and should actively avoid leading the interviewee or simply noticing her prior expectations within the interviewee's response and thereby missing other possibilities.

In planning and conducting my interviews, I sought to implement these four elements in my interviews.[15] Firstly, the interview schedule contained a set of interview principles to outline how the interview would be conducted, which I discussed with participants before I started. Secondly, while I already had an existing relationship with all the participants, I used the first question, "tell me what brought you to St Margaret's?" to establish a rapport within the interview setting, before moving on more explicitly to the focus of the study. Thirdly, I asked a series of open questions to draw out the participants' experience of the congregation and its relationship to its neighbourhood. I began this by asking about the participants' experience of worship on a Sunday morning; then their experience of other aspects of congregational life; and then their views on the relationship between St Margaret's and its neighbourhood, and the relationship between church and its social context more broadly. Fourthly, when conducting the interviews, I followed the lead of the participants' and attended more closely to the aspects of the questions they seemed more interested in talking about. My main focus of interest was on the second and third questions, and I included the first question to give the participants the chance to become used to giving a free narrative, rather than answering particular questions, before I moved on to the more substantive topics. However, most participants spent at least as much, if not more time, on the first question. This is reflected in my analysis of the themes that emerged from the interviews, and I will discuss this further in the next section on analysis.

Stage four – analysis

A standard model of analysis is proposed, in order to analyse each participant's response both separately and together. Each interview is analysed separately, before bringing the themes from the different interviews together to identify overarching themes and sub-themes. The analysis of each interview has four steps:

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[15] The interview schedule is set out in appendix two.

- *Reading and re-reading the transcript.* The intention of this step is to immerse the researcher in the words of the participant. She may or may not take notes at this point

- *Initial noting.* This is a form of free textual analysis, noting anything of interest, whether narrative, textual or conceptual.

- *Developing emergent themes.* From the notes, the researcher will identify themes that are apparent, always linking these back to the text of the interview.

- *Searching for connections across emergent themes.* The researcher looks for patterns emerging across the themes, which are then grouped into super-ordinate themes.

Once this process is completed for the first participant, the researcher goes on to complete this process with the other interviews, trying as far as possible to bracket off each interview in order to analyse each one independently. Once all the interviews have been considered, the emergent themes are put together on a master table, and the researcher looks for patterns of themes across the interviews. This will then be written up to present the key themes emerging across the interviews, always linking these themes back into the text of the interviews.

I followed this process in analysing my interviews. For each interview, I began by re-listening to the audio recording, with a copy of the transcript in front of me. I made notes on the transcript, marking comments that stood out to me as significant, and beginning to note my response to some comments. I re-read the text two or three times, continuing to make notes, and beginning to make connections between points within the interview. I then began to code the interview for emerging themes. I looked for patterns across the themes and grouped them together into overarching themes. Finally, I produced a summary document for each interview, which identified three or four overarching themes in the interview, and several sub-themes within each of these, and quotations from the interview that demonstrated the various themes. I completed this task for each interview separately, and then I brought the themes together from the different interviews. To do this, I printed out the summary document for each

interview, and cut out the quotations that related to each theme. I put together the themes that related to one another from across the interviews. I laid out the quotations relating to similar themes from the different interviews on a table, and moved them around to identify emerging patterns, as well as divergence, across each theme. I continued this exercise with each theme, ordering and reordering the quotations and refining the themes, from time to time checking back with the original text of the interviews to ensure I was not taking quotations out of context. Finally I established three overarching themes across all the interviews, with a number of sub-themes within each.

The process of analysis emphasises the importance of analysing each interview in its own terms, before analysing the interviews together. This allows for a distinct analysis of each participant's experience, in order that the individual experiences remain distinct within the overall analysis. At the time I was analysing the data, I was fitting this in alongside my work commitments. This meant that there was inevitably days, and sometimes weeks between analysing each interview. While this created pressure for the overall completion of the analysis, it did mean that I had a distinct break between each analysis, reducing the opportunity of the analysis of each interview being influenced by the previously analysed interviews. This also meant that the themes across the interviews were described differently, and so I had to identify where the differently described themes correlated. In some cases these were quite similar. For example, all the interviews contained a theme within the overarching theme of congregation's relationship with its neighbourhood, that was described as connections, connectedness, or disconnect. These were clearly related, with the different headings reflecting the emphasis of the comments made by the participants. In other cases these were quite divergent. For example, when describing their experience of worship, the variety of words participants used to describe their experiences led to me using a wider variety of words to identify themes. Because of this, I chose to correlate the different experiences with the particular element of the liturgy they related to, although I was also able to identify some more general themes emerging from the participants' experience of worship in the congregation.

Overall, I identified three overarching themes. The first was the participants' experience of liturgical worship; the second was the participants' experience of being part of a congregational community; and the third was the participants' perception of the congregation's relationship to its wider neighbourhood and social context. These three overarching themes correlate with the three broad questions I asked in each interview. This demonstrates clearly how the shape of my interview in turn shaped the outcome of the interviews and emphasises how important it is to attend to planning the interview so as to direct participants to a particular area of discussion, without leading them to any particular conclusion.

As noted above (at p44), the participants gave more attention to the first question than I had anticipated. I followed this in the interviews, staying with the participants rather than moving them on to the other questions. Likewise when analysing the data, I found myself attending to themes emerging in the earlier parts of the interviews that I felt I needed to stop and consider, rather than moving on to the questions I had brought to the interviews. When I began my research project, my focus was on the congregation as a community, and its relationship with its local neighbourhood and wider social context. I had anticipated that the themes would cluster into two groups; those related to the life of the congregation, and those relating to the connection between the congregation and its social context, with the participants discussing their faith in the context of both of these. However, it became apparent that the experience of worship was emerging as a distinct theme, playing a role in forming the community as well as the individuals within the community. In retrospect this is understandable, in that the worship life of the congregation is a distinctive element marking it out from other communities.

I have presented the data and the analysis on each overarching theme in three separate chapters, bringing in relevant research that relates to the emergent themes. I had originally intended to present the data in separate sections from the analysis, to ensure that the experiences of the participants were distinct from my analysis. However, it became evident that the flow would work better if I interwove the data and analysis together. I have therefore formatted the

participants' quotations in italics, so that they stand out in the text. I also included an element of discussion in each chapter. As discussed below in section five, in IPA the discussion is generally presented in a different section. This might work in a smaller study, however, given the scale of this study it seemed more appropriate to include discussion of the three overarching themes as they were presented, as well as a more general discussion bringing together the findings across the themes, in chapter seven.

It is worth restating the idiographic aspect to this methodology. As described above, the interviews were shaped by my questions, and the responses given by the participants were those offered on a particular occasion. This makes it difficult in particular to draw any conclusions from what the participants did not say or failed to comment on, as they may have offered further comment if prompted. In conducting my analysis, the things I noticed and found significant were shaped not only by my research question, but also by the prior knowledge and experience I brought to my situation as a researcher. For example, I have worked in, and studied, management in the voluntary sector. This allowed me to notice connections between congregations and other voluntary associations that another researcher may not have identified as significant. This will be developed in particular in chapter five. It also means there may have been significant elements in the participants' comments that another researcher would have noticed that I did not. The product of the research is a form of co-production between the participants and the researcher, describing the experiences of the participants through the eyes of the researcher.

Stage five – Discussion

The discussion is generally written up as a separate section from the analysis. This serves to separate the description of the experience of the participants from the interpretation of this experience by the researcher. At this point, the researcher will make reference to wider literature, both that presented in the literature review, and further reading prompted by the themes that have emerged in the analysis. The discussion should bring the analysis into conversation with the wider literature. Are there points of agreement or

tension? Does the literature shine further light on the analysis, or vice versa?
Are there any implications for practice, or further questions for research? What
has the researcher herself learnt, both in relation to the process of research,
and the wider practice topic being explored? Finally, the discussion should
consider how well the analysis has answered the original research question, and
any secondary theory-led questions.

As noted above, I began the discussion of each theme in chapters four to six.
These chapters present the response to the experience question: "What does it
mean to you to be a member of the congregation of St Margaret's, a Scottish
Episcopal Church congregation in the south side of Glasgow?" Each chapter
relates to a theme that emerged in response to that question, and I have
presented the data relating to that theme, together with analysis and discussion
in light of relevant literature. These chapters, then, represent both the intrinsic
and the extrinsic aspect of the study, both describing the congregation and
offering suggestions for transforming practice within the congregation and in its
relationship with its neighbourhood. Chapter seven represents the
ecclesiological aspect of the study.[16] It provides a more general discussion
across the three themes, responding to the secondary question: "What is the
continuing role of traditional congregations, in a Scottish suburban context, in
the twenty-first century?" While chapters four to six engage with literature
from other disciplines as well as theology, chapter seven focuses on theological
literature. Chapters four to six offer the experiences of the participants and
seek to draw theological insight from these; while chapter seven seeks to take
these theological insights and use them to respond to the secondary question.

Validity

In quantitative research, the researcher is testing a particular hypothesis. She is
looking to make measurements and establish causal relationships between
variables, in order to establish a general rule that can be applied in the future to
predict outcomes. The question of validity addresses whether the research does

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[16] In practice the three elements of the study are not quite as distinct as this, however, this is
the way the four chapters are focused.

in fact measure that which it set out to measure, and so establishes the causal relationship proposed. This relates to the concept of reliability, that is, whether the same method would provide consistent results over time (Golafshani 2003, 599). In qualitative research, by contrast, the researcher is looking closely at a particular situation, looking to describe and understand the situation. She is not making measurements, nor is she looking to develop general rules. Nevertheless, the question of validity is still relevant. Is the researcher focusing on what she has set out to observe? How far can the learning from this research be applied beyond the immediate situation? Golafshani suggests that qualitative researchers should be aiming for "trustworthiness". They should use rigorous and defendable methods, that will allow confidence in their results (Golafshani 2003, 602).

Within qualitative research, a key element to this is reflexivity. This involves the researcher making her own point of view explicit, to herself and to those reading the research: "reflexivity demands we explain our actions within the process" (Engward and Goldspink 2020, 44). This is both in relation to the implementation of the methodology, and also the outcomes, that is, the interpretation of the data and the findings. In IPA, reflexivity operates differently in the descriptive and the interpretative stages of the research. The phenomenological aspect of the research calls on the researcher to give voice to the experience of the participants, and bracket her own experience, that is, "to 'stand back' and maintain a critical perspective on [her] theories, assumptions and familiar ways of thinking, doing and interpreting" (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans 2019, 144). While this can never be fully achieved, it is the aim of the researcher to sit outside her own experience in order to allow the experiences of the participants to be heard in their own words. The interpretative aspect of the research invites the researcher to bring her experience and understanding into dialogue with the participants' experience. She is making sense of the participants' experience, and at the same time she is making known her own point of view, and how this interacts with the data.

While identifying these distinct stages, in practice the researcher will move between these different stages as she analyses each interview and brings the

data together for discussion, moving between description and interpretation. Reflexivity is, therefore, not so much a task to be completed, but a way of being with the research (Engward and Goldspink 2020, 43). Engward and Goldspink use the image of the data as "lodgers" in the mind of the researcher (Engward and Goldspink 2020, 42). She lives with the data, reflecting over time as she begins to make sense of them, and as they impact on her own understanding, and so the research should present not only the researcher's interpretation of the data, but also something of the journey of sense-making that has brought the researcher to this understanding.

My role as a practitioner researcher, researching my own situation, raises questions in relation to validity. It is increasingly common across a range of disciplines to for research to be conducted by a "researching professional" as oppose to a "professional researcher" (Taylor 2007, 156). There are benefits for a researcher in studying her own practice situation. She is already familiar with the culture, and her presence in the situation will not effect any change to this culture. Her pre-existing relationship with the participants can enable them to participate more openly in the process (Unluer 2012, 1). Nevertheless there are challenges also, that must be recognised. The pre-existing and ongoing relationship with the research participants and the organisation, which create the familiarity on both sides, also place responsibilities on the researcher not to misuse the trust which she has been given. Ultimately the welfare of the participants must be the practitioner researcher's priority, ahead of the research (Coy 2006, 422). The familiarity that the researcher has with the situation also means the researcher may make wrong assumptions based on her prior knowledge of the situations (Unluer 2012, 1). The process of bracketing in IPA is a vital process in order to help minimise the impact of this potential unconscious bias.

The study participants

The focus of my study was, as described in chapter one (at p4), a congregation of the Scottish Episcopal Church, based in Newlands, Glasgow. The church is set back from the road at a busy crossroads on one of the main roads south in the

city. When the church was built at the start of the twentieth century, most people who lived in the area would have regularly walked past the church building, whether to get to the shops, or to the tram or bus stop, or simply walking around the local area. Now, local residents are more likely to drive past the church than walk past it. Newlands is an affluent suburb, with higher proportions of car and home ownership than average in Glasgow. Life expectancy is above average for Glasgow, and there is a higher than average population of people aged over 75. Across the main road in Pollokshaws, the local area is much more typical of Glasgow as a whole.[17]

The congregation at St Margaret's is gathered from across the south side of Glasgow. As described above, the participants for the study were selected by the rector, in line with set criteria, in order to offer a typical mix of people who would attend on a Sunday morning:

- Ben, in his early sixties, recently retired from the military
- Cath, in her late sixties, retired from human resources
- Declan, in his early twenties, a student
- Diana, in her mid-forties, working in the third sector
- Helen, in her early seventies, retired from social care sector
- Ian, in his mid-fifties, working in social care sector
- John, in his early eighties, retired from education
- Lucy, in her early sixties, retired from the health service

All the participants' names have been changed.

During the time when I was designing and conducting the study, the congregation made a decision, led by the rector and confirmed by the congregation's annual business meeting, to release capital from the church's investments, to spend for the purpose of mission. The focus of this work was to promote social inclusion, both by developing congregational activities that were open to those living in the local area, and by developing partnerships with local

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[17] This information is taken from the Glasgow Indicators Project: Neighbourhood profiles | The Glasgow Indicators Project (understandingglasgow.com), read on 20 June 2021.

community groups who were promoting social inclusion. I was involved in developing this work, and from December 2017 I was employed by the congregation two days per week, in order to implement this work. The interviews for this study were conducted in 2016, at the beginning of this new development, and I have included reflections on how the work developed in my analysis of the data.

Chapter four – liturgy

Introduction

Introducing his book *On the Perception of Worship,* Martin Stringer explains what led him to research the experience of worshippers. He recounts two separate conversations regarding the location of meaning in liturgy: whether it is to be found in the text, in the performance of the rite, or in the experience of the worshippers. While acknowledging that this framing oversimplifies the question and that meaning is manifest in multiple ways through the liturgy, Stringer identifies that it was asking this question that prompted him to embark on his research into how worship was understood and experienced by worshippers, an area that at the time had received little research attention (Stringer 1999, 2). The question that started me on my research journey was that of how the congregation related to those around them in the neighbourhood, and to their wider social context. Nevertheless, listening to the participants describing their experience of worship prompted me to give more attention to how the worship life of the congregation related to its wider community life and local engagement. Gathering for worship is a distinctive activity of a congregation, marking it out from other groups, and listening to the participants' experience of worship gives an insight into what liturgical worship means to them, as well as allowing connections to be made between the congregation as a worshipping community and its relationship to its neighbourhood and social context.

The purpose of Christian worship is to orient the worshipper to God, it is a human response to God for all that God has done for humanity (Crichton 2009, 9). When Christians gather together to worship, there is also a communal and relational dimension, bringing together those who are worshipping together with one another as well as with God (Crichton 2009, 20).   Liturgy provides a framework that enables a group of people to gather and worship God together. It is a form of religious ritual, with a set of structured, repeated, shared practices, set aside from everyday life, serving the needs of both the individuals and the collective. There will inevitably be some element of compromise in

liturgy, as it seeks to provide forms that will allow people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse personalities and preferences, to share together in worship (Perham 2000, 3). While rituals are set apart from everyday activity, they are not separate from it: "in a ritual, the world as lived and the world imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world" (Geertz 1973, 112).

When Anglican congregations gather to worship, their liturgy is contained in the set of formal rites that shape their worship week by week, varying according to the season, as authorised by their province of the Anglican Communion. The liturgies of the majority of Anglican provinces have all been shaped by the sixteenth-century Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, particularly its seventeenth-century successors. This liturgical form is one of three characteristics that are distinctive (though not unique) to Anglican worship. The second is its corporate nature, with worship conducted in community both with those who are gathered at a particular act of worship, and with the wider church. The third is the centrality of the scriptures, which are read according to the lectionary so that the congregation regularly hears "the full sweep of biblical literature" (Avis 2016, 136). The liturgy used at St Margaret's for Sunday worship is the 1982 eucharistic liturgy of the Scottish Episcopal Church.[18]

Monro (2014, 9) asks what the markers of a good experience of worship are. She asserts that good worship, as a gift from God, is not dependent on the emotional experience of the worshippers, or on the quality of the production values or the performance, but rather on a faithful re-enactment of the story of God's redemptive relationship with God's people (Monro 2014, 11). While the divine initiative in worship is fundamental, worship is also a human activity responding to that divine initiative, and so the human experience of worship is significant, not for how good it makes people feel or how well it is delivered,[19] but for how it is transforming the worshippers into the body of Christ, individually and corporately. In this study, the responses of the participants shed light on their

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[18] https://www.scotland.anglican.org/who-we-are/publications/liturgies/scottish-liturgy-1982-alternative-eucharistic-prayers/ - appendix three sets out the form used at St Margaret's during Ordinary Time.
[19] That is not to say that these are unimportant, but rather that they are not the end of worship.

experience of worship, giving a picture of a variety of different, and at times conflicting, experiences that are taking place in the same congregation. This is in itself a contribution to congregational studies, both describing the experience and offering an opportunity to identify correspondence between the experiences of these participants and the expectations behind the liturgy. It is also significant when considering what the ongoing role of traditional congregations might be, alongside other expressions of church.

In my interviews I asked the participants to talk me through a typical Sunday morning, from when they arrived to when they left, highlighting the moments that were significant to them. This question led to a rich description of the participants' experience of liturgical worship, giving an insight into what worshippers might value in more traditional forms of worship, and in particular the Anglican liturgical style of worship. The key theme that emerged from the participants' comments in relation to the liturgy was engagement. They described their experience as active participants in the liturgy, not passive recipients. This included engagement with the words as well as sensory engagement: visual, physical, and auditory. The theme of engagement was also evident in participants descriptions of worshipping together with one another and encountering God in worship. The analysis will begin with a section that focuses on the theme of engagement more generally, and then there will follow four sections that consider the participants' comments on the four sections of the eucharistic liturgy: gathering and preparation; liturgy of the word; liturgy of the sacrament; and thanksgiving and dismissal. This is a slight variation on the standard method of IPA described in chapter three, however, I believe that it provides a better description of the participants' experiences than would be done by separating the themes entirely from the particular elements of the liturgy. Correlating the comments to the particular element of the service they are describing allows the variation of experience to be seen, as well as making it possible to compare the experience of the worshippers with what might be expected of the liturgy.

Engagement with the liturgy

The introductory notes to the Lima Liturgy of the World Council of Churches describe the enactment of the liturgy as "not a clerical solo performance but a *concert* of the whole Christian community, in which certain of its members play a special part, in accordance with their different charisms and mandates" (World Council of Churches 1982, italics original). Several participants valued the fact the active part that they played in the liturgy. Cath observed: *"I love the involvement that the congregation have. It feels like my service and I'm not being 'serviced' at".* She valued knowing the words, which allowed her to own them for herself: *"I'm basically word perfect, I know the words. That's lovely because it means I don't have to look at the [liturgy book], it comes from my head and my heart and I just love that".* For Lucy, it mattered that she understood the words: *"I like to think what I'm saying when I'm doing it".*

Liturgy consists of more than simply the words. As Allman puts it: "liturgical ritual, as religious experience, is not simply something that is spoken, rather it is something that is done" (Allman 2000, 60). Ian valued the physical participation along with the words:

> *I like the fact that there's a degree of action in it, that you do get up off your seat, that you do go forward, that you do kneel and that you're using your body and it's not just a cerebral thing where you're responding to a sermon which used to be the kind of thing I'm familiar with in the past.*

Lucy also spoke about the physical participation, observing people taking on different tasks: *"people doing things [as] part of the service".* She commented on the cross being carried in by one of the choir members, as they processed in at the beginning of the service: *"he was so stately and staid and looked as if it was really meaningful for him to do this".*

Several participants noted other aspects of sensory engagement that they valued. Cath observed: *"I think we are blessed with the music. I know it's not everyone's kind of music but it's my kind of music and I just love it".* Lucy

described how a particular musical setting of the liturgy moved her: *"I close my eyes when that's on and you're transported almost with the beauty of it"*. Lucy also observed *"the beauty of the building … and the choir and the service and even the eucharist with all that goes on there, it's visual"*. John highlighted the robes worn:

> *I think in a place like St Margaret's it's just right to have people in something other than ordinary dress taking part in things … the theatrical side of it adds immeasurably to the panoply of performance that's going on, all adds to it.*

These comments reflect Senn's description of liturgy as "a sensuous experience that involves speaking and hearing, touching and tasting, seeing and doing, motion and emotion" (Senn 2016, xi). The sensory aspects of liturgy reflect the active engagement of God with humanity throughout history and particularly in the incarnation of Christ: "our worship is rooted in God's work of creation, incarnation and redemption and so needs to be embodied and enacted in ways that engage all the senses" (International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, 2005). Pierce observes that people are often being critical of worship when they say it feels like a performance (Pierce 2013, 54). John's comment, however, does not appear to be critical. It seems rather to be indicating how the theatrical distinguishes it from the *"ordinary"*. Declan also highlighted the performative aspect of liturgy. He compared it with theatre, not in the sense of presenting a fictional story, but as a representation of a deeper truth: *"if you believe in the liturgy, if you believe in the church and you go to this 'theatre', it's still something that can affect you"*. Stancliffe suggests that it is the encounter with God, and the possibility of transformation through that encounter, that distinguishes worship from a performance before an audience (Stancliffe 2003, 103). As Declan suggests, it is an encounter through faith, with the possibility of change.

The repeated enactment allows a liturgical service to be both familiar and fresh. Diana appreciated the regular *"rhythm"* of the liturgy, while appreciating that she could *"take different things from each week … [depending if I] concentrate*

on different areas or don't concentrate on different bits". Ben described the repetition first as *"sameness"* but then corrected himself: *"sameness is the wrong word, it's the continuity"*. Stringer studied four congregations from different traditions (Roman Catholic, Baptist, Independent Evangelical, and Anglican) in order to understand how members of the congregations understood their experience of worship. He set out to find out if there was any common ground across the experience of the different styles of worship. While conducting his study he was uncertain if he would be able to identify any commonality, however, as he analysed his data, he found a common thread. What Stringer observed was that worship "works" by building memories of past experience around a repeated ritual. Each congregation had its own pattern of worship, however that pattern was structured, which provided the basis for the regular act of worship. While there was some variation, the basic pattern would be repeated week by week. This repetition would allow memories to be added over time, and these memories would be drawn together, building up the significance of the experience (Stringer 1999, 194).

Ben highlighted the distinctive Anglican character of the music: *"if you took out the Anglican music, it would be a totally different church"*. Ian valued the music but also wished it to be broader:

> *It's got a really strong musical tradition and there's a bit of me that thinks 'That's great because there's somebody protecting that tradition' but it's a narrow tradition and I'd like to see more musical diversity, other things happening musically.*

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth the place of music in liturgy. Nevertheless, these two comments highlight a potential tension between maintaining a particular traditional style of music, and the introduction of alternative styles.   That is not to say that this is a problem. Rather, it highlights the inevitability, when a group of people come together to perform a shared ritual, that there will be different views on what should be done, not just in the choice of music but throughout the liturgy: "Liturgy is, at a certain level, always about compromise, for it is about finding the forms that will enable

people to experience something satisfying collectively" (Perham 2000, 3). In navigating this tension, the starting point should be attending to the function of the particular aspect of the liturgy, in this case the music. This then makes "the celebration of the liturgy, rather than the music itself, the central issue" (Janco 2009, 53). Janco acknowledges that music in liturgy will often have a variety of functions. He demonstrates this by describing some of the functions of the entrance song, part of the introductory rite of the Roman Missal. This has a practical function, marking the beginning of the celebration and accompanying the procession of the priests into the church, it can introduce the theme of the service, and it also brings the worshipping community together as they join in singing, orienting the community to God (Janco 2009, 51). Ultimately the music, as with any aspect of the liturgy, should support the fundamental purpose of worship, which is "to be in touch with the living God" (Perham 2000, 4). The question of what style music is used remains important, but as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Indeed, Ian's comment which highlights the tension also indicated a response to this, acknowledging both the value of traditional forms and also the value of creating space for diversity.

This section has considered the general theme of engagement with the liturgy, which was significant for most participants. Different participants emphasised different sensory engagement, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements. This sensory engagement, together with the regular repetition of the liturgy, allowed participants to feel like actors in and not just observers of the liturgy. The following four sections consider in turn the four parts of the liturgy: gathering and preparation; liturgy of the word; liturgy of the sacrament; and thanksgiving and sending out.

Gathering and Preparation

Cottrell describes the purpose of the first section of the liturgy: "the point of the Gathering Rite is that we gather right, that we prepare our hearts to meet and encounter Jesus" (Cottrell 2001, 8). It is a liminal space, where people make the transition from the rest of their day-to-day lives into a time that has been set aside to worship God. At St Margaret's, the congregation are welcomed

by two volunteer stewards, who hand out a liturgy booklet and a service sheet which contains the hymns, prayers, and readings for the day. While the liturgy formally begins with the opening words of the priest, the informal time when people enter the church was noted as being significant by five participants. Lucy noted that, as the congregation arrives, *"there are people there, waiting for you and waiting to welcome you"*. Diana described it as a space to settle and separate from what was happening before: *"and then I would instantly feel relatively calm … I'm in an environment that's familiar and feels quite calm and a nice place to be compared to our quite hectic life most of the time"*. John used it as a space to prepare for worship: *"I like to read the prayer for today and I like to read the Gospel … first moments in church [are] sometimes quite deep"*.

There was a tension between the desires of those who used the time before the service to engage with one another and those who value silence and space for contemplation. Cath appreciated *"being able to have a hug with [someone] … and chat to one or two other people"*. She described this as creating a *"sense of community"* at the start of the service. Lucy felt the time before the service was *"a chance to touch base"* especially with *"elderly folk [who live] on their own"*. On the other hand, John described a frustration with *"sometimes the din with people standing and gossiping"*. Helen noted: *"I really like the silence but I appreciate for some people they like coming in and chatting"*. This highlights another aspect of compromise in corporate worship, as discussed above (at p57). Here, the compromise is in creating a space for those who wish to chat and connect with one another alongside those who wish to reflect in silence. The challenge is that both are of value, though to different people. Daw (1990, 24) discusses the significance of gathering to worship, encouraging clergy to attend to the moments before the service starts. He advises that attention should be given to creating a welcoming and hospitable environment for regular and new worshippers, while also suggesting a reverent silence before the service begins. However, he does not address the tension between two, as expressed by the comments of the participants. That is not to suggest that there is a solution to this, but rather to acknowledge that those gathering need to be understanding and accepting of one another's preferences while gathering.

In the Sunday liturgy at St Margaret's, before the opening hymn, the priest greets the people with an informal welcome and a sentence from one of the scripture readings. The clergy and choir then process in during the opening hymn, followed by the liturgical greeting, the peace, and the confession. Declan noted *"I like the fact [the priest says] 'hello' rather than going straight into the service because it's an acknowledgement, it's a breaking of the fourth wall of the whole theatre of the thing"*. He contrasted this with acts of worship where the minister *"doesn't ever really acknowledge the fact that there's a congregation in front of him, it seems that they're just going through the motions, it feels like a rehearsed piece of theatre"*. As discussed above (at p56), the theatrical aspect of liturgy can mark it as something distinct from the ordinary. Nevertheless, as Declan observes, it is also related to the ordinary, and this action acknowledges the relationship between the priest and the congregation, and their shared participation in the act of worship that is about to take place.

Ian valued the sharing of the peace:

> *I'm not a tactile person and I find the peace really awkward … but … I take it seriously. At that point in the service if I'm bearing a grudge against somebody, it doesn't have to be in the church but anybody, I need to think about it at least at that point and try to address it and let it go. That's a great discipline.*

Tellini (1995, 80) makes a connection between sharing the peace and Jesus's words in Matthew 5:23-24 (NRSV):

> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

In the context of the eucharistic liturgy, Tellini observes that the gifts of bread and wine, and the financial offering, are offered together with "ourselves, a single, holy, living sacrifice". Before we offer ourselves to God, we should be

reconciled to one another. This also emphasises the communal nature of the eucharist. Christians gather to receive the Body of Christ and also to become the Body of Christ. Sharing the peace, as an act of unity and reconciliation, is an enactment of that (Tellini 1995, 81). This function of the peace is echoed in Cath's comments about the informal greetings before the start of the service, helping to create a *"sense of community"*. Radcliffe makes the point that in sharing the peace we are "not so much making peace as accepting the gift of Christ's peace" (2008, 163).

The peace is followed by the collect for purity and the confession of sin. Ian related the peace to the value of the confession:

> *We fall, we stumble, we get a lot wrong and then you get up and you try again and again. That's what life's about. There's something about the service which I think recognises that – each week you confess before other fellow members of the congregation and before God your shortcomings and then you try again. I quite like the fact that that's in some way captured in the ritual.*

Again, this resonates with the words of Jesus about being reconciled to one another when approaching worship. Radcliffe describes the value of bringing our own stories into the story of God, not in order to be shamed, but to be assured of our forgiveness "in order to take up the journey again" (Radcliffe 2008, 21). Ian's comment highlights that the confession is a communal act: *"you confess before other fellow members of the congregation and before God"*. The act of confession acknowledges the other as well as the self and God; we confess to one another as well as to God, and we are reconciled to one another also. Van Ommen picks up on the fact that in the confession, while it offers words of assurance of our forgiveness by God, there are no words or actions that mark our reconciliation with one another (van Ommen 2019, 62). Ian's comments on the peace demonstrate how he uses this element of the service to achieve that end.

These elements of the liturgy mark a transition from whatever has been happening before, into a time of worship. Participants described differing journeys into this space, and differing needs in order to settle into the time of

worship. It can be challenging to hold these differing needs together, but it is a necessary time in order for the gathered worshippers to come together as a community, not just a gathered group of individual worshippers.

Liturgy of the word

The liturgy of the word is the most variable part of the liturgy, with most elements being different week by week. The first part of the liturgy of the word is concerned with proclamation, with readings from Scripture followed by the sermon or homily.[20]   The second part is the response of the congregation, in the creed and the intercessions (Zimmermann 2000, 26). While the focus here is on the word, the context is a worship service, and so the purpose is to enable the congregation to encounter God through the word (Stevenson and Wright 2008, 13).

While the readings are essential elements of the service, it was the sermon, an optional part, that received comment from all participants, the only element of the service to do so. The comments were varied, reflecting different expectations from the sermon, again highlighting the compromise that is an essential element of corporate worship. John commented that he: *"particularly like[d] the sermon because that's what takes you out of the measured thing that's there every Sunday"*. Ben thought the sermon was often *"too long"*, while Lucy was concerned when she first came to St Margaret's because *"we didn't get the fifty minute sermon … and I thought is this okay?"* though she later commented she is now comfortable with shorter sermons. Lucy appreciated the variety of the three regular preachers: *"all very different people, all very different ways of doing things and different ways of putting things over"*. Diana commented on the summer services when members of the congregation sometimes give the sermon: *"it was really lovely to hear the congregation's perspective on the theme of the service"*. Helen valued *"the liturgy of the set readings … you're focused on the readings and the short homily on the readings which I think is helpful"*. Ian wryly observed that with

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[20] At St Margaret's the readings are taken from the Revised Common Lectionary. On a Sunday morning there is generally a reading from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Gospel. The set psalm is generally not read.

the *"liturgical form of worship ... even if you've got a duff preacher, you've still got a service"*.

Lathrop considers that preaching in the context of a eucharistic service is itself sacramental. He suggests that that in preaching, "the word of God ... comes like a life-giving meal" (Lathrop 2015, 648) offering in another way that which the sacramental meal will offer. Stevenson and Wright suggest that preaching can have a prophetic element, in that the preacher is seeking to open up God's word "for *this* sermon at *this* time, in *this* place and for *these* people" (Stevenson and Wright 2008, 109, italics original). Craddock (2010, 37) observes that preaching generally takes place within a pastoral context. The preacher is often the pastor of the congregation to whom she is preaching, and she should be attending to the congregation as well as to the text in her preparation. Craddock acknowledges the tension that may emerge for the preacher in seeking to be faithful to the text while remaining sensitive to the needs of the congregation. Lucy noted the variety of preachers at St Margaret's, which allows for a variety of style. Different preachers will bring different knowledge and experience as they approach the text, as well as being aware of differing matters within the congregation. Declan observed that the congregation may have heard biblical stories many times: *"they have their comfortable feel of what the traditional interpretations are ... [The preachers] acknowledge these and often offer an alternative interpretation of that which I find very refreshing"*.

The sermon is, as John observed, an element of the service that varies week by week. While the beginning and end of the service formally mark the transition into and out of the worship space, at this point the sermon may use the readings to make connections for the congregation between what is happening in this worship space, and what is happening in their lives and in the world around them. Williams describes preaching as "the annunciation of a change ... change is possible: Jesus Christ makes it so" (Williams 2001, 45). Cath said:

> *I may not always agree, I may struggle, and there are times [a sermon] had me in tears and I've thought 'what is it you've said that's done that?'*

> *… I love the sermon because it makes me, sometimes it makes me very uncomfortable, sometimes it makes me realise how very far short I've fallen and that's never comfortable, is it?*

She later noted both the challenge and the encouragement she has received through sermons, receiving from God: *"a wee 'Come on sweetheart, you can do better than that'. Or sometimes 'Good on you, that was tough, you got through that but that was tough'"*.

Ian valued that the sermon offered a different way of looking at the world:

> *once a week someone [is] getting up in a pulpit and giving you a version, a story, about what life's about which is absolutely counter cultural. Where else does that happen? What other institutions or organisations have got that kind of space to do that kind of thing?   That I think is really valuable, the fact that there's another story to be told that isn't just the taken for granted assumptions that most folk are living with.*

Volf suggests that for Christians to be counter cultural is not to suggest that they are outsiders living in a different culture, but rather that they are insiders that have been transformed, and in turn seek to reshape the culture around them, in order to align to God's values (Volf 1994, 19). The sermon then can offer both a vision of how people's own lives can be transformed and a vision of how society could be different, which in turn can inspire the hearers to work for the transformation of society. Perham (2000, 8) notes that worship should not be about escaping from the world around but should respond to the context out of which worshippers are coming. Declan made this point in relation to the intercessions: *"prayers [are] organised by members of St Margaret's talking about specifics of things that are going on at the moment in the world, massively important part of the ceremony"*. Davie, in her concept of vicarious religion, makes the claim that churches are conducting their religious activities on behalf of, and with the implicit approval of, a wider population who do not attend church. I suggested in chapter two that this was in tension with her acknowledgement that attendance at church had become a voluntary matter (at p21). Nevertheless, the comments here suggest that the worship service is not

disconnected from the rest of the world, but that it encourages worshippers to see the world differently through the sermon, and to intercede on behalf of the world, and, as will be seen in chapter six, to act to bring about change in the world. In this way, the church can be seen to enact a form of vicarious religion, through both its worship and its service on behalf of the population, if not with their implicit approval.

Three participants commented on how the act of saying the Nicene Creed expresses their faith. The creed has had a place in the eucharistic liturgy from the sixth century. However, while the doctrinal content of the creed has received significant attention, there has been comparatively little discussion of its liturgical function (Chapman 2005, 213). Diana described how the decision to say the creed was part of her *"journey with the church"*. She was involved in church choirs as a student, but she never joined in saying the words of the creed:

> *It wasn't that I was an atheist or anything, I just didn't know, and I didn't want to say things I didn't believe in … Now I'm in church and I say the creed. It still slightly goes through my mind 'should I be saying these words, I don't know exactly what bits I believe in and what I feel' but I feel I can just much more easily immerse myself in whatever it is and that's okay.*

Chapman, drawing on the work of the nineteenth century Anglican theologian F. D. Maurice, proposes that the function of the creed within the liturgy is not a propositional statement of faith but an assertion of trust in the name of God, a statement of shared identity conferred to Christians in baptism. It is said by the whole congregation, offering a unifying statement beyond theological factionalism, with all those gathered belonging not to one part of the church, but to the whole church. Therefore, the speaker is not asserting their commitment to the facts stated, so much as to the name of God, affirming as Maurice says: "belief in a name, and not in notions" (quoted in Chapman 2005, 216). This proposition is reflected in the way Diana describes her experience of

beginning to say the creed, not as a mark of fully understanding all the statements, but as a mark of belonging within the congregation.

Nevertheless, Chapman acknowledges the tension between Maurice's position and that which holds the creed to be a test of doctrinal orthodoxy, requiring understanding and assent (Chapman 2005, 221). Two participants spoke of the significance of understanding and assenting to the words of the Creed. Declan stated he would choose what parts to say: *"there are certain things that, depending on what mood I'm in or whatever, I'll keep my mouth shut in order to make sure I'm not saying anything that's a falsehood"*. Lucy said she always adds in the *filioque* clause, which is not included in the SEC liturgy.

> *I always say the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, I like that bit because Jesus said I will send the Comforter so I always mutter that bit under my breath, I don't think it's heretical. I hope not!*

These two perspectives on the function of the Creed could be seen as complementary rather than contradictory, with the Creed serving as both an articulation of the core orthodox teachings of the faith, and also as an affirmation of the speakers' commitment to this faith. This acknowledges that for many worshippers their faith is as much about belonging as believing.

The participants' experiences of this section of the liturgy emphasises the importance of the words of the liturgy. The words in this section of the liturgy are the most variable, and the participants attended to these words, particularly the words of the preacher, expounding the scripture readings for them, which provided a contact with life beyond the worship service, both in the individuals own lives and with the wider world. Nevertheless, the description of some participants' experience with the creed also illustrates the attention they gave to the meaning of the repeated elements of the liturgy.

Liturgy of the Sacrament

The classic Anglican definition of a sacrament, as given in the Book of Common Prayer, is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof" (cited in Wainwright 2011, 345). In the eucharist, the sign is the bread and wine, and the grace is that that we have received through the death and resurrection of Christ. The eucharist was commented on by all but one of the participants. For Helen the eucharist was both the *"centrality"* and the *"undergirding"* of the liturgy. John and Cath both emphasised the element of communion with Christ. Cath recalled her first visit to St Margaret's: *"when it came to communion [the priest] said 'everyone who believes in Christ is welcome to the table, the invitation does not come from me' and I thought 'this is where I need to be'"*. John commented: *"I'm a great person for visualising things and almost having Jesus there at the altar with [the priest and servers]"*. Cath's and John's comments speak to the presence of Christ at the table, in Cath's comment as the host welcoming the worshippers, and in John's comment as a presence at the table.

Several participants drew out the element of communion with one another. Ian said: *"For me, I feel that, at that table, everybody's equal and there's a communism to it which kind of appeals to my left wing leanings. There's a political element to that act which is important for me"*. Bishop Lindsay Urwin describes the eucharist as a great leveller: "from the least to the greatest, we all receive the same" (Urwin 2008, 40). This is not implying a uniformity of experience. Ian himself went on to describe as *"touching"* the variety of people making the *"journey up to the altar rail"* with *"folk getting older and struggling with those stairs [while] the wee ones used to absolutely throw themselves off the steps"*. John spoke of how he reflected on people who were significant to him, in the moments leading up to communion:

> *I tend to think of not only present family and friends and anybody who's not well but I think of people who have gone, people who have gone off to heaven or whatever ... I like to sit and think and contemplate about*

them and particularly when the bread and wine is blessed and when the
communion service is ready for us to go out.

Diana spoke of how her family share communion together:

I guess as a family we get very few moments in our life when we share
something that doesn't have any other kind of agenda or need or pressing
timetable or any of these things and it's a time of reflection when we all
share exactly the same thing … for the children they can discover in their
own rights what it might mean to them.

Both of these experiences identify the eucharist as a reflective space, perhaps in contrast to the wordier elements of the liturgy that have gone before. They also speak of the shared nature of the eucharist, not simply something that is done together, but something that brings together the people who share it. Ian also valued the connection with other worshippers in other places:

I like the idea that there's a ritual that's being performed here where
there will be millions of people doing this across the world. There's
something quite special about that, that you're joining in something
that's being repeated millions of different places everywhere.

The eucharist, then, serves to connect the worshippers on multiple levels: with Christ; with those gathered; with family and friends, living and dead; and with all Christians who are celebrating the eucharist across the world.

While the Anglican tradition contains a range of understandings regarding the sacrament of the eucharist, from Anglo-Catholic to evangelical (Allan 2015, 284), it was the communion aspect of the eucharist that the participants spoke about. The fact that participants did not bring out other aspects of the significance of the eucharist does not imply that other aspects were not significant to the participants, only that the other aspects were not what came to mind during the

context of the interview.[21] What may be inferred is that, for these participants, the communion element of the eucharist is significant: communion with those gathered, with family and friends elsewhere, with the wider Church, and with Christ. This understanding has its roots in early church teachings, emphasised by Augustine: "In no religion, whether true or false, can people be held together in association, unless they are gathered together with some common share in some visible signs or sacraments" (cited in McGrath 2011, 409). It was also emphasised by the reformers, as Luther said: "To receive this sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and union with Christ and all the saints" (cited in McGrath 2011, 409).

Helen did make one comment that alluded to another understanding of the eucharist. She spoke about the eucharist as *"coming to the table and sharing breaking the bread in a different way"*. She explicitly connected this to her social practice of inviting people into her home to share meals, but the language of food speaks of nourishment as well as community. Likewise, both John and Cath spoke of the presence of Christ at the table as the host. This has resonance with Calvin's view of the real presence of Christ at the table, not in transubstantiated bread and wine, but by the Spirit, drawing those gathered at the table into the presence of the risen Christ in heaven (Allen 2015, 292). It would have been valuable to go back to the participants, either individually or in a group, to ask them to speak further on their understanding of the eucharist, to find out whether it had other significance for them, such as the spiritual nourishment hinted at in Helen's comment, or to further draw out their understanding of the presence of Christ at the table, as referenced by John and Cath. This is a recognised practice in an IPA study (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 52) and it would also help to make the study more of a conversation between the researcher and the participants, giving a clearer voice to the ordinary theology of the participants. By the time it became apparent that this second stage would be valuable, there was not sufficient time left to integrate it

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[21] In noticing this, it is worth reflecting that the focus of my research was related to ideas of community, something of which the participants were aware, and this may have contributed to the focus on the communion aspect of the Eucharist.

into the study, but were I conducting a similar study in the future I would consider doing so.

Thanksgiving and sending out

The SEC liturgy closes with a prayer of thanksgiving, a blessing, and words to send the worshippers out. This final section of the liturgy marks the end of the time of the worship, and also the transition back to the rest of life. Declan described the end of the service as *"the notices, blessing and go away"*. Cath highlighted the different feelings that can be present at the end of the service. On the one hand she said: *"I like coffee at the end as well because it's that bit about community"*. On the other hand, sometimes she takes time to herself in the side chapel: *"sometimes I think I need peace and quietness, I just need a bit of space and a bit of peace and I want it to be in church"*. Declan noted that the dismissal happened, and Cath spoke about informal activities after the service, but other than these, there is no mention of the dismissal. That is not to say that participants are not making any connection between the liturgy and the rest of their lives. For example, Diana spoke about *"tak[ing] different things each week"* from the service. Ian noted that he uses the Peace to try to address, and let go, any grudges he is holding against anyone. Declan highlighted how the intercessions acknowledge *"specifics of things that are going on at the moment in the world"*. Nevertheless, while the point of transition into worship received attention from several participants, the point of moving from the worship space back out to the world was not discussed by any of the participants.

Fenwick and Spinks describe the relationship between worship and social involvement: "True worship and sacramental participation should restore humanity to its true status in Christ, and this should have a visible outworking in society" (Fenwick and Spinks 1995, 10). They describe worship as the central activity, with all other activity flowing from this. Volf says: "Christian worship consists both in obedient service to God and in the joyful praise of God" (Volf 1993, 207). He highlights the connection between the sacrifices of praise and of good works in Hebrews 13:15-16 (NRSV):

> Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

That is not to say that social involvement was not significant to participants, indeed, precisely the opposite is true. However, they did not make an explicit link between the worship service and social involvement. If one purpose of the liturgy is to prepare the congregation to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord" then perhaps that movement should be made more explicit by those leading the liturgy.

Conclusion

Liturgical theology has generally been concerned with the historical study of the development of liturgical traditions and with the meaning contained in the rites and symbols of liturgy (Lathrop 1993, 6). There remains little in the way of research into the experience of those participating in liturgical worship, and so this chapter offers both observations on the experience of the participants, and also a model for researching the experience of worship.

The first observation is that the liturgy can function to form the faith of both the individual and the community. Ian's example of using the peace to let go of any grudges he has, and Cath's example of how the sermon can connect directly with her life, both suggest that the participant can been changed somehow from having taken part in an act of worship. The liturgy can also help people find their place within the community. This was reflected in Cath's observation that, by participating, *"It feels like my service",* and is also alluded to in Diana's comments about the creed. The act of saying the words enables the speaker to feel engaged, to have a place within the worshipping community, and the fact that there is a set form of words allows the speaker to hold any questions or uncertainties, while still belonging. The sense of belonging goes two ways; on the one hand the participant can find their place in the worshipping community, on the other hand the shared worship connects them with others who are worshipping. This can be seen in Diana's description of sharing communion with her family, and also Ian's identification with all those who are worshipping

across the world. This sense of forming the community was expressed in the act of the eucharist, with most participants describing this in terms of their communion with one another or with Christ.

The second observation is that participants engaged with the liturgy, not as passive recipients but consciously as actors, and engaging with different senses. A significant part of this engagement came with the words, both the repeated words and those that changed week by week. This engagement with the repeated words of the liturgy came out in Diana and Declan's discussion of the Creed, albeit in contrasting ways, with Declan making choices about what to say depending on what he believed, and Diana choosing to say words despite her uncertainty. The words that varied, notably in the sermon and the intercessions, served as a point of connection between the act of worship and the rest of life. Alongside the words participants valued the other sensory aspects, including music, aesthetics, and physical action, all of which engaged worshippers in different ways. This suggests one answer to the question posed by Bayes and Sledge, that is how can passive observers at worship become active participants (at p16). Using liturgical forms, with their repetitive rhythms and sensory engagement, can draw worshippers into the experience of worship.

The third observation is that participants may not always recognise the significance that is intended by those designing the liturgy. For example, the sending out, the element of the service that functions as a connection between the act of worship and their ongoing daily life, only received one brief mention. Participants made connections between the act of worship and the rest of their lives, but not when talking about this point in the service. This observation is more speculative than the first two, as it is based on what participants did not say, and a study that included a follow up interview with participants could have given the opportunity to explore such points. By attending closely to what is not said, as well as what is said, the researcher could shape questions for further discussion with the participants, and so the research becomes more of a dialogue, and can give more space to the ordinary theology of the participants.

Introduction

As I was reading and re-reading my interviews, one question began to emerge, that is, what makes a congregation a community? This emerged as a distinct theme across the interviews, the ways that participants experienced community within the life of the congregation. There was a difference in the participants' experience of St Margaret's, with some participants experiencing more of a feeling of community than others. Two particular comments provide bookends to this range of experience:

> *Support. Love. And I go back to this terribly overused word of community. I think that's what the congregation offer.* (Cath)

> *It doesn't feel to me like being part of a community though, to be honest, as a church.* (Ian)

Alongside the general theme of congregation as community, I have also identified two distinct subthemes. The first is around how people are involved in helping to organise the activities that take place in St Margaret's, which raises the question of how patterns of volunteering relate to a sense community in a congregation. The second is around some of the participants' description of their faith journey, picking up particularly of the shared discipleship within the congregation.

What makes a congregation a community?

Chapter two (at p25) discussed the concept of social capital, described by Robert Putnam the social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness within these networks, that arise from connections between individuals (Putnam 2000, 19). Putnam made a distinction between bonding social capital, which promotes solidarity and trust within a particular group, and bridging social capital, which creates connections and opportunities between different groups. Granovetter framed the difference between these two types

of relationships as "weak ties" or acquaintance relationships, and "strong ties" of friendships. While strong ties build trust within a small group, weak ties provide links that help to create a sense of community between small groups, and help to develop a sense of connectedness on a wider scale (Granovetter 1973, 1373).

The language used to describe acquaintance relationships – "weak ties" – might initially be taken to imply a lesser status in relation to strong ties. However, that is not the case. Granovetter emphasised the cohesive power of weak ties, which offer greater information and opportunities than strong ties alone. He demonstrated this through a study of workers who had recently found a new job through a personal contact. The contact was more likely to be an acquaintance than a close friend, as acquaintances were likely to have access to different information than that available to friends. Sandstrom and Dunn identified that weak tie interactions can promote a sense of subjective wellbeing and belonging. The experience of being recognised and acknowledged by another, with whom one has an acquaintanceship showed evidence of contributing to individual perceptions of wellbeing. On days when people had more weak tie interactions than usual, they reported greater feelings of belonging (Sandstrom and Dunn 2014, 919). Weak ties can therefore offer relational as well as instrumental benefits. Both strong and weak ties, then, have a part to play in creating social capital, within groups and between groups.

Cath described the congregation as diverse:

> *It's a group of people who come from very different backgrounds, very different religious backgrounds, I think very different financial backgrounds, different educational backgrounds who come to church on a Sunday and manage to shuckle in together and become community when they come to church.*

Helen also noted this: *"that's the exciting thing about the church, you get people with such different backgrounds"*. Ian offered a contrasting view, describing St Margaret's as *"very middle class … and quite mono-cultural"*. The tendency of people to associate with others who are like themselves is described

as "homophily". This can be either "baseline" homophily, that is, a similarity that is broadly similar to the wider population in the neighbourhood, or "inbreeding" homophily, that is, when people consciously or unconsciously associate more with people like them (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001, 419). The congregation is demographically typical of its immediate neighbourhood. However, it is not typical of Glasgow as a whole. Diana observed that it "chimes well" with parts of the south side of Glasgow. It would seem that people gather at St Margaret's from parts of south Glasgow that are demographically similar to the neighbourhood of the congregation, establishing a baseline homophily. However, the personalities and life experiences of members of the congregation are diverse as Cath observes, even if the socio-demographic profile is similar. While congregations may bring together people who are alike in relation to the practice of their faith, they will generally have multiple other diverse social connections beyond the congregation, bringing a measure of diversity to the congregation.

Three participants highlighted the importance of the welcome on a Sunday morning. Ben and Lucy both observed this from their own experience: *"it is genuinely very noticeable, right from the first time I came, how very welcoming people were"* (Ben); *"I found everything and everyone welcoming"* (Lucy). Diana described this as a particular attribute of St Margaret's: *"I think one of St Margaret's strengths is that we make everybody who comes through the door feel very welcome and, in fact, we give particular attention and care to people who we think have maybe come who might not feel that they're the same or whatever"*. These comments resonate with the comments made by Cath and Lucy in chapter four (at p59) regarding the use of the informal time before the service to *"touch base", "have a hug … and chat"* with people, enacting the welcome.

Diana remarked that St Margaret's considers itself a welcoming congregation, however, this is something that no congregation should take for granted. Aisthorpe highlights the strong foundation in the scriptures for welcome and hospitality, particularly to the stranger: "at a time when 'hospitality' is an 'industry' and fear of strangers is often encouraged, [the] scriptures pronounce

a prophetic word: love the outsider, the stranger" (Aisthorpe 2016, 87). Nevertheless, he acknowledges on the basis of his own and other studies, that a significant minority of those who leave congregations do so at least in part because they do not feel welcome. Different life situations or personality types can affect how welcomed one feels in a particular congregation. As Christians, we are both united in Christ, and diverse members of the body of Christ. While this is primarily taken to mean the different gifts that people bring, it is also helpful when considering the different ways people may experience the congregation. Diana's comment about giving *"particular attention and care"* to anyone who might feel in any way different or not welcome in the congregation should be a guiding principle.

The congregation of St Margaret's is itself is a social network in which a variety of activities take place: faith focussed activities (including, but also other than, the Sunday service); social activities primarily for the congregation; activities organised by the congregation and open to anyone; and activities organised by other groups, using the church building as a venue. When asked about aspects of the congregation and its life that were significant, all participants spoke about activities in at least one of the first three categories. Lucy mentioned the Tuesday morning eucharist, and the study groups that take place at different times of the year: *"these are all places where we can sort of get to know other members just a wee bit better, a wee bit deeper and see where folk are coming from"*. Ben appreciated *"fun things"* such as the church picnic: *"off to Troon, bring your own sandwiches and then all have an absolute giggle as we walk up and down the beach"*. John valued the monthly classical music concerts, which are run by the church and attended by a mixture of church members and local residents: *"[the organiser made] sure we got tickets for these things if we wanted them"*. Helen also spoke about informal social activities, inviting people round for meals: *"I … had people round for lunch because it's a very simple thing, but people do value sitting round a common table and it's not anything fancy … just people being together"*. The participants picked out different activities, but they all commented on the relational aspects of these activities, as opportunities to be together, to get to know one another better, and have fun. This suggests that, while the faith community brings the congregation

members together, the relationships established with other members of the congregation are, for these participants at least, also significant. The significance of relationships was also mentioned by participants in the context of the Sunday service. As noted in chapter four (at p59), some participants noted the value of the informal chat before the service when people were gathering, and again over coffee after the service.

It appears from the participants that the congregation is a place where people value establishing relationships of varying significance and depth. It is not possible from the participants' interviews to analyse the strength of particular ties, however, three comments demonstrate the different levels of belonging experienced by members of the congregation. Lucy identified *"the word that keeps coming to me about St Margaret's, I'm home"*. Ian described St Margaret's as *"not a huge part of my life socially, although it is part of it"* noting that *"if it wasn't there I would certainly miss it"*. Diana described a distinction between her experience relationships in the congregation from those in other areas of life:

> *I think there's that feeling of belonging to a group of people who would have your back if you were in trouble and without judgement. So it's a group of people you don't, in a sense, owe anything to because they're not necessarily your best friends and expecting all the kinds of things that friends and family might expect from you. They're not work colleagues so there's not that agenda.*

Lucy's comment implied that St Margaret's was central to her life, while both Ian and Diana identified a significance in relationships that were not their closest relationships. Nevertheless, even the less close relationships provided an important function in their lives, both providing social connections, and offering support (*"have your back"*) when needed. Diana noted the emotional space could also be valuable, as the relationships were not necessarily as intense as close family and friends nor transactional as may be in the workplace.

"Dunbar's layers" offers a nuanced model for looking at the ties of friendship and relationship. Using data from studies of social networks, this describes

nested layers of friendship and acquaintance. The most well-known aspect of this is "Dunbar's number" which is 150, estimated to be the full active network of friends that the human brain is typically capable of maintaining. This includes friends that someone makes an effort to contact at least once a year. Within this is a layer of friends, the affinity group, consisting of 30-50 people that someone socialises with more frequently. The third layer is often known as the sympathy group, 12-20 close friends that someone would look to for support at times of need. Finally the closest layer, 3-5 best friends, is known as the support clique, those that someone will turn to at times of distress. Beyond the 150 there are around 500 acquaintances that a person knows but makes no effort to maintain the relationship (Zhou et al, 2005, 440).

The data from the interviews is not sufficient to analyse the level of relationships in the congregation, however, participants' comments do suggest there may be relationships that fall within these different layers. The welcome to the Sunday service, and the informal chat before and after the service, could include acquaintances. Ian's description of St Margaret's as a peripheral but significant part of his social life may relate to relationships in the affinity or full active network, while Diana's description of the support network may relate to the sympathy or affinity group. Lucy valued the social spaces for creating the opportunity to get to know one another better, suggesting that relationships may move within these layers, given the opportunity. Using Granovetter's terminology, the congregation is a place of both weak and strong ties, both of which offer benefits to members of the congregation.

Ellison et al. explore how congregations create opportunities for developing support networks. Their study used data from the US National Congregational Survey to study congregation members' perception of their congregation as a source of support. They found that members of congregations which offered informal spaces for interaction before or after the service tended to be more likely to perceive their congregation as a source of support, with such spaces "permit[ing] members to exchange greetings, inquire about the well-being of others, and renew their acquaintances on a regular basis" (Ellison et al. 2009, 12). The research also noted that negative interactions in the congregation

reduced the feeling of support. The findings of this study corresponds with the descriptions by the participants of the value they give to relationships in the congregation. These relationships may be at different levels of intensity, but both the stronger and weaker ties have a value in creating a sense of belonging in a larger group, offering social opportunities, and offering support structures, and can contribute to overall wellbeing. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term "the third place" to describe somewhere that is not home (the first place) or work (the second place) but one of "a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg 1999, 16). The congregation can function as a third space, a place that enables people to come together outside of the sphere of work or family life, and interact within a predictable and hospitable space.

One notable finding by Ellison et al., was that the sense of support in the congregation was inversely related to age, with older people less likely to view the congregation as a place of support. Church congregations are typically older than the general population. Older people are more likely to experience a certain risk factors for becoming lonely, for example, bereavement, or the onset of illness or disability. They often live at a distance from family members (Griffin 2010, 16). Congregations may be meeting a social need for these older members, offering a place of low key, structured, social engagement, which is being used by a population that is at risk of social isolation. Nevertheless, if older people are less likely to view the congregation as a place of support they may be less likely to access support available, both formal and informal. This highlights a need for congregations to attend to the engagement of older people within activities and make explicit the availability of support.

Three participants highlighted gaps they perceived in the activities. In some cases, these related to what was on offer for particular demographic groups. For example, Diana noted that while the activities were *"great"* for younger children, there was *"something missing"* for teenagers. In other cases the comments related to the type of activity. Helen *"would have liked to have a house group"*. Ben felt that congregational activities were happening less often

since he had been a member of the congregation. He spoke about *"a potential I think to get to know people far better"*. However, he felt this required co-ordination, and it *"shouldn't necessarily be assumed that it will be members of the congregation doing that."* He also noted that, in relation to the welcome in the church, there is *"an energy that needs to be retained and developed"* which requires *"more thought and leadership from the clergy"*. Three participants spoke of shortcomings they had observed in relation to community building. Cath said: *"The difficulty is, one of our problems is that we don't get to know people as an individual"*. Helen spoke about the difficulty of feeling *"quite peripheral"* due to traveling and being away a lot. Lucy observed *"undertones"* where certain people don't like others *"and make that known, but quite subtly … that upsets me a bit"*.

These perceived gaps and shortcomings underline the need actively and consciously to create space for, and support the development of, relationships. As identified by Ellison et al. (2009), the existence of these spaces helps create a culture that supports a feeling of belonging. If there are gaps in the provision, such as for young people, this may unintentionally signal that these groups are not so welcome. While members of the congregation may recognise the value of such spaces, it appears they look to the leadership for support and validation to make these happen. In the time since the interviews were conducted, St Margaret's has begun to develop more regular activities outwith the Sunday service. These include a knit and natter group that meet on a weekday morning in the church; and a pub philosophy group, meeting in a local pub on a weekday evening; and a toddlers music group meeting weekly in the church hall. All these groups are led by members of the congregation, supported by the clergy. This suggests that it is important for clergy and church leadership teams to recognise the value of a variety of spaces for nurturing social engagement and to consider how they can be created and supported in their congregation. They do not need to be led by the church leaders, but it is important that the church leaders acknowledge and support the groups, as this contributes to the culture of belonging.

Ian's more critical assessment of the church as community stood out from the other contributions. Ian acknowledged that he has often had *"a kind of uneasy relationship with churches"*. He contrasted St Margaret's with a particular experience in another church:

> *there was something about being part of that place, there was a sense of community … very involved in its local community, it was doing loads of stuff. I felt part of that and I was very involved in it and doing all kinds of things in it. I don't feel that way about St Margaret's to be honest, it's not that kind of experience.*

He acknowledged that for him, faith and church are two distinct things. *"There's some people for whom church is all their life and I can't imagine that"*. He concluded that St Margaret's was:

> *good enough … there's never anywhere that's perfect … And yet that's okay, that's okay, I can have a relationship with the church and not feel it's going to meet all my needs and if it doesn't then I know that. That's not a reason for leaving.*

Ian's comments seem to highlight a distinction between a congregation as a community in itself, and a congregation being "involved" in a local geographical community. Ian's more positive experience of congregation as community involved a practical engagement with the wider community, *"doing"* lots of activity, which contrasts with St Margaret's which does not engage widely in its neighbourhood. While local residents make use of the church hall for activities, this is a transactional relationship. As Ian observed, *"you've got the church hall being used for various activities … they literally use the hall but there's no connection with the church in any way that grows out of that"*. Alongside the categories of "strong" and "weak" ties, Granovetter suggested a third category, that of "absent ties" (Granovetter 1973, 1361). This describes social contacts where the relationship is negligible, for example, a neighbour that one might smile at if you pass them in the street, but would have no further interaction with them. This would seem to describe well the relationship that Ian is observing, that is, the congregation and community groups both use the church

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building, but there is no significant interaction between the different groups. Granovetter suggested that for trust to develop across groups in a particular neighbourhood, there need to be weak ties connecting the groups (1973, 1374). While Ian identified this as a critique of the congregation as a community, he was not alone in identifying this lack of engagement between the congregation and the neighbourhood as a concern, which will be discussed in chapter six.

Volunteering in the congregation

Within St Margaret's, there are numerous voluntary roles and tasks that are carried out by members of the congregation. These can be divided into those involved with Sunday worship (e.g. stewarding, singing with the choir, serving at communion, serving coffee after the service), those involved with other activities during the week (e.g. organising the monthly classical music concerts, or fair trade coffee mornings), and those involved in the maintenance of the organisation (e.g. vestry members, assisting with building or garden maintenance). Congregation members are also involved in volunteering with other organisations unconnected with the congregation, both in the city and supporting development work overseas. Cnaan and Curtis observed that congregations generally rely heavily on the work of volunteers for the operation of the organisation. They also noted that the users, the volunteers, and the leaders of the congregation have significant overlap (Cnaan and Curtis 2013, 22). This is the case in St Margaret's. All the volunteers are drawn from those who attend the congregation, and the church is led by the vestry which operates as the management committee, all members apart from the Rector being volunteers. Of the three priests who lead the worship, two are non-stipendiary volunteers.

Three participants spoke about their involvement in volunteer activity in the congregation. Cath said *"I'm up for whatever … I feel I can contribute … while I can and while I'm fit and able"*. She gave the caveat that *"I no longer just say 'yes' and get irritated because I don't really want to do it so I now feel more able to say I think that's something I can do and yes, I'd like to do it"*. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that there were some tasks that simply had to

be done: *"I hate counting money, but you do it because that's what you need to do"*. Diana spoke about the difficulty for her when, for a time, she was volunteering in a role that was similar to her work role:

> *It meant that there was a point where the church felt less of a refuge for me and more of something that I should have done. It's finding the right balance of being part of a community where you exercise the roles that you can usefully do but not be taken over by it.*

Helen observed *"I would happily support anything I agreed with when I'm here, but I think I've lost the fire in terms of being the first on the barricade"*. She also spoke of the challenge of commitment: *"you don't want to be caught into the 'oughteries', caught up with the doing rather than the being"*. Cath summed this up as *"not expecting people to do more than they want to but making it an opportunity that they can"*.

These comments shed light on participants' motivation to take on responsibility for doing tasks within the congregation. All three wanted to offer both their time and talents to the congregation. This suggests that volunteering to help make the activities happen can supports a sense of contributing to the life of the congregation, and so contribute to the sense of community. This recalls the comments in chapter four on the significance of participating in the liturgy (at p55). It mattered to the participants that they were not simply passive observers of the worship service, but active participants. Likewise, they wanted to play their part in the running of the congregation. Nevertheless, all three participants expressed caveats. Helen's word *"oughteries"* sums these up well. None of them wanted to end up volunteering out of a sense of duty and so becoming overwhelmed or tired out by the activity. They wanted to contribute in a way that is useful for the congregation, bringing the particular skills that they have, while keeping themselves healthy and not being *"taken over"* by their volunteering activities.

Cameron identifies the field of organisational studies, particularly that which relates to voluntary sector organisations, as being useful to those studying congregations (Cameron 2004, 141). Cameron reviewed two studies of

congregations where volunteer activities were carried out both by members of the congregation and by others who lived in the neighbourhood but were not members of the congregation. She noted several differences in motivation between members and non-members (albeit differences of degree rather than clear-cut differences). Members were less likely to make a distinction between their public and private roles, with the congregation being the site of personal as well as organisational relationships (Cameron 1999, 57). They were more likely to have a commitment to the organisation as a whole, seeing their actions as building up an organisation from which they themselves received a benefit. Nevertheless, this led some members to be at risk of over-committing and so becoming burnt out (Cameron 1999, 56). This reflects the experiences described by the participants in my study, who wanted to play their part in the congregation but did not want to be overwhelmed. Wolfer et al. in their study of volunteers in Protestant congregations in the USA, found that volunteering had a measurable positive impact on the faith and life satisfaction of those giving their time. However, they also noted low levels of feedback from leaders to volunteers on their performance, and on assisting volunteers to make links between their service as volunteers and their Christian faith (Wolfer et al. 2017, 81).

It is important, therefore, for church leaders to consider how they can support volunteers to ensure that they do not feel overwhelmed or undervalued, and to recognise the connection between faith and volunteering. A more structured framework of support and oversight could assist congregation members to manage the balance of volunteering in the congregation with their other commitments, and to ensure they are themselves receiving a benefit from volunteering. Understanding motivation and giving support can help those co-ordinating volunteers asking too much, or the wrong things, from their volunteers. There are well developed networks in the third sector which support organisations in supporting and managing volunteers, including training and resources for volunteer development, if congregation leaders are looking for assistance with developing support structures for their volunteers.

It is also important to acknowledge that those who volunteer in the congregation may well not see themselves as volunteers, but rather as doing their part to keep the church running or serve others, as an expression of their faith. The term "volunteer" is a well-recognised term in the voluntary sector, and as such can be useful in organisational terms and in planning in practice for how to support and manage those who are giving their time to the congregation. Nevertheless, it is a term that none of the participants used themselves. The participants' motivation appears to be a commitment to, as Diana said: *"being part of a community where you exercise the roles that you can usefully do"*. All three were committed to the congregation and wished to give of their time and energy to support the congregation and its members, so that they and others would continue to receive the benefits of being part of the community. Their comments resonate with Paul's image of the body of Christ, with different members, each having different functions but all part of the one body, and all needing one another to be complete. As Paul says:

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, NRSV)

This variety of gifting is what makes the body complete, and all the members of the body need support to discern the part they play, and to be equipped to carry it out.

Journey with God

Christian spirituality can be understood as the devotional practices, both shared and individual, that assist a Christian to deepen their experience of God, and to integrate this with the whole of their lives (McGrath 1999, 3). As noted above (at p53) Anglican identity is established through its common liturgical practices, and it is in these practices that Anglican spirituality is rooted, which emphasises the communal nature of spirituality, expressed through daily prayer and the sacramental and pastoral liturgies. Prayer is said not for the people but by the

people (Mursell 2001, 249).   If the model of church as community emphasises the sense of living together in a place, then church as pilgrim people of God emphasises the sense of travelling together on a journey.

Congregations have a shared spiritual journey, and at the same time, each member has their own spiritual journey.   Ian observes this in his comment:

> *I have to admit that it's much more of a privatised, inner – this is helping me to do worship on a Sunday and in quite an individualistic way in some ways – although that doesn't, I don't think, contradict what I'm saying earlier about the idea of doing something in common with lots of other people at the same time.*

This shared journey can take on particular significance at times of difficulty in life. Wells identifies the significance of "being with" as a part of both day-to-day Christian discipleship and the ministry of building up the church. He describes "being with" as a model of social engagement that involves accompanying others through the challenges of life, not to resolve these challenges with or for them, but rather to be present with them through the challenges (Wells 2017, 9). As disciples, Christians are not only followers of God, but also members together in the body of Christ. This is part of sharing the journey: "the need, side by side, to embody Christ together and work out one's salvation with collective fear and trembling" (Wells 2017, 14). Ministry is often carried out by people set aside or ordained into particular roles, but any Christian can be engaged in ministry, when they are engaged in activity that builds up another part of the body, "answering the call given at conversion and fulfilling the commandment bestowed at baptism to 'feed my sheep'" (Wells 2017, 17).

Helen gave an example of "being with" a friend through terminal illness:

> *I was journeying with her as she was diagnosed with cancer [and died shortly after, leaving school age children] so - pretty hellish and, as people are on their last journey to death, they're quite selective in who they want to share with so I was very privileged to be able to share with*

her. I remember her saying "I just need Christ with skin on … I think that is the important bit about Christ with skin on to people so you are called, I strongly believe you are called into different situations.

Helen felt herself *"called"* to accompany her friend through terminal illness. Helen was convinced that this is not simply a random accident of who was there at the time, identifying a divinely appointed element to such relationships. The phrase *"Christ with skin on"* is a vivid image. Her friend identified a need for the presence of Christ with her and needed this presence to be embodied in someone who could be physically present over the last few months of her life. Helen's words resonate with the words of a hospital chaplain describing their ministry, "through my presence, and any interventions I carry out, I incarnate something of God's grace and love, as seen in Jesus, for that person" (Dunlop 2017, 180).

Elsewhere, Helen spoke of, *"that sense of journey to God with God and through God, you have that sense sometimes that these are the people … the journey we're on individually as well as the journey we're on collectively"*.   This picks up on the broader sense of "being with" as disciples together, not specifically ministering to one another but more generally encouraging one another as they share their spiritual journey together. The congregation can provide a place for this shared journey, both through worship as described in the previous chapter and through other shared activity as described above.

Disciples of Jesus find themselves together not because they choose to be together, but because they choose to follow Jesus, which brings them together (Williams 2016, 11). As they travel and learn together, they can encourage one another, as the writer to the Hebrews says: "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25a, NRSV). Morgan emphasises the impact of sharing the journey with one another: "we are called as individuals but formed through communities" (Morgan 2015, 115). Church leaders must acknowledge that the work of ministry is not the preserve of church leaders, but rather that, as Paul says, pastors and teachers are given to

the church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12, NRSV). Church leaders need to support their congregation both to travel well together as disciples, and consider how they can minister to one another, how they can "incarnate something of God's grace and love, as seen in Jesus" for one another. This may be carried out through formal pastoral care structures, or it may be more informal friendships that grow and develop that allow this ministry to emerge. Either way, the congregation's leaders should be acknowledging, supporting, and making space for this ministry within the congregation.

For some, however, their experience of the church has been less supportive and has led them to stop attending, and in some cases stop believing. Aisthorpe conducted a study among former church goers in rural Scotland. Reasons included a sense of institutional resistance to change leaving churches out of step with modern lifestyles, difficulties with church leadership such as lack of communication or poor handling of conflict, and a lack of a sense of belonging or a nurturing context for faith: "it is clear that, for many, the congregation alone has not provided a helpful context for discipleship." (Aisthorpe 2016, 164). While some said they had lost their faith, many still described themselves as Christians. They had not lost their faith in God and still felt a connection with the church more generally but did not feel able to be part of a local congregation. Some of these people were now involved in smaller, more informal, Christian groups, and others were simply practicing their own devotions of prayer or bible reading.

Two participants spoke about their reasons for leaving another congregation before coming to St Margaret's, one of them with several years of not attending church in between. Lucy had begun to feel discouraged at her previous congregation:

> *I realised on a Sunday when we went home for lunch, I was very angry and I got to the point where I said I was fed up being called a worm and my husband would say "That's not what I took out of that service or sermon" but that was how I felt, no matter what you did, you just didn't*

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quite hit the mark and I became really very disillusioned and anxious about that.

She realised she'd always gone with others to church, first her family, then her husband, and *"I'd never really chosen my church and I thought the Church of Scotland has beautiful buildings and all sorts of things but I think I was realising I'm more a visual person and that wasn't kind of allowed"*. So she decided to looked for a congregation that worshipped in a way that would meet this need in her. After trying other alternatives, she found herself at St Margaret's which met:

> *a part that had been missing for me. I like art and music, I'm not an expert in any of them, but I think that met that sort of part of me that, up until then, hadn't been fed. And a different face of God, a different side of God - there's a hymn "Behind God's frowning face, there lies a smiling face" - I can't remember word for word but that was it, God isn't just that God that keeps you in your place and it's all to be doom and gloom and whatever. There's a part of God that hasn't been allowed to be seen and nourished.*

Cath began her faith journey as a child and young person in the Church of Scotland. When she was about 19, a new minister arrived, and arranged classes to prepare for joining the church.

> *On the penultimate meeting, he said "Next week I will give you an exam and, if you don't pass that exam, you will not be involved in joining the church on the Sunday we have agreed". I was frankly appalled because that isn't what I thought church was about or the church I believed in or the God I believed in.… However, being that you do as you're told, I went along to the exam and he said "Phone tomorrow and I'll tell you the results". So not only did this man set us an exam, but we had to pass it. In those days I had a very good memory, I read the Bible and was brought up on Bible stories, so I remembered things and I phoned, didn't get him, got his wife, and I got 54.5 out of 55. She was so delighted for me and I was so horrified that it had even come down to a half mark. So I toddled*

along on Sunday and there were two, I think there were 6-8 of us, and there were two people who weren't there and to this day I don't know if they thought actually this is not my brand of Christianity or whether they failed and were told not to come. I finished that session because I taught Sunday School and then said I didn't want to do this, this is not what I think is right.

So I didn't go to church for years and years and years. A friend of mine, so after my son was born … at Christmas when a friend of mine who went here phoned up and said "I'm going to the midnight service in St Mags, do you want to come?" and I thought why not, midnight Christmas. Toddled along and … when it came to communion [the minister] said "Everyone who believes in Christ is welcome to the table, the invitation does not come from me" and I thought "This is where I need to be". And that's how I felt about it, I just thought "Now that's what I think, it's about faith" and I've been here ever since and that's about 25-26 years and that's how I came to be in St Mags.

Lucy and Cath both spoke about feeling judged in their previous congregations. In Cath's case, this was literally the case, having to pass an exam to join the church. The message Cath received was that that you had to know the right things to get in. This was reinforced by the two people who didn't turn up to join the church. Cath acknowledged that she did not know whether they failed or simply chose not to join, but she was clear that she did not want to be part of this sort of congregation. For Lucy, the judgment was a feeling, expressed in the emotive words she used: *"angry", "fed up", "disillusioned", "anxious", "no matter what you did, you just didn't quite hit the mark".* This last phrase picked up a feeling of helplessness. If you were never quite going to hit the mark, what was the point in even trying? There was also a feeling of something in her being inhibited, feeling that her visual side was not allowed within the worship style she was used to. This contrasts with the feeling of being freed up at St Margaret's, engaging through art and music along with the words, and encountering a *"different face of God".* Cath found a welcome without

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condition, no need to pass an exam to join in, all were welcomed by Christ at the table.

Both Cath and Lucy described a journey from a place they did not feel accepted, to a place where they found acceptance just as they were. Acceptance is recognised in child development theory as a foundational aspect of the parent child relationship, in order to create a safe and secure base within which the child may grow and develop. For a child to develop a secure attachment to their parent, the child must believe that they are unconditionally accepted:

> This safety enables the child to trust that his parents will meet his needs as well as trust that when his parents are setting limits on his behaviour, they are doing so because it is best for the child, even if he disagrees with the parents' choice (Hughes 2017, 11).

The parental role of guidance and correction can only be carried out on the basis of a fundamental relationship of acceptance. Volf (1996, 156-64) identifies this theme of acceptance in the parable of the lost son as he returns to his father (Luke 15: 11-24). The son has become estranged from his father, having squandered his inheritance, only to find himself in desperation turning back to his father. He knows his father to be a fair man, but the son recognises the judgment that his behaviour deserves. All he can hope for is to confess his failings and to offer to work as a servant, to earn back his father's favour. But this is not necessary. The father has always been waiting for the son to return, always ready to forgive and embrace him. The welcome has always been there, all it has needed was for the son to turn back to receive it.

This is not to say that there is no place for confession or repentance. Confession has its place, but as a response to the love of the father, not in order to earn it. This is captured in the liturgy in the words that introduce the act of confession:

> God is love and we are God's children.
> There is no room for fear in love.
> We love because God loved us first.
> Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

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As Cath observed she values the sermon because it can make her feel uncomfortable: *"sometimes it makes me realise how very far short I've fallen and that's never comfortable, is it?"* She could hear the words of judgment because she had first heard the words of acceptance.

Aisthorpe identified a key theme among those who left churches was "a longing for belonging" (Aisthorpe 2016, 85) that they did not find fulfilled in the congregation they were attending. This suggests a potential gap between what the church aspires to be, and what some of those attending may be experiencing. The acceptance is always available from God, but it is part of the task of the congregation as a whole to model that acceptance in the way they create space for one another. Williams describes the church as a place where God's love may be experienced freely:

> We are seen, known and held, but above all we are welcomed. We are the objects of an eternal delight. And if that is sinking into our minds and hearts, then what the Church is fundamentally, and must show itself to be, is a place where time and space are given, where people are allowed the space to experience eternal love, a place where nothing needs to be left at the door and where people are made free to receive in a world that can seem to be demanding of them all the time – that they give, that they trade, that they offer, that they are out there making a difference (Williams 2016, 33).

Aisthorpe suggests that patterns of Christian community are shifting away from institutional and organised structures towards more informal and relational engagement (Aisthorpe 2016, 195). This does not need to be a rejection of traditional congregational forms, but it does challenge traditional congregations to look at the different spaces within their activities. These should include spaces that allow for relationships to grow and develop, so people can share their spiritual journeys and offer one another practical help along the way. These should also include spaces for those who want to stay on the margins. Church leaders should not assume that they are responsible for all ministry

within the congregation but should be recognising the space for members of the congregation to minister to one another, and to equip them for this.

Conclusion

It might be presumed that congregations are mostly a site of bonding capital, where people with a shared interest come together and strong ties are developed within a group. While the experiences of the participants suggest that this may happen in a congregation, there was also evidence of weak ties, relationships that were more distant but were nevertheless significant and provided a valued part of their social network. The participants expressed a variety of views on how well the congregation operated as a community. Nevertheless, all the participants described ways that the congregation was valuable to them, to some degree, as a social as well as a worshipping community. This could be through the activities, such as John attending the monthly concerts, through informal time shared before and after the service, as described by Cath and Lucy, or connecting socially outwith the congregation as described by Helen. These relationships could be social, offering practical support, and they can also allow opportunities for people to articulate their shared spiritual journey, and to express God's love to one another, particularly through difficult times.

This creates a picture of a group of people who have come together because they share one particular thing, their desire to be part of this particular worshipping community. Within this community they have developed a tapestry of relationships, and they want to support those who are in the community, and welcome others who wish to join them. Much of this happens naturally within the variety of meetings that take place, but congregational leaders can enable this both through the practical tasks of facilitating the different spaces, and also through their role in making disciples and equipping members of the congregation to minister to one another. These findings bear out the claim made by Bayes and Sledge, in their reflections on the mission of the parish church, that traditional congregations can offer a space for open and authentic relationships, without ulterior motive (at p16).

When it came to the practical tasks that needed to happen in order to keep the congregation running, several participants spoke about their willingness to play their part, though not to be taken over by what Helen called the *"oughteries"*. There is a body of research on third sector organisations that can offer insight into how congregations may organise themselves, as well as practice models for any congregational leader wishing to develop support for volunteers in their congregation. Nevertheless, those volunteering in the congregation may well view their actions as an expression of their faith and a commitment to this community, and this spiritual dimension should be considered alongside any secular models of volunteering.

Chapter six – neighbourhood

Introduction

Several years ago, I was preaching a sermon at St Margaret's on the text: "like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). I had made a church building out of Lego (with the help of my goddaughter) and at the relevant point in the sermon I stepped down from the pulpit and brought out the model. "If this Lego church represents the congregation of St Margaret's gathered here this morning," I said, "then see what happens when we leave." I started to take pieces of Lego from the model, placing them around the room as I spoke. Precious as our building is, I told the congregation, God's home on earth is not in this building but in us. We are the people of God, and our lives are a sign of God's presence in all the different places we go, day by day.

My sermon was written to encourage the congregation at St Margaret's to think of themselves, and not the building, as the church, and to think about how they can live for God day-by-day. Nevertheless, the church building is more than simply a place where a congregation meets from week to week. Jacobsen described how church buildings hold memory, both individual and collective, in three distinct ways. The first, semiotic memory, is literally built into the church. The symbolism of the architecture, the windows, the layout of the furniture, can all hold the tradition in the fabric of the building. The art in the church – stained-glass windows, mosaics, embroidery – shows characters and scenes from the bible, as well as saints from the history of the church. The building itself is also a sign, instantly recognisable to passers-by as a place of Christian gathering and worship (Jacobsen 2012, 66). The second is sensory memory, which refers to the personal memories evoked by the building: the feeling on first walking in the door; the memory of a significant event, such as baptism or marriage; or a particular encounter with the Spirit in worship. The third, patina memory, is a term coined by Jacobsen. A patina is a thin layer that forms over time on an object, a mark of its age. Jacobsen uses this term to refer to the wear and tear on a building over time, the marks made by human

use of the building, where memory is literally worn into the fabric of the building (Jacobsen 2012, 74). In these different ways, the church building becomes a place that is marked by a tradition, both in the way it is designed and built, how it is used and experienced by people, and the marks that they leave behind on the fabric of the building. Over time the building can become a sacred place, through the sacramental encounter that takes place week by week in its regular worship, and by its witness to Christian faith in the landscape (Walter and Mottram 2015, 175).

Most traditional congregations meet in a building that has been built for the purpose, located in a particular neighbourhood. Increasingly, however, urban congregations draw their members drawn from a wider geographical area than the neighbourhood in which the church buildings are located. Even if they belong to a denomination that has a parish structure, members may choose to join a different congregation in that denomination than that in whose parish they live, due to worship or theological style, or other personal reasons (Cnaan and Curtis 2013, 16). A congregation, then, has a neighbourhood where it meets, and for some of its members this is also the neighbourhood where they live. Nevertheless, for a proportion of its members, they will live in a different area from the church. St Margaret's was established to serve a particular area of Glasgow, and is often referred to by reference to this area, being known as St Margaret's Newlands. However, the congregation is now gathered from across the south side of the greater Glasgow area. Approximately one third of the congregation of St Margaret's live within a one mile walk of the church building, a third live within a two mile walk, and a third live further afield.

The relationship between St Margaret's and its neighbourhood, the question that started me on this research project, was the third overarching theme across the interviews. Two sub-themes emerged within this overarching theme. The first of these was the sense of disconnect between the congregation and its neighbourhood, which most participants discussed within the context of a wider disconnect between the church generally in the UK and its social context. Within this, participants paid particular attention to the place of St Margaret's church building in the neighbourhood. The second sub-theme was the potential for renewed relationship between the congregation and its neighbourhood that

participants envisaged, particularly through expressions of social concern. Participants expressed a desire to respond to social needs of people living in the neighbourhood of the church building, reflecting on what this response might look like and how the church building might be used for this purpose. The question of the relationship between social action and evangelism was raised, as well as the question of how members of the congregation might express this social concern in their own social networks, distinct from in the neighbourhood of the church building. Participants also articulated a desire to respond to wider issues of social justice.

Disconnect

The church building

St Margaret's church building has a monumental position at a cross-roads on a main road, and Lucy observed that it is well recognised by local residents: *"I think it's a very prominent building and most people in the area would know where St Margaret's was … it's that beautiful church on the corner"*. Ian also commented *"I suspect that local people see the church with some affection as a building and all the rest of it, it's an iconic local building"*. Nevertheless, participants also felt that people often passed by but rarely came in – having quite literally a passing acquaintance. Ian described it as a *"beautiful building but distant"* and potentially *"unattainable and untouchable for a lot of folk"*. Cath also picked up on the idea of the building being untouchable:

> *the number of people when I was doing my shifts for the open day*[22] *who would come in and say, "We've seen this building from the outside and never been in, lovely building," and that seems very sad to me because it's almost the way libraries and museums used to be, you could look outside but couldn't touch or go in.*

Ben also referred to visitors on Doors Open Day, when *"a number of people … came in [and said] 'What a lovely building, we often walk past it'"*. Even those

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[22] Doors Open Day – this is an annual event in Scotland, when buildings and sites of historical or architectural interest are open to the public to visit.

who use the church building for non-congregational activities do not engage with the congregation, as Ian observed, *"they literally use the hall but there's no connection with the church"*. As noted in chapter five (at p82), this could be described as an "absent tie" where, even when there is interaction, there is no relationship, even on the level of acquaintanceship.

Helen commented that many church buildings were built at times of urban expansion when there were very different patterns of social engagement, so that: *"now you're in this existing community … this heritage of these big, big beautiful churches"*. In the years after St Margaret's was built, most people who lived in the neighbourhood would have attended church from time to time, whether for worship or social activities. Some would have crossed the threshold of St Margaret's, whether regularly or occasionally, and the building would have held personal significance for them. Others would have had a connection with another local congregation, which would have given them an understanding of what the building of St Margaret's represented. Increasingly, however, people in the neighbourhood have no reason to enter St Margaret's or any other church building. They are not building up a store of experiences relating to the building, nor are they leaving their own physical mark on the building by their use, and so contributing to its patina (Jacobsen 2012, 74). Even those who do come into the building for activities, may not associate any significance with the building and the congregation, but rather with the group organising the activity. Many people living in the neighbourhood will have little cultural connection with church at any level, and so St Margaret's building becomes something they just pass by. The memory held by the building becomes more akin to a museum, a repository of artefacts from the past, observed but not touched or interacted with.[23]

Helen identified the challenge of large buildings used by declining congregations: *"it's these buildings, isn't it, we're all heating buildings … we're now stuck with the legacy here … but [it's] hard for people to let go tangibly of the building where they worship"*. McGuckin (2016, xvi) makes the same point,

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[23] This reflects traditional museum practice, although in recent years museums and heritage sites are increasingly creating opportunities for visitors to engage physically with artefacts (Pye 2007, 13).

asking "how many communities are tied to old loyalties of stones and bricks, and cannot bear to face the weekly realities of dwindling numbers?" According to the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland, there were in 2009 around 47,000 church buildings in Scotland. The history of the church in Scotland, with multiple Presbyterian denominations, alongside Catholic, SEC, and others, has led to "an historic overprovision of churches" (Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland 2009, 17). This, together with the significant decline in church attendance over the past half century, has left a heritage, as Helen observed, of elderly, declining congregations often meeting in buildings that they can no longer afford.

The congregation and its neighbourhood

Participants described a clear sense of disconnect between the congregation and its neighbourhood, which mirrored the disconnect between the church building and the local residents. In response to the question, "how do you feel St Margaret's fits in with its local neighbourhood?" seven participants offered a negative response. Ben replied: *"I don't think it does"*. Cath replied: *"I don't think it does at all"*. John said: *"I know that churches are supposed to relate to the community and so on, but I think that effect, and I don't know how you get over it, is limited"*. Diana said: *"I don't suppose we mean anything, we're not even on their radar really"*. Declan said: *"I think St Margaret's isn't that big a part of people's lives in the local area"*. Lucy said: *"I don't know really how much influence we have"*. Ian said: *"I'm not sure the potential is being fully used for St Margaret's and the local community at all"*. Participants put this disconnect in a wider context of a decline in church attendance more generally across Scotland. John described this as *"just a sign of the times … most churches are having a battle to survive as it were"*. Helen described her experience of visiting other churches when visiting friends: *"big churches, small congregations, at 66 you're the youngest person there and you think "how long is this going to last and what relevance has it got to people?"*

It is worth acknowledging that the opinions expressed that there was no significant connection between the congregation and its neighbourhood were offered by people who were members of the congregation. In order to establish

whether or not they were correct, the question would have to be asked of those outside the congregation, living in the neighbourhood. In the ethnographic study conducted for his doctoral thesis, on which his book *Parish: an Anglican theology of place* was based, Rumsey conducted several focus groups to explore the attitudes of parishioners to the parish church (Rumsey 2015). The parish in which Rumsey was working at the time, which he used for the study, was a small town on the outskirts of London, a distinct geographical area bounded by greenspace, with a long history as a town. The focus groups were conducted with a variety of formed groups in the community, and the group members consisted of a mixture of parish congregants, members of other churches in the town, and people with no church connection. Rumsey found a broadly positive view, though not uncritical, of the parish church. Analysis of the participants' contributions to the focus group identified community as a key theme, which was linked to the history and culture of the parish: both churches in the parish had stood for around 1,000 years (Rumsey 2015, 204). Rumsey identified from his own interaction with residents in the town that people had a sense of connection with the parish church even when they had no active involvement with it. He also acknowledged, however, that this pattern of identifying with a community without necessarily participating within it was a traditional pattern of belonging in the countryside (Rumsey 2015, 176).

Rumsey's description of the relationship between the local residents and the parish church contrasts with a study based in the south side of Edinburgh, conducted by Christopher Cotter. Cotter's study does not focus on a particular church or a bounded community, but on a distinct though unbounded urban area, with several church buildings, some still used as churches and others now used for different purposes. In his discussions with participants, Cotter observed a "discourse of indifference" in relation to Christianity (Cotter 2017, 55), whereby people were at ease talking about religion, both positively and critically, while not expressing any engagement with it. Cotter suggests that the place of Christianity in British history, as visually represented by the importance of churches in the built environment, allowed it to be something that became a part of the periphery; noticed and acknowledged, but demanding no engagement. Cotter cites an interviewee's comment that she "notices the [church] buildings ... especially because some of them are really stunning

buildings … but I don't necessarily think about them … in any active way" (Cotter 2017, 57). Cotter's findings resonate with the comments made by the participants in my study and their perception that those who live in the neighbourhood and pass by the building appreciate it's aesthetic but without any sense of personal connection. This suggests that in an urban setting, with less of a sense of bounded place than in the town studied by Rumsey, there may be a different relationship between local residents and the church building(s) in their area. Using Granovetter's language of social ties, it may be that those who live in a distinct and bounded place, such as a village or small town, have a weak tie with their local church, having a genuine identification with it, despite not participating in congregational activities. By contrast, those in less defined places such as urban settings, may have an absent tie, being peripherally aware of the church but indifferent to its activity.

Some of the participants suggested reasons for the general context of decline in church attendance. Helen noted that *"there are so many different groups and all the shops are open"*. Diana also picked up on the range of other choices on a Sunday: *"I wonder if there are just so many more things that take up people's attention and take up people's life"*. She also noted that church attendance had ceased to be a cultural obligation:

> *we go to church because that's what we want to do and not because there's any kind of expectation … I think generally people feel freer to take much more diverse paths in their lives so they don't feel necessarily beholden to the way their parents lived their lives.*

Flatt, Haskell and Burgoyne conducted a study with members of mainline protestant congregations in Canada, to discover the explanations they gave for congregational decline or growth. The most common reason given by congregation members for decline corresponded with the reasons given by Helen and Diana, with respondents citing competing Sunday activities and the busyness of people's lives (Flatt, Haskell and Burgoyne 2017, 88).

Secularisation theory has noted the correlation in western countries between a rise in economic prosperity and a decline in religious adherence, though there

are different views on the nature of the relationship between these two factors. Norris and Inglehart (2011, 18) propose that religion provides consolation for economic insecurities of life, with a set of rules for living and a promise of future reward for faithfulness. As their material situation improves, people no longer need to look to religious authority for security. As a result, trust in religious values declines, leading to fewer people practising faith. Hirschle (2011, 265) offers an alternative explanation for the decline in religious practice in affluent societies. Religious practice offers a means of social solidarity and belonging. As economic prosperity increases, consumption of non-essential goods and leisure experiences offers not simply alternative activities but also an alternative context for social relationships. Initially, it is not so much that people stop believing, but that going to church is one amongst many other options and so they stop attending church, which in turn leads to a decline in belief.

Diana and Helen's comments resonate with Hirschle's hypothesis, that is, *"so many more things", "so many different groups and the shops are all open"*, which offer many more options and choices. This also reflects Davie's observation, noted in chapter two (at p21), that attendance at church is increasingly becoming a matter of choice rather than a cultural obligation. Guest suggests that the shift from obligation to choice need not be seen as a negative. "If religion has become less about obligation and more about choice, there is no reason why congregational involvement should not be a part of that choice" (Guest 2007, 63). As Diana said: *"we go to church because that's what we want to do and not because there's any kind of expectation"*. Nevertheless, this is not simply another individual consumer choice, but the choice to be part of a group with a particular set of values. Linking back to chapter four (at p64) and the experience of Sunday worship in the congregation, Ian highlighted that the preaching offered *"a version, a story, about what life's about which is absolutely counter cultural … there's another story to be told that isn't just the taken for granted assumptions that most folk are living with"*. The choice to go to church is not dutiful or socially constrained, nor is it consumer driven. Rather, as Spencer suggests "people who come to the church are freely entering into the network of relationships within congregation and with God, usually with

commitment and enthusiasm, freely giving as well as receiving" (Spencer 2013, 94).

Declan and Ben both picked up on a cultural disconnect between congregations and their social context. Declan suggested that the social context had changed while St Margaret's – and churches more generally – had not:

> *[St Margaret's] hasn't changed from what I can gather from what it did previous decades any more than any other church has. I don't think this is something that's unique to St Margaret's, it's just a thing with society and the way it's heading.*

Declan suggested this was part of a wider context of: *"rejection of the old cultures, a feeling that the old cultures have let us down".* Ben picked up on the church's lack of a response to the social context. He highlighted the *"increasing, depressing, absence of relevance"* of the churches, and their lack of response: *"they're not [important] anymore, not in the wider society, and I don't think they've really worked out how to deal with that".* Ian felt: *"The church can be so conservative about issues it drives me insane. It always seems to be behind the curve when it comes to women and sexuality and all the rest of it so stuff like that".*

Ian's observation that the church is *"behind the curve"* on certain social attitudes is reflected in research conducted by Clement. This uses data sets from British and European social attitudes surveys conducted over the past fifty years to examine changing patterns of attitudes across the British population on a range of different topics relating to religion and belief. One of the topics considered was the change in attitudes towards same-sex relationships. From 1983 to 2012 the data indicate a consistent decline in the number of people who disapprove of same-sex relationships. Disapproval by Christians of same sex relationships has declined at the same rate as the general population. Nevertheless, disapproval remains consistently higher among Christians, and the decline is slowest amongst those who attend church most regularly (2015, 167-172).

Clement also looked at the available data on confidence in religious authority over the same time period. Respondents were asked how much confidence they had in the church, and the responses indicated a decline in confidence throughout the 1980s and '90s, with a levelling off from around 2000 (the available survey data end at 2008). The decline was fastest in older age groups, while levels of confidence of the youngest age groups started lowest, but also showed the smallest decline. This meant that the difference in confidence levels between older and younger groups decreased over time (2015, 21). In addition, Clement compared levels of trust in the churches with those of a variety of other civic and government institutions. He found that the decline in trust in the church was consistent with a general trend of declining confidence in most national institutions, including parliament, the police, the press, and the civil service, although confidence in education and the armed forces both increased over the period measured (Clements 2015, 25). This decline in trust in religious authority reflects the research of Woodhead (2016, 250) who observed that those describing themselves as having "no religion" were unlikely to say that religious leaders should not speak out on public issues but were likely to say that they would have no regard to what they say. This resonates with Ben's comment that *"nobody accepts the authority of the clergy unquestionably now"*. It is not that people necessarily wish to stop religious leaders speaking but rather that people no longer feel the need to accept what they say.

This disconnect in attitudes is, in part, a cultural phenomenon. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a significant proportion of British people had a connection with the church at some level. Therefore, the attitudes of the public in general were more likely to correlate with the attitudes of those who described themselves as Christian. As church attendance and Christian identity decline in the population, it becomes more likely that attitudes will diverge. As the culture becomes more consumer orientated, and people's experience of engagement with churches reduces, the consequence is not necessarily an antagonism towards faith, but rather, as Ben suggests, to an *"absence of relevance"* to which churches do not know how to respond. However, Ben did have a suggestion as to how to respond to this, to which I shall return below (at p118).

The lack of engagement between local residents with the church building mirrors the disconnect between the congregation and its neighbourhood. Participants had a variety of suggestions for how the church in general, and St Margaret's in particular, could respond to the challenge of the disconnect with its social context. Weaving through these suggestions, was a theme of concern around social issues. This included both engagement with the needs of vulnerable people in the neighbourhood and city and engagement by the church in wider socio-political concerns.

Social action

Five marks of mission

In 1984, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) produced a statement which summarised the mission of the church: to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; and to seek to transform unjust structures of society. [24] In 1990, responding to growing global concern for the environment, the ACC added a fifth, to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. These statements constitute the Five Marks of Mission (f 2017, 155). In 2012, the wording of the fourth statement was revised to add in a commitment to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation (Zink 2017, 161). The five marks emphasise both personal evangelism and social action as aspects of mission (Zink 2017, 148). Their development through the ACC was rooted in, and enabled, a genuinely cross-cultural debate with engagement from across the communion, and they have found particular resonance in the twenty-first century with the aims of the UN Millennium Development Goals (Zink 2017, 160). In my study, most participants spoke of a potential for a greater role for St Margaret's in social action, both through local action to respond to needs in those living in the neighbourhood of the church building, and through wider engagement in issues of social justice.

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[24] The role of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) is to facilitate the co-operative work of the churches of the Anglican Communion, exchange information between the provinces and churches, and help to co-ordinate common action. It advises on the organisation and structures of the Communion and seeks to develop common policies with respect to the world mission of the Church, including ecumenical matters.

These two aspects of social action pick up on the third and fourth marks of mission.

Local social action

Cameron offers two reasons for the church to engage in social action. It is an act of service, which "demonstrates neighbour-love"; and it is an act of witness, enacting the Christian faith in a society where most people have no habit of connection with the church (Cameron 2012, 19). This notion of "neighbour-love" is at the heart of the third mark of mission: responding to human need by loving service. This mark of mission is rooted in the greatest commandment. "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" a lawyer asked Jesus, trying to test him. Jesus replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is probably what the lawyer expected to hear, but he did not expect what Jesus went on to say: "And a second is like it: 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:34-40, NRSV). These are not separate or sequential commandments. To love God is to love your neighbour, and to love your neighbour is to love God, says Jesus. And your neighbour is not simply the person near you or the person like you, but the person who needs you, as Jesus makes clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 (Maggay 2008, 49).

Several participants spoke of their desire for the congregation to be more responsive to social need in the neighbourhood and the city. In the language of the five marks of mission, they expressed a wish for St Margaret's to respond to human need by loving service. Lucy pointed to the example of the work of Tom Allan, minister in a Glasgow city centre Church of Scotland parish in the 1950s and '60s. She described Allan's ministry as *"standing out in the streets and talking to the street girls and talking to the down and outs and the homeless and bringing folk in for a cup of tea"*. Allan's ministry spanned the years when church attendance in Scotland was at a high point into the beginnings of its steep decline. In 1955 he began ministering in St George's Tron, a church in Glasgow city centre that had virtually lost its congregation and was being considered for closure. Allan was a well-known preacher in Glasgow and drew

many to join the congregation. He encouraged his congregation to step out of the church building to minister to those in need in the city centre, building up a significant social ministry. Allan did not consider this ministry to be separate or subordinate to the work of preaching the Gospel, but an integral part of it, expressing the Gospel in action, as he wrote in an article for a local newspaper in 1959:

> We need a body of committed men and women in every congregation who are prepared to put the teaching of Jesus into positive and concrete action, and tackle the social problems on their own doorstep with consecrated understanding and common sense. So long as there is a man without a chance in Glasgow or a girl looking for a home, none of us who call ourselves Christians can be at peace (Forsyth 2017, 59).

Allan was also convinced that the involvement of lay people was key in the church's engagement in society. He sought to build up the church "by the empowerment of lay church members as individuals and in community, to witness to Christ in word and deed where they lived, worked, or gathered socially" (Forsyth 2017, 2).

In contrast to the city centre location where Tom Allan was serving, the "doorstep" of St Margaret's is a middle-class residential suburb. The neighbourhood around St Margaret's has a higher than average population of older people[25], which makes this a potential focus of concern in the neighbourhood. Helen observed, the human need in an area such as the neighbourhood around St Margaret's may remain *"behind closed doors"* or *"behind comfortable facades"*. One human need that has recently received an increased public policy focus in the UK is the issue of loneliness. While loneliness can affect people of any age, older people are often affected by a cluster of factors that can make them more socially isolated and so at risk of loneliness, such as being bereaved, living at a distance from family connections,

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[25] 16% of the population of Newlands/Auldhouse council ward are aged 65 and over, as compared with the general population of Glasgow at 14% aged 65 and over. https://glasgowgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=eed5c7218ac645718e855d7644f40014

suffering from a disability or chronic health condition, or caring for another person (Church Urban Fund 2016, 5).

Lloyd et al. conducted a study with number of older people who had varying needs for support, to find out how this impacted on their sense of identity and autonomy. Most of the participants were resistant to asking for help, perceiving it as out of character for them to do so and "seeing virtue in self-reliance and independence" (Lloyd et al. 2014, 13). Tod et al. conducted a study to understand the factors that inhibited older people asking for assistance, in this case seeking financial assistance to heat their homes in winter. One of the barriers they identified was the need some older people felt to remain independent, which could lead to becoming "fiercely private" and maintaining an appearance of coping (Tod et al. 2012, 6).

The role of the congregation as a social support network was discussed in chapter five (at p79). Rote, Hill and Ellison explored the role of the congregation particularly in relation to older people. They found that older people who attended religious services more frequently were likely to be able to identify wider social networks and to identify people they could call on for support, and that they reported lower levels of loneliness. The study acknowledged that religious attendance is a social activity, so it may be that those who are less socially isolated attend religious activities, rather than the other way around. However, the results persisted even when controlling for a range of health and personality factors that might adversely affect social integration (Rote, Hill and Ellison 2013, 48). In chapter four, some participants identified the value of Sunday services for connecting with older people who lived alone (at p59). Some participants identified this as something that St Margaret's could offer during the week as well. Cath expressed a desire that St Margaret's would offer social spaces for older people who may be lonely: *"I think a morning or an afternoon where people can come and maybe some of the older members of the congregation … and have a blether: 'What have you been up to?' 'How have you been?'"* Helen was concerned for those suffering from dementia and their carers: *"there are a lot of people trying to care desperately and I would like to see something … supporting people involved in it because it can make a tremendous difference"*.

The Cinnamon Network offers support and advice to churches that are looking to develop social action projects in their neighbourhood. They have developed a variety of models of community-based projects promoting health and wellbeing and tackling poverty, which congregations can take and adapt to fit their local situations. The Cinnamon Network commissioned research to review effectiveness of several community health projects run by churches. The study found that where services were delivered in co-ordination with local health and social care services, they were able to offer added value to the statutory services, particularly in their ability to offer more time to users of the service (Simmons 2018, 87-88). The study also identified that these services were able to offer spaces where the users, often socially isolated due to their health problems, could find community, which was identified in the study as the most important finding: "with community comes belonging, and with that comes dignity" (Simmons 2018, 94). For example, at a lunch group for dementia sufferers, the carers ended up staying instead of taking a respite break, as they found they enjoyed the group, and they gained support from one another in their roles as carers.

The Church Urban Fund reviewed research on how congregations could respond to loneliness in their neighbourhood through further activities throughout the week. The review identified the value of group-based activities, particularly those themed around a common interest, which are led by the group members (Church Urban Fund 2016, 7). At the time of data gathering, St Margaret's did not have any regular social groups. Since that time, however, several monthly social groups have been established, including "knit and natter" group and a book group. The set-up of these groups was supported by clergy, but they are all now led on an ongoing basis by members of the congregation. Most of the people attending these groups are also members of the congregation, particularly older members, however, there are a few people who attend from other congregations or none. This model offers support along the lines of that identified in the Church Urban Fund report, that is, member led, interest-based groups. These groups could be further developed to offer support within the neighbourhood more widely beyond the members of the congregation. By liaising with GP surgeries, social work services, and housing offices, workers in these organisations might encourage older people at risk of social isolation, who

have no current connection with a congregation, to become part of these groups. They would be able to access the social benefit of being connected with a congregation without any need to become part of the Sunday worshipping congregation.

There are practical challenges for congregations in developing activities that respond to social need in the neighbourhood. Cairns, Harris and Hutchison conducted a study within one diocese in Church of England congregations that were engaged in delivering community based social action projects in their neighbourhood, and in receipt of some governmental funding to contribute to these. One challenge they identified was that some congregations found the regulatory frameworks expected by the statutory agencies to be cumbersome and off-putting. Another challenge was for congregations to recruit and maintain sufficient volunteers to sustain projects (Cairns, Harris and Hutchison 2007, 424). In chapter five I discussed volunteer roles within the congregation (at p82). Some participants wanted to contribute to the life of the congregation, but they did not want to feel duty bound, or to become overwhelmed by the demands of the roles. Ian made a similar observation in relation to involvement in new social action initiatives in the community: *"part of me is just a tired old guy now … there comes a point when the day job is hard enough and there's only so much energy that I've got"*. Ian's comment highlights a challenge for congregations who are considering developing new initiatives, that is, members of the congregation are often already committed to volunteer tasks within the congregation or in other organisations, and they will most likely have commitments at home and work as well. This can make the prospect of any new activities feel daunting. Helen raised another issue: *"people would say 'I've got this new innovative idea' and I'd think, well, we did this twenty years ago"*. She also noted *"the danger that you become like the parable of the sower where very little of it takes root and it's all frothy and back to the rhetoric and words so it has to be something that doesn't just start"*.

Ben offered a response to this dilemma:

I think it is far more important to identify on a larger scale, probably city wide, what it is the problems we have … because there just aren't enough people … what is it that the Glasgow diocese wants to be as it can't do at a local level, it's got to do it at city level in order to make any form on impact.

Helen identified the opportunity for ecumenical co-operation: *"I feel we perhaps could do more collectively with other churches or support people who are doing [activities that serve the community]"*. Lucy commented that: *"with other churches we don't work very much … we all sort of work away in our own wee corner and don't seem to be talking to each other. I feel there's a lot more there we could be doing too and sharing"*. Helen also identified *"I feel there's a missing - a need for interfaith discussions"*.

Mladin, Fidler and Ryan conducted a survey of church leaders in congregations across England that were involved in the ecumenical umbrella organisation Churches Together in England. Participants in the survey identified local co-operation between congregations as an opportunity to build a more visible unity in the church across different denominations. There was an acknowledgement that the diversity in worship practice and church doctrine, as well as on social issues such as views on same sex marriage, presented challenges for congregations coming together (Mladin, Fidler and Ryan 2017, 47). Given this, engagement on mission and witness was seen as offering a space for working together, with social action projects such as foodbanks, street pastors and homeless interventions offering a practical way of engaging (Mladin, Fidler and Ryan 2017, 22).

Co-operation between congregations can begin in simple ways. Three years ago, St Margaret's began a regular collection for the local foodbank, operated by a neighbouring congregation. Members of the congregation were invited to bring donations on a Sunday: as the congregation gathered to share bread and wine together, we would bring food to share with others. In the course of one Sunday service, the collection box for the food donations was brought to the front of the church with the financial offering and the bread and wine, as a mark that the collection of food was an expression of faith being shared with the community.

The connection with the foodbank then led to St Margaret's joining the local community network, which consists of several local congregations and community groups, and which oversees the local neighbourhood centre.

Rumsey offered the metaphor of "common ground" as a way of understanding the relationship between the congregation of a parish church, and those who live in the parish but do not attend the church. This metaphor may not operate the same way in an urban setting, where there is a greater degree of indifference to the church, as discussed above (at p106). Nevertheless, while urban residents may not feel any sense of connectedness to their parish church, they will often have a sense of connectedness with the place where they live. This is demonstrated in a study by Chan and Kawalerowicz (2022), which set out to test David Goodhart's cultural categories of "Somewheres" and "Anywheres". Goodhart coined these two terms in his book *The road to somewhere* (2017). He argues that:

> the old distinctions of class and economic interest have not disappeared but are increasingly over-laid by a larger and looser one – between the people who see the world from Anywhere and the people who see it from Somewhere. (Goodhart 2017, 3) [26]

As the descriptor chosen by Goodhart implies, the cultural categories he identifies have an association with place, in that Somewheres are more likely to live close to where they grew up and feel a sense of rootedness in a place, while Anywheres are more mobile, often living in new places after leaving home for university (Goodhart 2017, 24). Chan and Kawalerowicz used data from Understanding Society, a national household panel survey, to assess these cultural categories. One of the questions that they explore is the sense of connection that Anywheres and Somewheres feel to the neighbourhood where they live. The study demonstrates that while Anywheres may be more mobile and to settle in a place other than where they grew up, they are as likely as

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[26] Goodhart sets out in this book to reflect on the tension between these two groups in British politics, particularly in the context of the Brexit referendum of 2016. He identifies the Somewheres as more numerous, with values he describes as "decent populism", while the Anywheres who dominate the political classes, with values he describes as "progressive individualism" (Goodhart 2017, 5). A broader discussion about Goodhart's argument is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Somewheres to feel a sense of attachment to the neighbourhood where they live (Chan and Kawalerowicz 2022, 121). It is for local churches, then, to make connections within the neighbourhood and to find this common ground. In terms of Foulger's parish principle, a parish church in an urban setting can no longer expect a relationship with local residents simply by *being* in a place, but it can *become* present by joining with others in the neighbourhood and responding to local social need. This shared concern becomes the common ground, in which love of neighbour can be shown, and relationship can grow.

Individual social action

While the participants' comments around social action focused substantially on engagement with the local neighbourhood of St Margaret's, Helen spoke about responding to personal social need within friendship networks. In chapter five, I discussed Helen's description of supporting others, identifying the value of members of the congregation ministering to one another on their shared journey of faith, and the need for the congregation's leaders to acknowledge, support, and make space for this (at p87). The relationships that Helen described were not limited to members the congregation, but also included people from other parts of her life. This is a reminder that each member of the congregation has their own network of relationships that intersects with, but is not limited to, the congregation. These may include formal relationships such as work or membership of other organisations, and informal relationships such as friends and acquaintances. As Ian observed, *"you're a member of a number of things at the same time - you're not a member of one thing or the other, and some of those memberships overlap"*.

My particular research interest was in the intersection between a congregation and the neighbourhood in which it is located. The way that my interview questions were framed reflected that interest, and in turn focused the responses of the participants. Nevertheless, Helen and Ian's comments highlighted the many other networks that members of the congregation are involved in, both formal and informal. For most Christians, their faith is not something they express only when they congregate with other Christians, but is something they consider to be a part of their identity at all times, which they take into all these

different places, negotiating what it means to be a Christian in multiple different contexts, public and private.

Helen said: *"you're also called to be Christ where you are and to live your life by what you believe"*. Rowthorn points out that it is through the laity that the church is represented in the world, but "whether or not Christ is represented in human activity is dependent on whether or not the laity genuinely represent him" (Rowthorn 1986, 5). To return to the image used in the introduction (at p96), the church building holds the congregation when they gather together. It holds them in a tradition, as a community, in a neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the members of the congregation do not cease to be the body of Christ when they leave the building. They are the body of Christ wherever they go. As Rowthorn says, "through its laity the Church is present in every area of human activity" (Rowthorn 1986, 5). Helen described the potential for a congregation to equip its members to do this, for the ways that they are engaging with other people and networks in their daily lives:

> *I suppose if this was more of a hub with people going out … St Margaret's becomes more of a powerhouse to activate people and people are going out in different directions and then coming back to the central point.*

For the laity to represent Christ in the world, they need to be equipped and released into this. Forsyth identifies the importance of resourcing lay members of the congregation to enable them to "integrate the everyday with the word of God" (Forsyth 2017, 227). Christians need the tools to be able to reflect for themselves what it means to live out their faith in the specific contexts in which they live. They may also need to be encouraged to recognise their presence in the world as part of their service of God, as they demonstrate God's love in the way they live their lives. In chapter five, the significance of "being with" was raised as a model of ministry, accompanying others through the challenges of life, and making Christ present by their presence (Wells 2017, 9). Wells offers this also as a model for mission, that is, when Christians engage with the work of the Spirit that is going on beyond the church (Wells 2018, 17). Using Helen's image of the hub, Christians can gather together to be with one another, learning together, building one another up and encouraging one another, and

then they can go out to the various places they live and work, and be with those they encounter along the way, living as a sign of God's love.

Use of the building

Some participants expressed a hope that St Margaret's church building might be used to respond to local need. Helen wanted to ask the question *"could we more creatively use the church … so there could be more things that would [bring] people through the door"*. Lucy wanted churches to view their buildings *"not just for us, a wee holy huddle and we're in and you're out and you either join us or you stay out"*. Ian wanted *"a building that isn't just for Sundays … I'd like to see traffic in, folk coming and going, a place where people feel they can just drop in."* Nevertheless, Helen identified the challenges of the location of the building at St Margaret's: *"I find it quite hard to conceptualise what that would actually look like because we're not geographically in a position where we would have a drop in café"*. Cath also commented on the limitations on how to engage in such a neighbourhood: *"thing[s] like the food banks is maybe not going to work, drop in cafés maybe not going to work"*.

The participants' comments highlight a tension between a desire for the church to be better used, and a recognition of the limitation of the building and its locality. Helen spoke about congregations being *"stuck with the legacy"* of buildings that were no longer suited to the needs of the congregation. Church buildings are a significant part of the nation's built and cultural heritage and are often valued as landmarks by local communities. Nevertheless, the decline in their use, for both worship and other activities, puts increasing financial and practical pressures on diminishing congregations to sustain buildings that may be old, in out of the way locations, and difficult to adapt (Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland 2009, 3). While the financial pressures this places on congregations and denominations may lead to the disposal of some church buildings, it can also be a motivation for congregations to rediscover their buildings as a shared space, shared by the congregation with their neighbourhood.

The church building may be cultivated as a site of common ground, with the church inviting those who live locally to see the building as something to which all local residents can develop a sense of connectedness. Muskett offers a case study which develops the metaphor of common ground, connecting it with another metaphor, that of sacred space. She conducted a study of a church in a large English town that held a Christmas Tree festival in the week running up to Advent. The event offered fun activities in the church building, including an ice rink, combined with a reflective space in the lady chapel which offered participants space for prayer and reflection. Over 10,000 people attended the festival, many entering the building for the first time. Nearly 700 chose to write something to hang on the prayer trees (Muskett 2017, 30). In reviewing the event, the congregation identified the importance of not losing the sacred space in creating the common ground (Muskett 2017, 31). Muskett suggests that:

> the type of generous hospitality which encourages townspeople and visitors to make best use of common ground, often in novel and unorthodox ways, breeds familiarity with sacred space and thereby lays the foundation for a more thoughtful association with the sacred. (Muskett 2017, 34)

Cotter noted that those in his study who were indifferent to Christianity were nevertheless open to the idea of church buildings being resources for the whole community, particularly when the focus was on contributing to the good of the community (Cotter 2017, 57). This suggests that traditional congregations that seek to develop their buildings as places of common ground with their local community may well find a positive reception.

Traditional congregations that wish to remain in their building need to find a way forward that will "both respect the church as a holy place and also allow it to have a viable and sustainable purpose in contemporary society" (Walter and Mottram 2015, 176). One striking example of this is Union Chapel, in Islington. Founded as an independent chapel in 1799, the congregation thrived in the nineteenth century, but attendance began to decline in the twentieth century, until in the 1980s the congregation planned to demolish the church building and replace it with something smaller. However, local residents campaigned to raise

money to preserve the building. It has become a prominent local live music venue hosting a wide variety of acts, including Elton John, Phillip Glass, and U2. It also houses a homeless charity, The Margins Project, which hosts a range of drop-in advice and support services as well as a winter night shelter. Alongside this, it continues to host a worshipping congregation (Union Chapel 2021). While not all congregations will wish to take on such an ambitious project, the work of this congregation offers a picture of how cultural, social, and spiritual needs can be met out of the same physical space.

The simplest way for congregations to share their buildings is to hire out spaces within the building to local groups, for community or commercial use, as is currently done by St Margaret's. As Ian noted above (at p99), this does not necessarily create any significant relationship between the congregation and the hall users, and to develop relationships further may require some form of partnership arrangement between the congregation and the other organisation. This is a more significant undertaking, which raises a range of logistical questions, such as what sort of use would be suitable for the church building (e.g. community or commercial use), how the space would be shared at different times, what alterations may be needed to the building in order to facilitate the shared use, and the financial implications. The Church of England has recently undertaken a pilot project to support congregations with listed buildings to develop strategies to make their buildings more sustainable. One strand to this project was creating a diocesan role of Community Development Advisers (CDAs), who worked with the congregations to build their relationships in the wider community, in order to develop opportunities for wider use of the building, as well as securing finance to assist with maintenance and repair. The CDAs were able to assist congregations to change their own perceptions on the benefits of engaging with the wider community, as well as help with identifying community need, planning community activity more strategically, and developing partnerships (Frontier Economics 2020, 58).

Social action and evangelism

One participant commented on the relationship between social action and evangelism. Cath said the purpose of engaging with people in the

neighbourhood is *"not about bringing people to church because I don't see that as the important thing … if I try, or we try, to do things that [Jesus] might just approve of, then that's as good as it gets"*. While no-one else directly commented, Lucy did observe, when talking about churches engaging in social action in the neighbourhood, that *"churches that open themselves and make themselves open and have something to draw people in I think are the churches that are growing"*. This does not imply that church growth is an aim of social engagement though it does suggest that the two may go together.

In 2015, the Diocese of Liverpool launched a diocesan wide initiative encouraging congregations to develop social action projects and activities in their parishes. The initiative was part of a wider church growth initiative entitled Bigger Church: "The Diocese of Liverpool is asking God for a Bigger Church, so we can make a Bigger Difference - more people knowing Jesus, more justice in the world" (Church Army 2018, 4). The Church Army conducted research on the social action initiative in 2018 which included interviews with church leaders and parishioners in four congregations in the diocese. The research identified four overlapping reasons that motivated congregations to engage in social action: to serve their community, to address wider injustice, to tell people about God, and to get people into church (Church Army 2018, 13). Participants acknowledged that there could be more than one motivation for action, nevertheless, some participants identified a potential for tension between the different motivations, between social action as an end in itself to demonstrate God's love, or as a means to create opportunities to share the Christian faith. Some participants highlighted a concern that congregations might simply be engaging in social work, but this was countered by an acknowledgement that any activity is underpinned by prayer (Church Army 2018, 15). These findings suggest that it is important for a congregation embarking on any social action programme to explicitly discuss their aims, so as not to create tension.

Social Justice

While Cameron advocates the engagement of the church in social action (at p105), she also notes that social action can have the unintended consequence of

entrenching injustice. She raises the concern that, in responding to immediate social need, the church may find itself dealing with the symptoms of social problems while never engaging with the more fundamental causes of these problems. In doing so, this may contribute to a culture which is disempowering for the poor, causing them to become reliant on the charity of others (Cameron 2012, 19). Cameron advocates social action which is pastoral and practical, but also political (Cameron 2012, 23). Elsewhere, she observes that God's mission will manifest God's character, which includes justice, and therefore the work of the church should also exhibit God's justice (Cameron 2015, 2).

This relates to the fourth mark of mission, transforming the unjust structures in society. God's character as a God of justice is established particularly in the book of Exodus, when God hears the cry of God's people who are enslaved:

> The LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey". (Exodus 3:7-8, NRSV)

Jesus affirms his commitment to this vision of justice as he reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah at the start of his ministry:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
>   because he has anointed me
>   to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
>   and recovery of sight to the blind,
>   to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV)

God's justice identifies with the oppressed, while denouncing the forces that hold them in their captivity (Steuernagel 2008, 69). The call to the church is to incarnate this justice, to hear the cry of those who are oppressed calling out for

justice in our society, to stand in solidarity with them, and to call the oppressors to account (Steuernagel 2008, 71).

As noted in chapter two (at p14), Tomlin identified the importance of a congregation demonstrating virtues that express its orientation towards God, and in particular, giving attention to those virtues that distinguish them from their social context. Three participants in the study raised the issue of how the congregation could engage with social issues at a political as well as a practical level, both challenging political institutions and finding ways to engage. Cath wanted the church to be:

> *more political with a small p … I think the lack of standing up and being counted means that people don't see the church in any of this … I think we should be stronger on poverty, I think we should be stronger about refugees from Syria, I think we should be standing up and saying 'Come on guys', we should be holding politicians to account and I don't think we do that. I think as individuals we might, but I think, as a church, as Christians, as a Christian organisation, I don't think we hold them to account.*

Ian wondered *"Are there issues we feel collectively as a community so strongly about we could say 'Listen, we should be annoyed about this, are you going to write to your local MP?' Why don't we do it?"*

One issue in responding to Ian's challenge is the diversity of political views in the congregation. Elsewhere, Ian described himself as *"left wing"* while Ben spoke about his political views in relation to *"one nation conservatism"*, which points to the mix of political views that may be found even in one congregation, let alone across the wider church. One possible way forward is signalled in Ben's comment: *"Were the Christian churches to move back to the centre stream, back to centre importance, I would expect it to be something that allows power to be exercised for the common good"*.   The notion of the common good is an understanding of fairness in society that seeks to mediate between the different needs and aspirations of each person, in order to create a society where all are willing to contribute as able and required, and all are enabled to flourish, both

as individuals and as part of the wider community (Sagovsky and McGrail 2015, xxviii). This contrasts with a utilitarian society ordered to obtain the greatest good for the greatest number, or a libertarian society ordered to maximise individual choice. Plant points out that in a pluralist society it is not plausible to expect that there will be general agreement around one set of shared values (Plant 2001, 196). He proposes that in a liberal western social context, the common good is not to be found in seeking a shared common purpose for life, but rather in providing and sharing the goods that meet basic needs that exist across society, in order to allow members of society to pursue their own purposes and so for all to be able to flourish (Plant 2001, 198).

In a society where people live by different values, there will be disagreement about what the public goods are and how they should be shared throughout society, therefore there needs to be a way to mediate these different positions and agree how people are to live together in a particular society. The political structures of a society exist to facilitate this, being "that which shapes and structures this common life so that, as a good, it can be sustained over time" (Bretherton 2019, 33). These structures of governance, such as constitutions, laws, and electoral systems, could be described as statecraft. Bretherton notes another aspect of politics, that is, "the relational practices through which a common world of meaning and action is created and cultivated" (Bretherton 2019, 34). This refers to the processes by which conflicting ideas and values are debated and negotiated, both in formal political structures and across civic society.

In chapter two (at p14) I noted Tomlin's suggestion that the culture of a congregation should reflect kingdom values that distinguish the congregation from their social context. As demonstrated by Ben and Ian, Christians may worship together and yet hold different political positions. What Christians share is a belief in a common humanity, that all people are created in the image of God, and therefore all people are worthy of respect. Further, humanity was made by God to live in relationship, interdependent upon one another: "Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family" (Paul VI 1965, 26). This offers a way for Christians to be *"political with a small p"* as

Cath wished. As Spencer notes, Christians may have divergent views on a whole range of political and moral issues. Nevertheless, this belief in a common humanity, and a consequent respect and concern for all, are foundational values for all Christians, who bring this a distinctive (though not unique) contribution to politics, both as a value to guide decision making, and as a characteristic that marks their own relational engagement in politics (Spencer 2008, 81). This offers a way for Christians to be counter-cultural, not necessarily by all holding the same values, but in the way they negotiate difference while maintaining a respect for one another.

Where congregations are motivated to engage in wider political issues, this can be given legitimacy by their engagement in social action, giving authenticity to their contribution. Muers and Britt (2012, 206) note that governments have been increasingly interested in highlighting the role of faith communities in voluntary action, which offers a way for churches and other faith communities to become engaged in the public square, speaking with the authority of those who are delivering services. Some participants observed (at p102) that church leaders are no longer deemed as having authority to speak into political situations simply by virtue of their role. Nevertheless, where churches are engaged in working to address social problems, this allows those engaged in this work to speak with a voice that is informed by practice, both speaking up on behalf of those with whom they are working, and also bringing those who are marginalised into the political arena to speak for themselves. As noted above (at p111), St Margaret's supports the work of the local food bank. Following on from this, St Margaret's has become involved with the work of the Glasgow Interfaith Food Justice Network. This network supports the work of faith communities across the city that support people facing food insecurity. As well as supporting the work of the groups, the network has been active in campaigning for a Good Food Nation Bill, to establish a food system founded on principles of social and environmental justice. The network also works to raise awareness of food insecurity, and for the past two years has held "One Big Picnic", an event in Glasgow city centre offering free food and fun activities. St Margaret's fair trade team joined in the second of these events, with a homemade cake stall. More locally, St Margaret's is working with the food bank

and other local community groups to survey issues of food insecurity in the local area, in order to campaign effectively on local need.

Making common ground, finding sacred space

Returning to Rumsey's concept of "common ground", the different ideas offered by the participants for engaging with the local neighbourhood represent different opportunities for building common ground with local residents through shared activities. While Rumsey identifies the potential for the physical place of the parish to become common ground, the perspectives of the participants demonstrate the potential for not only the building, but also shared concerns around social action and social to become sites of common ground. A congregation may find common ground in working with others in the local area to meet the needs of the local community, whether general needs for social engagement or specific needs that particular people or groups have, and also in joining with others in speaking up on wider issues of justice. In these cases it is the shared activity that becomes the common ground, albeit that the activity may be located in a place. In the case of St Margaret's, the congregation has found common ground in serving the community through supporting the work of the community hub and the foodbank, both located in the neighbourhood of the congregation.

The question remains of how to hold sacred space alongside the common ground when going out into the neighbourhood and engaging around shared social concerns. In order to respond to this, it is helpful to turn to the work of John Inge, who offers a sacramental understanding of place. Inge identifies the significance of place in the Old Testament as the site of meeting between God and the world (Inge 2003, 46). In the coming of Christ, God redeems all of space and time. It is no longer in a place, but in the person of Christ that God meets humanity. Nevertheless, place is still significant as Jesus takes on human form, incarnate in a particular place. (Inge 2003, 52). Place is thus understood as sacramental: if a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an invisible grace, then any place where grace is received can become sacramental. This is not in the sense that all of creation reveals God as a testimony to God's creative power in a general way, but in a more particular sense as God reveals God's self to people in particular places (Inge 2003, 67). A place where we experience God

can itself can become a sign of our encounter with God. Inge emphasises that it is not simply the presence of God that makes the place sacred, but the accepting faith of the person receiving God's grace in that place (Inge 2003, 81). Such holy places may be particular to an individual or be shared by a community and designated over time as holy places. They serve as a sign of God's continuing presence on earth: "the role of such places is to root believers in their faith and point them towards the redemption of all places in Christ" (Inge 2003, 86).

With this sacramental understanding of place, then, sacred space cannot be created, but rather space can be made for the possibility of a sacred encounter in a place. In Stringer's study of the experience of worship discussed in chapter four (at p63), the memories built around a repeated ritual of worship and encounter with God could build up significance over time. Muskett offered an example of how a church building can hold sacred space and common ground together at the same time. How to make space for the sacred when engaging in shared activities is not as obvious. Nevertheless, reflecting on the third and fourth marks of mission, Christians should recognise these shared activities as participation in God's mission of redeeming creation. If these activities are recognised as not simply good works, but as God's work, then Christians may be more open to encountering God in these activities and so finding sacred space.

Conclusion

Church buildings can be a gift for a congregation wishing to engage with its local neighbourhood, but they can also be a burden. The building may be a symbol in the local area of the presence of the church, and also a resource to be shared with local people. Nevertheless, the building can constrain the congregation by its location, and will inevitably be a drain on resources itself. The participants of the study identified something of both the gift and the burden in St Margaret's church building. It was acknowledged to be a landmark in the local area, known and appreciated by residents, but participants also acknowledged that the building was a place that people passed by, rather than came in. Even those that came in to use the building for activities generally did so on a transactional basis, without engaging with the congregation. This perception of

the building was paralleled by participants' perception of the engagement between the church and community more generally, with the church seen as an institution that most people were aware of, and may even have an appreciation of, but with which they have no meaningful relationship. Participants offered different reasons for this. Some participants identified the competing opportunities in people's lives for social activity, while others pointed to a cultural disconnect between churches and their social context.

This disconnect was recognised by participants, but most also offered a vision for bridging this disconnect. This was strongly focused around social action; in some cases this was local action serving the needs of those living close to the church building, and in others it focused on taking action on broader social justice issues. Participants acknowledged that human need may be more hidden in a middle class area such as where St Margaret's is located, but were still able to identify groups who may need support, such as older people in the area. This identified need matched well with the informal support that participants had already recognised was given by the congregation to its members in previous chapters (at p77) which offered a good basis for developing activities to meet this need. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged constraints to developing activities. These included the need for people to commit time and energy, which was discussed in chapter five (at p83) and also the constraints of the building. Both of these limitations might be reduced if neighbouring congregations were to come together to develop activities, or join with local community groups who are already serving the neighbourhood, two things which St Margaret's have begun to do in the period since the data were gathered. The three participants who advocated more engagement with issues of social justice came from different political perspectives, but shared a desire for the church to be more engaged with what one termed as issues that were *"political with a small p"*.

These two strands of social engagement demonstrate spiritual and religious capital. The motivation expressed by the participants resonate with two of the five marks of mission; to respond to human need by loving service; and to seek to transform unjust structures of society. The participants' experiences of the congregation as a community provided a practical basis for developing activities to meet the need. This offers a basis for a congregation to develop its

engagement with the community that is rooted in the mission of the church, and building on the strengths of the congregation.

Chapter seven - conclusions

Introduction

Through my research, I set out to explore the question: "What is the continuing role of traditional congregations, in a Scottish suburban context, in the twenty-first century?" My perspective in exploring this question has been that of a non-stipendiary priest working in a traditional gathered congregation that is part of the Scottish Episcopal Church, located in the south side of Glasgow. It is apparent that many parish churches in towns and cities in the UK are increasingly operating in ways that share characteristics with gathered congregations, but the model of the gathered congregation has received much less attention in the literature.

I wanted to explore my question by conducting a congregational study, in order to gain the perspectives of members of the congregation on what the congregation offers them and the neighbourhood. To do this, I used a methodology that was phenomenological, interpretative, and ideographic, which has allowed me both to present the experiences of the members of a particular congregation, and also to reflect critically on their experiences in the light of wider literature. On the basis of this study, it is evident that such congregations have something significant to offer, both to those that attend the congregation and to the neighbourhood in which the congregation is located. The interviews I conducted gave me an understanding of what the participants valued in being part of a traditional gathered congregation, and also how they perceived the congregation engaging with the place where it is located. In turn, this has enabled me to identify insights from the participants' experience in order to transform practice within a traditional congregation, whether a parish or a gathered congregation. This thesis therefore provides a contribution to the ongoing theological discussion as to how traditional congregations can operate alongside fresh expressions in the mixed economy of church.

When I came to write up my conclusions, I found myself in a very different context from when I began my research. On 23 March 2020, the UK went into a

lockdown as a response to the developing coronavirus pandemic. All public worship and most other church-based activities were cancelled, and even when public worship became permitted again, on a limited basis, many other congregational activities remained prohibited. I have not discussed the impact of the pandemic in the preceding three chapters, where I analysed the data from my research, instead analysing those data against the background of the social context in which the interviews were conducted. Nevertheless, while churches will hopefully, in time, be able to return to the breadth of activities that were taking place prior to the lockdown, congregations will not be unaffected. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore how lockdown has impacted traditional congregations, and in chapters four to six I have discussed the data in the pre-COVID19 context in which it was gathered. In this chapter, however, I will include some reflections on the impact of COVID19 on congregations within my reflections on the findings.

In chapters four to six, I presented a discussion of the data in relation the three overarching themes that emerged from the interviews. In this chapter I will bring these findings together to reflect on the question I set at the start of the study, that is, what is the continuing role of traditional congregations, in a Scottish suburban context, in the twenty-first century, and I will show what contribution this study is making to congregational studies and a range of related disciplines. I will begin with some reflections on my methodology, and then I will consider what has been learned from my study.

Reflecting on the methodology

As discussed in chapter three (at p29) a congregational study can have an intrinsic or an extrinsic purpose. My study has both. It has an extrinsic purpose, that of contributing to a theological discussion on the ongoing role of traditional congregations. Nevertheless, my study has an intrinsic aspect also, presenting the experience of the participants and discerning the theology articulated in their descriptions of their experience, in order to bring these voices into the theological conversation. The study was designed to ensure that my reflections

on the theological question would be rooted in what I learnt by listening to those who chose to be members of the congregation.

In chapter three, I made reference to Astley and Christie's argument that all those in leadership in the church should be attending to ordinary theology:

> We need to know about the beliefs and values of those for whom we care and those who are forced to listen to *us*, and get some sort of handle on their patterns and modes of thinking, believing and valuing. And the only way to do that is to listen. (Astley and Christie 2007, 5)

I wanted my reflections on the question to be based on listening to members of the congregation, and I selected a methodology that was relatively new to practical theology, but that I believed would enable me to achieve this. IPA is a methodology that makes a distinction between the experience as articulated by the participant, and the interpretation of that experience by the researcher in conversation with wider academic discourse. As a methodology for a congregational study, then, it enables the researcher to present the experience of the participants in their own words, and then to discern the theology that is articulated in these words, in order to allow their experience to engage with academic theological voices. My description of what it means to be a member of St Margaret's, is, as far as possible, presented through the experiences of those who attend there. No study remains unaffected by the researcher, however hard she tries, but the methodology offers a clarity to the process which hopefully enables the reader to hear and understand the experiences of the participants themselves. My study has, therefore, confirmed the value of IPA as a methodology for congregational studies and for practical theology.

As noted above (at p63) the study would have been enriched by extending the conversation with my participants, that is, by building in an additional stage in which I discussed my findings with the participants, either individually or as a group. This would have strengthened the research, and would have allowed me to further refine my findings. It would also have offered the participants further opportunities to reflect for themselves, individually and together as members of

a congregation, and to allow this reflection to transform their own practice. If I were conducting a future study using IPA, I would include this additional stage if possible.

When I began my research, I chose not to use the methodology of action research, in part because I was concerned that it would be more challenging to present my contribution to the research for the purposes of the thesis within the context of a collaborative piece of work (above, at p xx). While I remain content with my choice of IPA as a methodology, I have changed my view on the challenges presented by conducting a piece of collaborative work. The purpose of ordinary theology is to first present, and then dialogue with, the theology of Christians with no academic theological training, which is necessarily a collaborative task. IPA rightly calls on the researcher to bracket her own perspective when seeking to present the experiences of the participants. However, when interpreting these experiences, and in order to demonstrate her reflexivity, she must articulate her point of view and make her voice clear. The question is not, then, whether to conduct collaborative research. The question is, as my maths teacher used to ask repeatedly of the class: "have you shown your working?!" A clear methodology, articulated throughout the research, allows all the voices – the participants, the researcher, and the wider literature – to be heard, and also gives enough information for the reader to bring their own interpretation, and so to join in the conversation.

Reflecting on the findings

This study has identified important aspects of what it means to be a local gathered congregation, which is a significant contribution to the literature responding to *MSC*, particularly that which considers the ongoing place of the parish in the mixed economy of church. *MSC* offered a model of the mixed economy, with fresh expressions operating alongside, and in partnership with, traditional parish congregations. This model, though not without critique, has received broad acceptance in many UK churches as a way forward for churches in the twenty-first century. *MSC* itself did not discuss how parish church

congregations might need to adapt to operate in this mixed economy of church, neither did it discuss the model of the gathered congregation. Following *MSC* the literature has begun to address both of these, as discussed in chapter two. In the mixed economy of church, traditional congregations cannot assume that they will continue to operate in the same way that they did in the twentieth century, and that it is for fresh expressions alone to respond to the changing social patterns of life in the twenty-first century. In urban contexts at least, the distinction between the parish and the gathered congregation is becoming one of degree rather than of kind. Parish churches are still a part of their community, but they are no longer at the heart of it, and they need to find new ways to engage with people in the local area, who increasingly have no sense of connection with the church. At the same time, those who do gather to worship are often drawn from a wider area than the parish, and are involved in multiple networks, of place and interest. Traditional churches need to find a way to be responsive to their social context while remaining faithful to the tradition they have inherited.

What, then, do traditional congregations have to offer in their local context? In my study I found a picture of a gathered worshipping community that was committed to God and to one another, but also concerned for the needs of their local area and beyond. The ongoing role of the traditional church, then, is to serve the needs of those who choose to gather there, and in turn to support these people to worship God, to serve one another, and to serve others. They have a ministry to both the congregation that gather to worship, often from a wider geographical area than the locality of the church, and also the place where the congregation is located. Traditional congregations have to consider how they can remain faithful to their inherited traditions, while also being responsive to their social context, within a mixed economy of church.

Gathering

Within my study, participants described the significance of their experience of welcome in the congregation, as well as their desire to offer this welcome to all

who come. They did not view it as an exclusive community, but as a place where they had received a welcome which they wanted in turn to offer to others who came along. This study has demonstrated the potential of the local church to offer welcome and friendliness to all, as Bayes and Sledge (2006, 80) identified; something distinctive in an increasingly fragmented society. In the context of the mixed economy of church it is particularly significant that the local church continues to offer this inclusive welcome. One of Davison and Milbank's critiques of fresh expressions of church is that they risk separating people into groups according to their identity (Davison and Milbank 2010, 166): against this backdrop, the welcoming and inclusive space offered by the local church becomes particularly important. Nevertheless, it cannot be taken for granted that a local congregation is offering this welcome, or enabling relationships to develop and grow. Aisthorpe observes that one of the main reasons given for leaving a congregation was a lack of a sense of belonging (Aisthorpe 2016, 83). Those who gathered at St Margaret's emphasised their experience of this welcome, but two also described their contrasting experiences in previous congregations, which had caused them to leave. This demonstrates the importance for congregations of attending in a reflective way to the welcome, both the initial contact when people come in, and the culture in the congregation that encourages a sense of belonging. It is important here to acknowledge that my study explored the experiences of those who had chosen to remain in the congregation, and so did not include the perspectives of those who have, over the years, left the congregation. This highlights the importance of bringing together the learning from studies such as this one, which hears from people who choose to stay in a congregation, with studies such as Aisthorpe's, which hears from people who choose to leave congregations.

For some participants in the study the congregation was a major part of their lives, for others it was more marginal, but for all, the relationships formed in the congregation were a valued part of their social network. As noted in chapter five it was beyond the scope of the study to analyse the different levels of relationship within the congregation, however, the study did suggest that a congregation will be constituted by a variety of different relationships; from

acquaintances to social networks to close friends, reflecting the different types of relationships described in Dunbar's layers (at p78). As such, a gathered congregation is a site of both bonding capital, strengthening relationships of those who consider themselves to be part of a shared group, and bridging capital, bringing together those who might otherwise see themselves as different. The various relationships in the congregation all provide a valuable social function, and a fruitful area for further study would be to consider the variety of social relationships in a local congregation, and both the benefits and the challenges of these different relationships.

One area that could be of particular interest to research further is the benefit of "weak ties" or acquaintance relationships, that is, those people who only have contact with one another at church, but value this contact. Sandstrom and Dunn's research highlighted the positive impact that these relationships can have on a sense of subjective wellbeing and belonging (Sandstrom and Dunn 2014, 919), and it would be valuable to find out more about how such relationships in a congregation can contribute both to individuals' wellbeing and to the wellbeing of the whole community. This may have particular significance given the challenges of the past year, when much congregational activity has either been cancelled or gone online due to the legal restrictions around gathering. One consequence of this has been that the informal spaces for encounter before and after the service have been significantly limited. During the summer and autumn when restrictions were partially eased, places of worship became one of the very few indoor places where people from different households could come together without cost.[27] As research is conducted into the impact of lockdown on congregational life, it will be important to include a focus on the impact of the loss of these informal interactions on members of the congregation.

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[27] The only other place I could think of was a museum or art gallery; all other places where people could meet indoors, such as cafes or cinemas, required payment.

Worshipping

If a congregation is a form of voluntary association, then the aspect of a congregation that makes it distinctive from other associations is the fact that people are gathering to worship God. This is what has drawn these people together – they may have other things in common, but the reason that they are all part of this congregation is that they want to worship God together, in this way and in this place. That is not to say that everyone valued the same aspects of the worship. There were inevitably aspects of the service that participants had differing views on, because, as Perham observes, there is always an element of compromise in liturgy, if it is to find a form that will enable a collective experience that is satisfying for all (Perham 2000, 3). This is one of the reasons why, as Astley and Christie point out (at p32), those who are leading congregations should ensure that they listen to those who have to listen to them. A worship leader is not performing for the benefit of a gathered audience, but rather bringing the congregation together in a shared act.

For the participants in my study, the sense of being an active participant in the service was significant, and the liturgical form of worship enabled this. Worship was not something that was separate from the rest of the life of the congregation, but was integral to it. Worshipping together enhanced the relationships in the congregation, both the sense of connectedness engendered by worshipping together, and the ability to make personal connections and build relationships in the informal shared time before and after the formal act of worship. The worship also helped shape the relationship between the congregation and its members, and the rest of the world, offering a different vision of how life could be. During the lockdown, many churches moved to worshipping together online, and as the restrictions ease, some churches are looking to continue some aspects of their worship life online. For example, when the church buildings closed in March 2020, St Margaret's moved morning prayer, which had been conducted on weekdays in the church building, onto

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Zoom.[28] Attendance rose from 3-4 up to 10-12 people, with most of those attending taking part in the liturgy, and this has continued post-lockdown. It is likely that many congregations will have found some aspects of congregational life and worship that can be usefully conducted online, and this is already the subject of research.[29] In conducting this research, it will be important to consider the value for (at least some) worshippers of being active participants in the worship event, and to consider ways that this may be possible when worshipping online.

As Perham observed, there is an element of compromise in worship, but this is not – or at least should not be – a question of finding the lowest common denominator. It should be a process of collaboration between all involved, those leading and those participating, in order to develop an order of worship that best meets the aspirations of those that gather together. It is surprising therefore that there has not been more research into the experience of worshippers. It could be that, in a desire to maintain a focus on the centrality of God in worship, and in a reaction against a consumer society which evaluates much in terms of user satisfaction, the question of the experience of worshippers has been neglected. My study has demonstrated the worth of attending to this experience, both to understand how worship constitutes the community of the congregation, and also in order to develop that collaborative approach to the understanding of worship.

Serving one another

It was evident from my study that those who gather in the congregation wanted to contribute to the life and work of the congregation, both to the practical tasks needing done in order for the congregation to operate, and also witnessing to God's love in the local area and beyond. In exploring the participants' responses, I found the field of voluntary sector studies a useful partner for

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[28] St Margaret's did not conduct a Sunday service online, but instead joined with the SEC provincial service, which was available on YouTube and Facebook.
[29] For example, see the work of the Centre for Digital Theology at Durham University: Centre for Digital Theology - Durham University (accessed on 6 June 2021).

conversation, particularly when considering the ways that members of the congregation contributed to the life of the congregation, both in terms of practical tasks and relationships. There is a wealth of literature in this field, including both research into volunteering, and also practice models for supporting and developing teams of volunteers, that is of value to those who are managing and supporting the volunteer activity in the congregation.

Nevertheless, it is also apparent from the study that those who volunteered to take on these tasks had a distinct, faith-based motivation for doing so. None of the participants in the study who spoke about volunteering for roles within the congregation described themselves as volunteers. Their willingness to take on tasks to contribute to the life of the congregation, both formally and informally, came out of a commitment to the congregation as a group, and a commitment to one another, including a sense of their shared journey of faith. The congregation is not therefore a place that people come in order simply to receive, but a place of reciprocity, where each brings their own contribution to serve the good of the whole group. This connects with Aisthorpe's observation that one of the reasons given by people for leaving a congregation is not feeling welcomed (at p76). It is therefore important for congregational leaders to acknowledge the roles that members play in the life of the congregation, both formal and informal. Leaders should affirm these as part of individuals' faith journeys and discern opportunities for members of the congregation to take on roles in the congregation, equipping and encouraging them in carrying out these roles. In doing so, the church will not only be sustaining the organisation, but will be building up the faith of each member, and fostering a sense of shared discipleship through journeying together and ministering to one another.

Serving others

This study displayed both a disconnect between the congregation and the local area where it is situated, and also the desire of the participants to rebuild connections with those living in the area. The desire to connect was framed around engagement with social issues: for some, this focused on the needs of

those living in the local area; for others there was a concern to engage with wider issues of social justice. What these concerns share is a desire to transform the world, whether effecting change for individuals in need or challenging structural issues of inequality. This desire for transformation was acknowledged by some participants in their discussion of their experience of worship as a space that offers a different vision of what life is about and where prayers are made to God to bring about that transformation. The concern for others is also consistent with the description of the congregation as a community where people support one another's personal and practical needs.

Will Foulger, in considering how the principle of the parish can be maintained, asks how a church can become present in a particular place (Foulger 2018, 193). Listening to the participants in this study offers a picture of a congregation where those who gather find a benefit in being part of a group, and want to share that benefit with those around them. They wish to do so both as an expression of human concern for others who may be in need of help, and also as an expression of their faith in a God who calls them to love their neighbour. The concept of spiritual capital as described by Baker and Skinner (at p26) describes a distinct form of social capital, which is demonstrated in this study, and offers a way for congregations to think about building connections in their local area.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that, while my study focused on the relationship between the congregation and its local area, members of the congregation are also involved in other communities. For those who live at a distance from the church, this will include the area local to their home. Moreover, all the members of the congregation will be connected with a variety of networks; some local, some further afield, some online. While the focus of my study was on engagement in the area local to the church building, it is important also to acknowledge that members of a local church live out their faith in the various different localities to which they are connected and networks in which they are involved, and that they are encouraged and equipped for this. Further research is needed to explore the impact of such tensions on congregations, and this could usefully include further inquiry into how members

of local churches are serving in places and networks beyond the locality of their church, and how their congregation is supporting - or does not support - them in this.

One way in which congregations have potentially become more engaged in their local area during the COVID19 pandemic is in responding to the immediate social needs created by lockdown. Across the country, local communities have been coming together to identify and meet the needs of those in their local area, and church congregations have been part of this. A survey of local authorities across the UK found that, during the time of the lockdown, there had been an increase in partnership work between local authorities and faith community groups, and through this the relationships between faith communities and local authorities had been strengthened (APPG Faith and Society 2021, 3). At St Margaret's, a significant focus of my own activity while the church was closed, involved working with other congregations and community groups in order to support community responses to local need arising from the lockdown, particularly around emergency food distribution. The recovery work in the months ahead as the nation moves out of lockdown will offer an opportunity to build on these developing partnerships. It would be valuable in further research to identify what has worked well in practice, and how this can be built upon.

A local church, a gathered people

My study has presented a picture of a traditional congregation that is, by its nature, a gathered congregation and not a parish church, but which is nevertheless located in, and seeking to serve, a particular locality. It is striking, however, that – at least in urban settings - parish churches are increasingly operating with some characteristics that are more typical of gathered congregations. People do not always attend their nearest church, but are more likely to choose to attend a particular congregation, whether in their local area or further afield. Those living in the local area who do not attend the church are less and less likely to have any significant connection with their parish church, whether as an occasional place of worship, or of social interaction. The

distinction between gathered and parish congregations is becoming one of degree rather than of kind, and going forward it may be useful to move away from this distinction. Instead, as Percy suggests (at p20), it may be better to speak about the local church, in its traditional inherited forms, changing and adapting as it ever has, and working in partnership with other churches, both traditional and fresh expressions in a mixed economy, to serve the needs of those who gather there to worship and to witness to God's love in the local area. This contrasts with Davison and Milbank's argument to preserve the current form of the parish church. This is not to say that the type of parish church that Davison and Milbank are defending does not have its place within the mixed economy of church. However, as Atkins observes, the essence of the church lies not in its traditions and structures, but in its expression of God's character and participation in God's mission (at p14).

A key shift in the move to the model of the local church is the shift in the relationship between the congregation and the people living in the local area. In previous generations, more people living in a particular area would have made use of their parish church for either religious or social purposes, even if just occasionally. This relationship is captured in Cameron's analogy of the parish as a public utility (at p8). This analogy captures the sense of availability and comprehensive coverage of the parish system, however, it no longer expresses the relationship between the providers and the users of the service, that is, the parish church and the residents in the parish. Public utilities administer services which are natural monopolies and that everyone in the population must use, such as the police service, road and rail infrastructure, or the electricity grid. A parish system may endeavour to provide full coverage across a nation, but there is no compulsion on the residents to make use of it. For most people living in a local area, the parish church has no particular significance, but rather is one of many community groups in a local area of which they may or may not choose to make use.

Cameron's analogy for the gathered congregation, that of the voluntary association, offers a model that better describes both those churches that have

traditionally offered a parish-based ministry, and those which have operated as gathered congregations. Cameron notes that voluntary associations can be classified into member-benefit and public-benefit organisations, and that many associations have elements of both (Cameron 2010, 27). This active choice to become part of a worshipping community is acknowledged in the model of voluntary association, recognising that the congregation has a particular community of people who choose to worship there with some degree of regularity, who give of their resources, both time and money, to support the community, and have some sense of connectedness to the other people who gather to worship. The public-benefit aspect of the association captures the aspiration of the congregation to make itself available to those beyond its membership, both by welcoming others in to worship and congregational life, and through expressing concern for the wellbeing of others in prayer and social action, and so bearing witness to God's love in the place the church is located.

This public-benefit dimension of the life of the congregation can be seen in what Davie's concept of vicarious religion. In chapter two (at p21) I noted the tension between Grace Davie's claim that vicarious religion was practised on behalf of, and with the implicit approval of, those who did not attend the congregation, and her acknowledgement that going to church had become a voluntary matter. As discussed in chapter six, many people outside the church simply do not feel it is relevant to their lives. They may have no problem with what churches are doing, but they probably have no sense that it relates to them in any way. Vicarious religion may not, then, be being conducted with the approval of those outwith the church: after all, how can they approve of that of which they do not know? Nevertheless, that does not prevent it being conducted on their behalf. The local church has a commitment to people who live in its area, whether or not they are members, and whether or not they are aware of it. This is made evident in the offer of welcome to all when the congregation gather to worship. It is also evident in the course of that worship, as the words of the sermon and the prayers direct the attention of the worshippers beyond the walls of the church building to the world around them, and it is evident in the way that congregations wish to serve the needs of those in their neighbourhood, and to

join with those outwith the church in doing so. This understanding of vicarious religion would refine its claim to being religion practised on behalf of the wider population and available to them, as a witness to them of God's loving kindness and saving grace. This is demonstrated through the local church praying for its neighbourhood, inviting and welcoming local people to become part of the life of the congregation, and going out to join with local people to meet the needs of the neighbourhood.

The local church is available to all in its local area. Nevertheless, the local church is also a gathered people, a particular group of people that do not necessarily live in the local area, but choose to worship in this place and are committed to the life of the congregation. It is their desire to worship God that brings them together: they value the particular style of worship, which draws them close to God and also helps form them into a community; they are committed to the life of the worshipping community and to one another; and they desire to serve the world around them in God's name, both in the local area and beyond. Percy has suggested (at p19) that the type of communities that modern parish churches developed to serve, no longer exist as they did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This changes the relationship between the church and its local area, and it also changes the relationship between the church and its gathered people. The congregation of a traditional church will typically be a mixture of people living locally and those from further afield, who have chosen to be a part of this congregation for a mixture of theological or personal reasons. The people in the congregation form a network of strong and weak ties, with various degrees of relationship to one another, but all belonging to this worshipping community, brought together fundamentally by their desire to worship God in this place, in this way. Each of these people will also be involved in a variety of networks and places where they live out their lives, and where they live out their faith.

While urban parish congregations increasingly share characteristics with gathered congregations, Foulger argues that the church should maintain the parish principle, that is, "the ministry of presence in a place" (Foulger 2018,

13). This offers a way for the local church to hold on to the incarnational model of the parish, with the universal offer of God's love made particular to these people in this place, as it adapts to the new relationship between the congregation and its local area. Foulger emphasises that this is not achieved by the local church simply being located in a particular place, but that the church must become present by growing and nurturing relationships. In urban settings, where local people often do not have any sense of connection with the local church, it may be that the congregation can find ways to share their building with the community, to create common ground with one another. Alternatively, it may be that the congregation and the local residents have shared concerns, particularly around social issues, that can become common ground for action.

Alongside the witness that the local church is in its area, each member witnesses to God's love in all the places they go day by day. A key task of the local church is therefore to equip its people to be witnesses in all of these places, in what they say and do. Foulger's principle of "the ministry of presence in a place" offers a way for the people who gather to think of their own ministry, both within the congregation and in the various networks of which they are a part. The church is present in the place when the people gather, and it is present in many places when its people go out. As the people gather, they minister to one another as they share their journey of discipleship together, and they participate in the witnessing presence of the church in its local area. As they go out, they continue to bear witness to God's love in the various places they are present day by day. In this way the witness of the local church is woven into the fabric of God's world.

Chapter eight – afterword

"I've finished," I said to my mum. "Well, I've sort of finished, I mean, I still need to do some tweaks, and final edits …"

Mum smiled and said "Well, as your dad said to all his doctoral students, you never really finish a thesis, you just get to a point when you are ready to hand it in."

I have come to that point now, and it has brought me full circle, from practice to theory and back to practice again. This is the journey that Don Browning advocates, in his seminal work *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (1991). Browning describes how our theological questions are shaped by practice. We begin by describing our practices, and then bringing the questions that arise from this into conversation with our theological texts. In this way, insights from practice can influence theory, and in turn insights from theory can lead to a transformed practice (Browning 1991, 6). The journey of this thesis began in practice, as I reflected on the situation of the congregation where I was working, and the thesis presents the practice-theory conversation that emerged from this question, and the insights for practice that emerge from this conversation. The thesis has demonstrated how my understanding of the role of the traditional church, and its practices, has been shaped by listening to the participants in the study. At the same time, my own personal practice as a priest has been affected by what I have heard from the participants.

As Astley and Christie say, it is important that those who are in positions of leadership take time to listen to those who have to listen to us (Astley and Christie 2007, 5). The process of carrying out the interviews brought me back to the fundamental value of simply listening. This was one of the first lessons I learnt as a social worker. When I left my first job, one of the young people I had worked with said she liked working with me because I actually listened to her, and I held on to her comment going forward in my work. But the listening of a social worker can slip into being a task focused listening, as these conversations are part of a situation that at some level requires a solution. In the interviews

for this study, I asked questions, and then sat back and listened. And when I listened, the participants talked. They offered me the gift of sharing their stories, and in listening I received both the gift of the stories, and the reminder of the lesson that young person taught me many years before, to listen, and to hear what people were actually saying, not what I am expecting them to say. As I have spent so much time with these words, listening to them and reading them over and over again, they have impacted on my own faith, and my expression of this in the worshipping community. One example that sticks in my mind is that of John's comments about the eucharist: *"I'm a great person for visualising things and almost having Jesus there at the altar with [the priest and servers]."* I have often thought of this comment since, when I was standing behind the communion table, particularly on days when I was feeling in any way inadequate or unworthy. I would remember John's comment that Jesus was there with me, and so my understanding of the presence of Christ at the eucharist has been enriched by John's words.

One of the most important lessons that my journey from practice to theory to practice has clarified for me is that I am a researching professional, rather than a professional researcher. In this thesis I have argued for traditional parish congregations to reimagine themselves as local churches with gathered congregations, operating within a mixed economy of church. I will be taking these insights into a new job, working with a presbytery of the Church of Scotland in Ayrshire. A year ago, the presbytery invited its congregations to come up with proposals for pioneering missional projects to grow new expressions of church alongside the existing traditional congregations, with a vision to establish a witnessing and worshipping community in every locality in the presbytery in the next ten years. The team of mission pioneers that I am leading will be seeking to establish new worshipping communities, some committed to a local area, and others reaching out to communities of interest. They will work in partnership with members of the parish congregations to develop their mission initiatives, and at the same time the pioneer team will be a resource to the parishes, offering training and development to assist the parish congregations to grow their own missional vision and activities. It is a bold

vision, and I am excited to be bringing all that I have learned from this research into my new role, bringing the theory to a new practice situation. And in due course, I trust, this practice situation will spark new questions in me that will bring me back again to theory, to test and evaluate what we are doing in our practice. And so the cycle continues, from practice to theory to practice, from practice to theory to practice, over and over again.

Information for potential participants in research

This information sheet has been written to answer any questions you may have about taking part in this research. Please take time to read this information and ask any further questions you may have or if anything is unclear.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to understand the experience of members of St Margaret's, at a point when the leadership team is seeking to develop the mission of the church to respond to its changing social context. It will also contribute to a wider theological discussion on whether traditional forms of church are equipped to respond to their changing social contexts.

Who is organising the research?

The research is being conducted by Rev'd Maggie McTernan as part of her Doctorate in Practical Theology at the University of Glasgow. The research is being overseen by Rev'd Dr Charlotte Methuen, and has been approved by the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee. The vestry of St Margaret's has also given permission for the research to take place, at its meeting of 8 October 2015.

Why have I been asked to take part?

A number of members of the congregation at St Margaret's will be interviewed for the study. Potential participants have been selected in order to give a representative sample of the congregation. Rev'd Dr Scott Robertson, Rector of St Margaret's is managing the selection of participants. Maggie will not be given the names of potential participants who chose not to take part, but only those who do wish to take part.

Do I have to take part?

No you don't. It is up to you whether you wish to agree to take part in the research. If you do choose to take part, you can withdraw consent at any point up to the submission of the thesis, and you do not need to give any reason.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The research outcomes will be shared with the vestry and congregation of St Margaret's, and more widely within the SEC, and will help the church to reflect on future directions. After submitting the thesis, Maggie may also seek to publish the outcomes of the research in an academic journal, to contribute to wider theological debate on the contemporary church. Hopefully you will find it rewarding to have your contributions recognised within this research, and to contribute to reflection on the future direction of the church.

What does taking part mean?

Maggie will meet with you and go over the aims of the research, how the interview will take place, and answer any questions you have. At this point you will be asked to sign a consent form, which is attached.

Maggie will then conduct an interview which will be audio recorded. This can take place at St Margaret's, or at another neutral venue, whichever you prefer. It will last round about an hour, though it may be longer, depending on how much you want to say. You will be invited to talk about:

- What is your experience of being a member of St Margaret's?
- How do you understand the relationship between St Margaret's and the rest of your life, e.g. family, work, social activities?
- How do you understand the relationship between St Margaret's and its local neighbourhood?
- How do you perceive St Margaret's response to any changes in this relationship?

It is up to you how much you want to say about these topics, and if anything comes up that you find upsetting, you do not have to talk about it.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is up to you what you decide to talk about during the interview. However, it may be that, in talking about your experience in the church, this will bring up painful memories or uncomfortable feelings. If anything difficult comes up in the interview, Maggie will discuss with you any support you might wish to deal with this.

What happens to the interviews?

After the interview takes place, Maggie will give the audio recording to Ruth Downes, a professional transcriber, who will make a written transcript of the interview. She will not keep any copies of the interview. Both audio and written records will be stored securely on password protected files, and only Maggie will have access. After the thesis is completed, the interviews and transcripts will be securely stored for ten years, just in case there is any need to review Maggie's thesis.

Is the information confidential?

It is hoped that the research will be shared with the wider church and academic community, so the information you give is likely to end up in the public domain. However, anything you ask to remain confidential will do so. The only exception to this is if you say anything that suggests that you, or anyone else, is at significant risk. In that case, Maggie will share the information with Scott, and with any relevant public agencies.

Will my name be used in the study?

The research is taking place within a small community, and its benefit comes from giving a detailed description of the perspective of the participants. It is possible that someone reading the research who is familiar with St Margaret's would be able to guess who the research participants are, even if they were anonymised. For this reason, participants are not being offered anonymity. This

means that your first name will be used in writing about the research. However, if you would like a different name used, that will be done.

What do I do if I am unhappy about the process of the research?

You can discuss with Maggie any issues that arise along the way. If you prefer, you can contact Charlotte Methuen, Academic Supervisor, or Scott Robertson, Rector, to discuss your concerns.

Scott:
St Margaret's Newlands
353-355 Kilmarnock Road
Glasgow G43 2DS

revscottrobertson@gmail.com

Charlotte:
Theology and Religious Studies
4 The Square
University of Glasgow

charlotte.methuen@glasgow.ac.uk

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

Consent to participate in research

I understand that Maggie McTernan is collecting data in the form of taped interviews for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

See attached information sheet for further information on the aims, scope and method of the research.

I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:

- The data will not be anonymised; however, I will have the opportunity to review my contribution prior to submission of the thesis to ensure accuracy.
- The recording and transcript of the interview will be treated as confidential and will be kept in secure storage at all times.
- The interview and transcript will be securely stored for ten years subsequent to submission of the thesis.
- The material produced for the thesis may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor:_____ Date:

Contact Details

Researcher: Maggie McTernan – m.mcternan.1@research.gla.ac.uk
St Margaret's Newlands
353-355 Kilmarnock Road
Glasgow G43 2DS

Supervisor: Charlotte Methuen – charlotte.methuen@glasgow.ac.uk
Theology and Religious Studies
4 The Square,
University of Glasgow

Introduction

Check whether the participant has any questions from the information

Review

- anonymity
- process of review

Interview Principles

- I will ask you a series of questions - the first group of questions will focus on your experience of St Margaret's, and the second group of questions will look at the relationship between church and society.
- I will be taking some notes as we go, in case I want to come back and follow up on any things you say.
- There are not right or wrong answers, I am looking to get your point of view, your experience of being a part of the congregation at St Margaret's
- Give as full an answer as you want - even if you think I probably know the answer, tell me anyway - and if you think you've already said it in the interview that's fine, it's okay to repeat things.
- If there is anything you don't want to talk about, just say, and we'll move on.
- If you don't understand what I am asking, tell me, and I'll put my question another way.
- If you want a comfort break at any point, let me know, and
- If you want to end the interview just say, and we can finish.

Tell me what brought you to St Margaret's

- When did you come to St Margaret's?
- What church were you involved in before?
- What made you choose St Margaret's?

Moving on to your experience of St Margaret's, I want you to think about a typical Sunday morning, from when you arrive to when you leave, and all the things that happen, formal and informal. Talk me through a Sunday morning from your point of view, tell me your thoughts and feelings.

- prompt by taking through elements of service
- use copy of liturgy

You may be involved in other activities connected with the life of St Margaret's, both formal and informal - or you may have been involved in things in the past. Again, can you talk me through each of these?

- choir
- vestry
- study groups
- daily prayer
- friendships
- concerts

What does it mean to you to be a part of St Margaret's?

- How does it nurture your faith?
- How would you describe St Margaret's?

We're going to move on to think about St Margaret's in its local context.

- How does your involvement at St Margaret's fit in with the rest of your life?

How do you feel St Margaret's fits in with its local neighbourhood?

- How aware is St Margaret's of the neighbourhood - its assets, its challenges?
- How aware is the neighbourhood of St Margaret's?

Thinking more generally, how relevant do you think local churches are to their social context, to the people and communities around them who are not part of the church?

Looking back over your time in the church - not just St Margaret's but other churches also - has the relationship between the church and society changed?

- What changes have you seen at St Margaret's?
- What changes have you seen in the church in general?
- What changes have taken place in society?
- How well has church kept in step with society, in your experience?

Finally, I'm going to bring us back to St Margaret's. Are there any things you think St Margaret's should be doing at this time, in order to develop its relevance to its neighbourhood?

Appendix three – the SEC Eucharistic Liturgy, as used at St Margaret's during ordinary time.

Before the service the organ plays for about ten minutes.

The service is led by a priest with a deacon and server, or two servers. While the organ is playing, they enter from the sacristy, reverence the altar, and then come to the chancel steps, where the priest offers an informal welcome and a sentence of scripture from one of the readings. They then join the choir at the back of the church, and process in during the processional hymn.

PREPARATION

Welcome

>Grace and peace to you from God our Father
>and the Lord Jesus Christ.
>**Amen.**

Peace

>We meet in Christ's name.
>**Let us share his peace.**

The congregation takes some time to share the peace with one another, typically with a handshake or a hug. The priest and servers go into the congregation to share the peace. At this time, the children leave to go to Sunday School.

Collect for Purity

>Almighty God,
>to whom all hearts are open,
>all desires known,
>and from whom no secrets are hidden:

cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Confession and Absolution

God is love and we are his children.
There is no room for fear in love.
We love because he loved us first.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Silence

God our Father, we confess to you
and to our fellow members in the Body of Christ
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed,
and in what we have failed to do.
We are truly sorry.
Forgive us our sins,
and deliver us from the power of evil,
for the sake of your Son who died for us,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.

God, who is both power and love,
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Gloria

Sung by the choir, with the congregation joining in

> Glory to God in the highest,
>
> and peace to his people on earth.
>
> Lord God, heavenly King,
>
> almighty God and Father,
>
> (with God the Son, Jesus Christ,
>
> and God the Holy Spirit,)
>
> we worship you, we give you thanks,
>
> we praise you for your glory.
>
> Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
>
> Lord God, Lamb of God,
>
> you take away the sin of the world;
>
> have mercy on us;
>
> you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
>
> receive our prayer.
>
> For you alone are the Holy One,
>
> you alone are the Lord,
>
> you alone are the Most High,
>
> Jesus Christ,
>
> with the Holy Spirit,
>
> in the glory of God the Father.
>
> Amen.

Collect of the day

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Old Testament Reading

Epistle

The readings are read by members of the congregation.

Gradual hymn

During the gradual hymn, the priest will take the Gospel book from the altar to the middle of the nave, from where it is read.

Gospel

When it is announced:
Glory to Christ our Saviour.

At end:
Give thanks to the Lord for his glorious Gospel.
Praise to Christ our Lord.

Sermon

The sermon is generally given by one of the priests, although during the summer months it is sometimes given by a member of the congregation.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,

and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again

in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father.

With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Intercessions

The intercessions are generally led by members of the congregation, and occasionally by the priest.

Offertory hymn

During this hymn, the offering is taken and the elements are brought to the front of the church by two members of the congregation.

THE LITURGY OF THE SACRAMENT

The Taking of the Bread and the Wine

Offering

> Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation; through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made: it will become for us the bread of life.
> **Blessed be God for ever.**

> Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation; through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands; it will become the cup of our salvation.
> **Blessed be God for ever.**

The Eucharistic Prayer

There are alternative eucharistic prayers for different seasons.

> The Lord be with you.
> **And also with you.**
> Lift up your hearts.
> **We lift them to the Lord.**
> Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
> **It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

> Worship and praise belong to you, Father,
> in every place and at all times.
> All power is yours.
> You created the heavens and established the earth;
> you sustain in being all that is.

> In Christ your Son our life and yours
> are brought together in a wonderful exchange.
> He made his home among us
> that we might for ever dwell in you.

Through your Holy Spirit
you call us to new birth
in a creation restored by love.

As children of your redeeming purpose
we offer you our praise,
with angels and archangels
and the whole company of heaven,
singing the hymn of your unending glory:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,
God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The sanctus is led by the choir, with the congregation joining in

Glory and thanksgiving be to you,
most loving Father,
for the gift of your Son born in human flesh
He is the Word existing beyond time,
both source and final purpose,
bringing to wholeness all that is made.
Obedient to your will he died upon the Cross.
By your power you raised him from the dead.
He broke the bonds of evil
and set your people free
to be his Body in the world

On the night when he was given up to death,
knowing that his hour had come,

having loved his own,

he loved them to the end.

At supper with his disciples

he took bread and offered you thanks.

He broke the bread,

and gave it to them, saying:

"Take, eat.

This is my Body: it is broken for you."

After supper, he took the cup,

he offered you thanks,

and gave it to them saying:

"Drink this, all of you.

This is my Blood of the new covenant;

it is poured out for you, and for all,

that sins may be forgiven.

Do this in remembrance of me."

We now obey your Son's command.

We recall his blessed passion and death,

his glorious resurrection and ascension;

and we look for the coming of his Kingdom.

Made one with him, we offer you these gifts

and with them ourselves,

a single, holy, living sacrifice.

Hear us, most merciful Father,

and send your Holy Spirit upon us

and upon this bread and this wine,

that, overshadowed by his life-giving power,

they may be the Body and Blood of your Son,

and we may be kindled with the fire of your love

and renewed for the service of your Kingdom.

Help us, who are baptised into the fellowship of Christ's Body
to live and work to your praise and glory;
may we grow together in unity and love
until at last, in your new creation,
we enter into our heritage
in the company of the Virgin Mary,
the apostles and prophets,
and of all our brothers and sisters living and departed.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory be to you,
Lord of all ages,
world without end.
Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

The living bread is broken for the life of the world.
Lord, unite us in this sign.

Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour has taught
us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed he your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Do not bring us
to the time of trial
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.

Amen.

The children rejoin during the eucharistic prayer, generally in time for the Lord's Prayer.

Communion Song

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
grant us peace.

The agnus Dei is sung by the choir with the congregation joining in. During this, the priest and the servers receive communion.

Communion

The choir come forward first, followed by the congregation to the altar rail, from where the priest administers the bread and the server administers the wine. After they have received communion, the choir sing a post-communion hymn which the congregation join in, and then the choir sings an anthem.

At the giving of the bread:
The Body of Christ given for you.

At the giving of the cup:
The Blood of Christ shed for you.

The Communicant replies **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING AND SENDING OUT

Sentence

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious.
And his mercy endures for ever.

Post-communion collect for the day

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your
hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his
Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and
all those you love.
Amen.

*Following the blessing, the priest gives any notices to the congregation, as well
as an invitation to the congregation to go to the hall for tea and coffee.
Occasionally the children at the Sunday School show what they have made at
their lesson. Then the recessional hymn is sung, during which the choir and
clergy process to the back of the church, from where the deacon gives the
dismissal.*

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ.

Amen.

An organ voluntary is played.

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