What Constitutes Fruitful Continuing Ministry Development for Baptist Ministers in Scotland?

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Abstract

This thesis presents a series of discoveries about what has contributed to the continuing development of Baptist ministers in Scotland. Previous scholarship has focused on the initial training of ministers (eg Reber and Reber 2010, Goodliff 2017) and the impact of initial ministry education on ministerial practice in the early years (eg Scharen and Campbell-Reid 2016). Denominations have produced guidance for ministers on how to pursue continuing development (eg Archbishop's Council 2010a, Church of Scotland 2017, Methodist Church 2018) which has been the focus of some evaluative studies (eg Hamill 2010, Wilkin 2014, Clinton, 2016, Denton and Thomas 2017). This research uses narrative inquiry to listen to the way practising ministers describe what has actually been developmental for them over the years and decades of their ministries. Key themes that emerge are the desire for practical wisdom, the importance of communal learning, the impact of development dialogues and the significance of habits. In the light of these discoveries I propose a new way of defining Continuing Ministry Development and make recommendations as to how these could be reflected in the practice of denominations and networks of churches.

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Introduction

Origins

I am distressed when I remember that during 25 years serving local churches as a Baptist minister in Scotland and England, no one ever raised with me the question of continuing ministry development (CMD). It may have been implicit that ministers would be studious, and perhaps even reflective, but I found no explicit expectation and no structured organisational or peer support for lifelong learning and vocational growth.

As it happens, I muddled through. The crowded clutter on my bookshelves grew as I worked my way avidly and randomly through books on theology and ministry. I found my way to some courses and conferences for church leaders, often validated more by the self-proclaimed success stories of church leaders than the rigour of academic inquiry. I persuaded a wise and experienced colleague who lived some distance away to become my mentor and met him monthly at Keele motorway services. I met someone who invited me to join a learning community for church leaders which for two years turbo-charged my enthusiasm and creativity in ministry. I read a book about retreating and decided to give it a go at the local Franciscan monastery. CMD for me was bricolage, grabbing the things I noticed around me and trying to make the most of them.

As time went by I took some training as a mentor and began to support a few colleagues in ministry. Pursuing an MTh provided more structure to my development for a time; a dissertation on preaching helped me find the discipline to organise and own my thinking and the courage to revise my practice. Nevertheless, CMD remained largely a personal interest rather than an expectation of the community of churches to which I belonged.

Gradually the wind changed and most denominations in the UK began to embrace the importance of continuing development for ministers. It was in the context of this wider turn to lifelong learning that I left local church ministry and was appointed Ministry Development Coordinator for the Baptist Union of Scotland in 2015. Any residual frustration about the lack of CMD in the past was quickly overtaken by my enthusiasm for the opportunities this role gave me to develop a purposeful approach to CMD for the Baptist ministers in Scotland. I soon recognised the potential for this work to be informed by a detailed study of ministers' experience of CMD and I recognised that the Doctorate in Practical Theology would be an opportunity to generate this research. Hence the

question I am seeking to answer in this thesis is: *What constitutes fruitful continuing ministry development for Baptist ministers in Scotland?*

1.1 Listening to the Voices of the Ministers

In the turn to lifelong learning for ministers which has occurred during the last 15 years, CMD has generally been defined by organisational (typically denominational) leaders and theological educators. From an *organisational perspective* there is a clear reason to run a programme of CMD for ministers. Any organisation taking responsibility for a workforce should rightly be concerned to maintain the skills of the workers, ensuring the core values are reinforced, knowledge is updated and new skills are developed. From an *educational perspective* there is also a strong argument for CMD. Initial ministry education cannot be the whole training for ministry. It equips people to make a start in ministry, to practise competently, safely and knowledgeably; but this education becomes a greater gift as a framework for organising learning that arises from further study as a minister seeks deeper, specialised or updated understanding. The formative work of ministry education does not reach an end point.

The organisational and educational perspectives are both quite legitimate but they are predicated on the idea that people outside the body of practising ministers have both power and competence to define CMD. Whilst not suggesting that organisational leaders or educators either misuse power or lack competence, the unique contribution of this study is to listen to the voices of ministers and hear how *they* have come to understand and experience fruitful CMD during their years as practitioners. In that sense, it is the 'inside story' of CMD. It is an attempt to hear the perspectives of local ministers which have often been occluded as 'national' programmes for CMD have been developed, or which have simply remained unnoticed despite the accumulation of wisdom and experience they contain.

1.2 Terminology

Various terms are used in academic literature and denominational documents to describe the phenomenon I am studying. These include most commonly 'lifelong learning' and 'continuing ministerial education' (often abbreviated to CME). Although there is much to commend both these terms, I have chosen not to use them in framing my field of research. Whilst 'lifelong learning' is self-evidently a good thing, the phrase has become deeply associated with the quest for economic

growth in rapidly changing world.[1] I have shied away from a term that may suggest the aim is relevance and competitiveness to the exclusion of the formation into Christ-likeness which is at the heart of Christian discipleship. 'Continuing ministerial education' is used to describe the phase of education that continues once the initial ministerial education provided by a theological college is fulfilled. My concern is that this phrase can be taken to imply that the continuing development of ministers remains in the hands of the initial theological educators; in other words, that it is the continuing responsibility of ministerial educators. Whilst they may have an important contribution to make, my understanding of continuing development from both experience as a minister and observation of ministers is that it is a more expansive process where learning arises from multiple contexts.

Instead I have chosen the term 'Continuing Ministry Development'. I define the component parts of my title as follows:

Continuing: This is a process of development that continues *beyond* initial training, that continues *throughout* the years of active ministry, and that continues *consistently* as a commitment inherent to the ministerial vocation.

Ministry: I am focusing on the experiences of Christian ministers, serving local churches and communities, who would see themselves as carrying a range of responsibilities typical of an ordained minister.

Development: My assumption is that ministers are seeking to grow in faithfulness to Christ and the call of the Spirit on their lives. Development therefore is the journey towards this end, which will undoubtedly include both the spiritual development (or formation) of the person and an increase in the practical wisdom required to serve faithfully.

Fruitful. I have chosen to ask, what constitutes 'fruitful' CMD? Initially I considered using the term 'effective' but decided this suggested a mechanistic relationship between CMD and its outcomes when in reality the formative work of the Spirit in and through the personality of a minister is a subtle and sometimes mysterious process. I therefore chose to use the word 'fruitful' which suggests both the wonder and uncertainty of an organic process. It is an idea that recurs in biblical language;

[1] 'Lifelong learning' seems to have gained currency especially through its inclusion in the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals*. Goal 4 is: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' See https://sdgs.un.org/goals (accessed 19.4.23).

in particular it is used by Jesus when he promises that as his disciples remain in him they will 'bear much fruit.'[2]

1.3 The Project

In Chapter 2 I situate this research within the discipline of Practical Theology, drawing attention to the scope of other related disciplines, and demonstrate through this literature review a gap in the existing scholarship which I believe this work will fill. In Chapter 3 I describe the research methodology which underlies my work and the narrative inquiry method I will use in the collection and analysis of data.

Chapters 4 to 7 each report aspects of the data I collected, through a narrative description of my encounters with the participants. This is followed in each case by an analysis and discussion of the findings. In Chapter 8 I draw together my conclusions and offer some recommendations to people involved in supporting CMD for ministers. Finally I reflect on the research journey in a short epilogue (Chapter 9) and consider potential future areas for research.

[2] John 15.5 (NRSV). See also for example, Isaiah 5.2, Matthew 3.10, 7.17, Mark 4.20, Ephesians 5.9, Philippians 1.22, Colossians 1.10, Hebrews 12.11.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Continuing Ministry Development is self-evidently both practical and theological. It is practical because it is about the practices that ministers might engage in to enrich the gift we hope to bring to the church and the world. It is theological because the calling to ministry is understood as something that is itself God-originated and its outworking is within or on behalf of a community of faith. Therefore it naturally belongs in the landscape of practical theology.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore some contours in that landscape and in some neighbouring territory, in the hope of finding a location where there is space to build something new which will draw life from the surrounding ecosystems whilst adding its own distinctive contribution. I will do this in four stages. In the first section I will visit the wider terrain of Practical Theology, noticing some ways in which the discipline has developed and seeking a region in which to locate my work. Then in the second section I will focus on the specific locality of CMD, observing customs and beliefs that already exist. Next, in the third section, I will turn my attention to the adjacent territory of Continuing Professional Development, whose scholarship will readily cross the border to enrich my project. Finally, in the fourth section, I will listen to some of the voices echoing across another academic frontier from studies in the ides of Communities of Practice, which may provide an important model for the way I hope CMD will develop. In this way I aim to identify a plot on which the construction work of the DPT can begin.

2.1 The Wider Terrain of Practical Theology

a. Entry Points

A well-trodden route into the field of practical theology begins with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). He identified philosophical theology, historical theology and practical theology as respectively the root, body and crown of the theological tree, in which practical theology was the prescriptive element providing techniques for maintaining and perfecting the Church (1850:100-103). Whilst he sought to establish an essential unity of theory and practice, in which theology could be

comprehended then applied, Schleiermacher's approach is open to criticism from a contemporary perspective in at least four ways.

i. Making practical theology subordinate to philosophical and historical theology is not consonant with the primarily existential presentation of the message of the kingdom of God by Jesus.
ii. The focus is almost entirely on the activities of the ordained minister to maintain and improve the church.
iii. Such totalising grand narratives can be a means of control exercised by power holders which disenfranchise other ways of seeing and being.
iv. It remains deaf to the insights of other disciplines, neglecting the notion that all truth is God's truth. [3]

So where else might practical theology begin? Building on the work of Paul Tillich (1886-1965), who identified *correlation* as the process of paying theological attention to the questions that emerge from human cultural expression (McGrath 2001:52-56), the Chicago school recognised practical theology as a fundamental discipline of theology, not merely an application of another branch of theology. Thus in the language of David Tracy, who both embraced and revised Tillich's method, theology is a dialogue between the 'situation' and the 'message' (1974:10). Subsequently Don Browning based his 'Fundamental Practical Theology' (1991) on four movements which seek to achieve this: descriptive (starting with the situation), historical (looking at the texts and traditions of faith), systematic (a fusing and ordering of the situation and the normative texts of the tradition) and strategic practical theology (determining praxis and how to defend it). This reflects the dialectical approach expressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer as the fusing of horizons, out of which emerges a moment of understanding (1997:302).

A potential weakness of such a correlationist approach is the underestimating of the decisive revelation of God in Christ. My anabaptist spirituality leads me to seek the 'lordship of Christ' and I am cautious of an approach that might appear to dilute my aspiration to seeking insights that come from within the traditions of the faith. Browning criticised Barth for a theory-to-practice movement (1991:7) but those influenced by Barth in the so-called Yale school have sought to preserve the emphasis on an authoritative revelation in Christ without returning to a Schleiermachian applied theology. John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, for example, maintain that 'Taking human experience seriously does not imply that experience is a source of revelation. Experience and human reason

[3] Friedrich Schweitzer discusses some critiques of the influence of Schleiermacher on Practical Theology in *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Practical Theology* (Miller-McLemore ed., 2012:468-69).

cannot lead us, for example, to an understanding of the cross and resurrection' (2006:5). Thus 'God and the revelation that God has given to human beings in Christ is the true starting point for all practical theology' (2006:11). They are nevertheless at pains to emphasise this does not reduce practical theology to '*applying* theory to the practices of the church'; rather it requires 'a careful theological exegesis of particular situations within which the practices and experiences that emerge from these situations are explored, understood, evaluated, critiqued and reconsidered' (2006:12). This approach reflects a Christocentric narrative theology which is more harmonious with the faith I seek to practice, though I would not accept their absolute view that experience is not a source of revelation; rather I would say that glimpses of God's reality in human experience are a form of divine revelation but I do not see them as definitive without reference to Christ.[4]

b. From city-state to many settlements

Historically the terrain of practical theology has looked like a city-state – a territory dominated by one focal point. This was the instruction and training of pastors, which became increasingly necessary in the highly clericalised and centralised model of church which predominated in the post-Constantinian era.[5] Ministerial education has continued to be a fruitful area for cultivating practical theology. Notable examples of this can be seen in the work of Clement Rogers, writing in the UK in the early 20th century, who sought to explore the practices of ministry in a scientific way (Rogers 1912), and in the *Preface To Pastoral Theology* by Seward Hiltner, which located pastoral theology in the unique attitude or point of view of the pastor, thereby defining the task of pastoral theology as bringing that distinctive perspective to bear on the functions of the church and the minister (Hiltner 1958:18). A further significant contribution to this field was made by Edward Farley who observed a lack of theological rationale for theological education and proposed as a solution the reuniting of

[4] I am aware that like any practical theologian beginning to exegete a particular situation, or commence Browning's 'descriptive' phase, I carry an inherited theological payload. This is what Ward describes as 'the affective gravitational pull of the church' (Ward P, 2017:4). Terry Velling touches on this when, quoting Karl Rahner, he maintains that the theory of practical theology 'indwells the practice itself' (Velling 2005:4). In this sense practical theology is necessarily *practitioner* theology, or as Ward says, 'Practical Theology in all its manifestations starts from this residue within us that has been shaped by the life of the Christian community' (2017:17).

[5] *The Book of Pastoral Rule* by Gregory the Great (c590) is one of the richest flowerings of this enterprise from the patristic period. Its pattern of addressing core pastoral practices of teaching the faith, administering the sacraments, acts of charity and church government continued for centuries to follow in the form of the 'pastoral manual'. It was out of this tradition, and specifically the challenges arising from the introduction of university training for Lutheran ministers in the German universities, that Schleiermacher formed his definition of practical theology.

'theology as discipline' with 'theology as habitus'[6] (Farley 1983:35). A study published in the USA by the Carnegie Institute, *Educating Clergy*, builds on Farley's assumptions, proposing that 'seminary educators seek to form dispositions and the intuitive knowledge, or *habitus*, of a given religious or intellectual tradition in students' (Foster et al 2006:23).

With similar concerns in mind, Paul Goodliff has suggested an approach to initial ministerial formation informed by Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics and the social learning theories of Lev Vygotsky and Etienne Wenger (Goodliff 2017). So far this approach has not impacted the (limited) scholarship on CMD so my research will be paying particular attention to how habitus and social learning relate to ministers' experience of CMD.

A more recent work in the field of ministerial studies, *For Life Abundant* (Bass and Dykstra eds 2008), focuses on the ministerial perspective, exploring the practices that shape both minister and congregation and result in a distinctive ecclesial and pastoral imagination. This is especially relevant to my research as my aim is to listen to ministers narrating their own experience and therefore merits examination at greater length. Craig Dykstra proposes that 'pastoral imagination' arises from sustained engagement in pastoral work and 'functions as a kind of internal gyroscope, guiding pastors in and through every crevice of pastoral life and work' (2008:41). 'Ecclesial imagination' is the way of seeing which arises when a community learns to experience and trust the love and mercy of God (2008:42). Both forms of imagination are perceived as living 'in a perpetual and dynamic process of mutual interdependence' (2008:43) as pastoral imagination 'involves specific capacities of mind, spirit and action that are not only gained during pastoral ministry but also [are] essential to doing it well' (2008:47). This requires 'multiple intelligences' which must be 'trained and formed within a lifelong process' (2008:51).

Dykstra thus provides a framework for ministerial development based on a growing pastoral imagination, which I find to be an extremely helpful metaphor. It avoids the controlling implications of the language of ministerial 'formation' and it foregrounds the imaginative and creative dimensions of ministerial growth over against a principles-and-solutions approach. Furthermore, it recognises a symbiotic relationship between community and pastor in the creation of imaginations, which resonates with the congregational model of church in which I practise ministry. The statement that this is a lifelong process connects directly to my area of research. However, I am somewhat disappointed that the promise of the book to explore lifelong ministry development further in a later

[6] Farley maintains that the meaning and unity of theology arises from a fundamental plurivocity in western thought – that knowledge is both a wisdom ('habitus') and a set of materials to be learned ('discipline) (1983:6-8).

section entitled 'Practical Theology In Ministry' is approached only narrowly, focusing on areas such as transitioning from seminary to ministry, ideas for congregational formation and youth pilgrimages. The most hopeful section, an essay by Christian Scharen entitled 'Learning Ministry Over Time', suggests and illustrates a framework for developmental stages in ministry but does not address the 'how' of lifelong learning. Although Baptist theological educator Anthony Clarke (2021) has developed Dykstra's work by examining how the nurturing of pastoral imagination is evident in the formation of ministers in theological colleges in England and Wales[7], there remains a clear gap in the literature with regard to how pastoral imagination may be evident in the continuing development of ministers in the UK.

The 'Learning Pastoral Imagination Project' in the USA is a longitudinal ecumenical study which began in 2009 following 50 pastoral leaders; it has been using the concept of the formation of pastoral imagination to explore the participants' experience in the years following theological education (Scharen and Campbell-Reed 2016). My reaction when I discovered this study was that it may already have done what I am proposing to do. However, although the researchers record at length the experiences of many ministers told in group interviews, their central question is 'What conditions are needed to *prepare* ministers for the wise practice of ministry?' The focus of their research is therefore on the impact of initial theological education on the subsequent development of pastoral imagination and the conclusions they draw are directed towards theological institutions.[8] They also place a heavy emphasis on the outcomes of the seminary experience of ministers in the early years of their practice. My research is not asking how seminaries can perform better but what characterises fruitful CMD in the experience of ministers and how this arises. In fact, the conclusion to the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project report asks 'church and society' to consider: 'Are there ways to name more carefully how faith leaders learn and grow over time?' (2016:51). In many respects, my research is picking up precisely this challenge.

Now returning to our journey, if the training of pastors has historically been the walled city dominating this landscape, in recent decades practical theology has spread to the hinterland and settled in a vast array of new locations. This turn to practice in practical theology began in the 1980s,

[7] Clarke draws on empirical research in five Baptist colleges and five non-Baptist theological colleges in England and Wales to assess the pastoral imagination that emerges from their ministerial preparation then proposes a trinitarian theology of formation for Baptist ministers.

[8] Similarly, despite its promising title, *A Lifelong Call To Learn: Continuing Education for Religious Leaders* (Reber and Roberts 2010), published by the now defunct Alban Institute, is a series of essays by religious educators *for* religious educators, focusing on the role of the seminary in initial and continuing education. It does not draw on the voices of ministry practitioners which is the focus of my research.

as wider parameters for the discipline emerged, regarding 'the living human document',[9] whoever and wherever, as an appropriate subject for enquiry. Alongside this an appreciation of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom arising from experience, has led to a new environment where 'to be a practical theological researcher is to enquire into these embodied expressions of situated knowledge' (Graham 2017:174). Since a distinctive feature of my research will be the analysis of CMD through the lens of practical wisdom, I will now explore in greater depth the development of practical wisdom and its emerging place in Practical Theology.

c. Practical Wisdom and Practical Theology

The notion of *phronesis* emerges in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. It is fundamentally a practical wisdom. When Aristotle analyses the concept he tells us, 'the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us' (translated Crisp, 2000: 1103b.28-30). It is because of a person's virtue that they choose the correct end to pursue but it is through their *phronesis* that they do the right things to achieve that end. As D C Russell puts it in his discussion of the Nicomachean Ethics, 'Virtue involves wishing to do well, but it also involves actually doing well, and this requires practical wisdom' (Russell 2014:205). *Phronesis* is therefore a type of moral know-how that enables a person with a virtuous end in mind to deliberate correctly to ascertain the means to achieve that end. Drawing on her work in moral theory, Nafsika Athanassoulis maintains that this know-how is 'expertise that is supported by a variety of abilities, from emotional maturity, to self-reflection, to an empathic understanding of what moves others, to an ability to see beyond the surface and understand the complexities of human behavior' (Athanassoulis 2018:415).

The Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* underpinned Aquinas' understanding of *prudentia* in his systematisation of Christian thinking and practice in the *Summa Theologica.* He regarded *prudentia* as a means to achieving moral virtues, through three key steps: inquiry (observing and understanding the circumstances), judgment (evaluating what has been discovered) and

[9] The term 'living human document' was coined in the 1930s by Anton Boisen, founding father of the Clinical Pastoral Education movement, to express his commitment to the careful and systematic study of people struggling with spiritual issues, especially through the use of verbatim accounts of pastoral encounters. Boisen became a pioneer of bringing together theological training and the insights of psychotherapy and also an early example of the practice of 'turning life into text' which has characterised Practical Theology more recently (Graham et al 2019:23,37). Subsequently Miller-McLemore developed the wider concept of the 'living human web'; aware of the risk of isolated individualism in the 'living human document' she proposed a 'focus on care understood as part of a wide cultural, social, and religious context' (Miller-McLemore 1993:367).

commanding (where what has been discovered and judged is applied to action). He identified eight aspects of *prudentia* which made this process possible: memory, understanding, docility, shrewdness, reason, foresight, circumspection and caution (Aquinas, trans. 1920, II.ii, 47-56). As such, this was a fundamentally practical approach to acquiring virtue, where *prudentia* became the route from a vision of the virtuous life to the actual embodiment of that life.

Beyond the boundaries of theological discourse, the acquisition of practical wisdom came to prominence in the late 20th century, influenced significantly by the writings of Donald Schön on reflective practice (1983, 1987). Schön, an educational theorist, believed that professional people lacked the ability to solve complex or indeterminate problems because they depended on established technical expertise, which he termed 'technical rationality.'[10] In a now famous metaphor, he stated:

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution (1983:3).

Schön's solution was to advocate an alternative epistemology of practice in which the knowledge inherent in practice is understood as artful doing. This knowledge arises from two forms of reflective practice. Firstly, reflection-in-action is the 'learning on our feet' which occurs when a person faces a new challenge and solves it by drawing on and modifying their current repertoire of practices, deploying 'tacit recognition, judgments and skilled performances' (1983:50). Secondly, reflection-on-action occurs after an event as a person reflects on the knowledge they used to make a judgement and the part their tacit and spontaneous understanding played in this (1983:61). Schön's work has brought knowing-in-action to the fore in the discourse on professional development and contributed to a widespread acceptance that professionals should expect to gain practical wisdom through reflective practice.

I note that it is not possible to undertake research in practical theology without a commitment to reflection and reflexivity and a range of methods merit consideration.[11] Theological reflection can

[10] Schön (1987) argues this dependency has its roots in the early part of the twentieth century when professions first placed their schools in universities as a way to gain social prestige with the notion that the closer professional knowledge was to science, the greater would be one's professional status.

[11] Originating with the work of Brazilian Marxist educationalist Paulo Freire, the idea of a simple pastoral cycle moving from *see* to *judge* then *act* has been used as a tool for both analysing a situation and challenging it (Freire 1972). A similar see-judge-act model had been developed in Belgium in the early 20th century through the work of Joseph Cardijn with the Young Christian Workers organization (Graham et al 2019:202). Building

take place through a simple pastoral cycle (Experience→theological reflection→learning→action) triggered by an interruption of some kind (Ballard and Pritchard: 77-78).[12] However, the pastoral cycle may be criticised for placing an undue focus on disruptive and problematic experiences and also for reducing 'theology' to one stage in a process. A broader understanding of theological reflection is found in *Theological Reflection: Methods* (Graham et al 2019) which notes that 'theological reflection is now seen as a process rather than a product' (2019:5) and goes on to identify seven specific forms of reflection which entail thinking, speaking and writing, and both individual and corporate activity. Subsequently Walton has demonstrated also the richness of spiritual autobiography through exploring its history and construction alongside a piece of her own spiritual life writing (Walton 2015).

Phronesis also came to prominence in modern practical theology in the generative work of Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (1991).[13] This offered a model of practical theology that is predicated on the importance of practical wisdom or *phronesis*, which Browning contrasts with Aristotle's categories of theoretical reason (*theoria*) and technical reason (*techne*). He regrets that 'since the Enlightenment, the modern experiment has been dedicated to the improvement of human life through the increase of objective scientific knowledge (*theoria*) that is then applied to the solution of human problems (*techne*)' (Browning 1991:34). In Browning's view this 'theory-to-practice structure' characterised the practical theology of Schleiermacher and Tillich and much of the subsequent work in this field up to the late 20th century (1991:43-44). Browning proposed a different method which begins with 'descriptive theology'; its starting point is not the *theoria* of historical or systematic theology but careful observation of the *phronesis* apparent in the existing practice. The task of descriptive theology is 'to describe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions that generate all theological questions' (1991:47). From that starting point he proposes a fundamental practical theology that moves from theory-laden practice to theory to revised practice.

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on this Kolb (1984) maintained that we do not learn directly from experience but only do this via reflection and conceptualisation. (As I have just noted, this emphasis is paralleled in the work of Schön.) Each emphasises that knowledge begins with recognising where we stand.

[12] American practical theologian Richard Osmer developed a version of the widely-used rendition of the pastoral cycle designed to equip ministers, in particular, to reflect on practice (Osmer 2008).

[13] Browning's *Fundamental Practical Theology* approaches *phronesis* via a neo-Aristotelian tradition, reflected notably in the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960) and the moral philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre (1981).

Whilst Browning has played an important role in highlighting the place of *phronesis* in practical theology, he has been criticised by Graham for lacking 'a true unity of theory and practice.' She argues that, despite his emphasis on *phronesis*, his method seeks 'metaphysical moral principles rather than…truly listening to the embodied, incarnational practical wisdom' of the congregations he studies. She points out that his work assumes that moral reasoning is the chief activity of the church and the value-commitments that may be deemed to form the moral conduct of a congregation are pre-existent. In reality churches are also concerned with activities such as worship, social action, learning, spirituality and public *apologia;* and their value commitments are not pre-existent but have human authors and derive from specific social and cultural contexts. Browning's confidence in the logic-centred reasoning of congregations reflects a modernist rationalist tradition which does not pay attention to 'the exclusions of gender, race and class' where notions of selfhood, knowledge, agency and virtue may differ (Graham 1996:90-92).

More recently the work of a group of American practical theologians has focused specifically on *Christian Practical Wisdom* (the title of a 2016 publication by Bass et al).[14] Like Schön, Browning and Graham, they consider that practical knowledge has been devalued as

> the result of a specific understanding of knowledge dominant in the modern West that actively marginalises embodiment and practical engagement as relevant dimensions of knowledge (2016:1).

Since Christianity in particular and religion in general cannot be understood fully from theoretical and objective perspectives, their central concern is that the theological task cannot be meaningfully undertaken without paying serious attention to *phronesis*.

> When Christian academic and ecclesial communities valorize theological abstraction and cognitive belief in ways that imply that practical wisdom is a second-rate, dispensable form of knowledge, Christian discipleship is undermined as a way of life and diminished as a witness in society (2016:3).

They acknowledge that practical wisdom has strong roots in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and the parabolic wisdom of Jesus. Given the focus on *phronesis* in many other disciplines they choose to speak of 'Christian Practical Wisdom' as wisdom which 'emerges in relation to God

[14] The co-authors of this work are Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman and Christian B. Scharen. Previously this group had worked together on the book *For Life Abundant* (Bass and Dykstra 2008), mentioned above, which had explored how ministry can move towards its *telos*, 'the abundant life for all creation provided by God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is already breaking in on the world though it is not yet fully realized' (p43).

embodied', both through God's embodiment in Christ and through the embodiment of God's presence by loving a neighbour (2016:8). The idea of *phronesis* as a kind of knowledge that is embodied, situated and inhabited is captured effectively in the contrast between map-reading and knowing a route from experience:

> Ideally, Christians blessed with practical wisdom know their way around the neighbourhood not by map but as resident walkers who rely on body knowledge and all their senses (2016:9).

The authors model their commitment to valuing *phronesis* in the ensuing chapters by writing from their own particularities about matters such as marriage, congregations, culture, physical exertion, healing and community. They portray experiences of significant and formative learning and spiritual growth that are not derived from the successful application of universal principles but from drinking in life, paying attention, living imaginatively before texts and traditions, aware of the limits of their knowledge, being open to beauty and to the presence of God where unexpected discoveries may be made. In chapter 4 of this thesis I will pay particular attention to the focus these authors place on practical wisdom as I reflect on the way ministers define CMD.

In a particularly relevant and important chapter in *Christian Practical Wisdom*, Cahalan (in Bass et al 2016:275-322) considers the relationship between practical wisdom and Christian spirituality. Cahalan is a Professor of Practical Theology at St John's School of Theology and Seminary, a college in Collegeville Minnesota in the Benedictine tradition. A major focus of her research has been on vocation and spiritual practice. Reflecting the shared view of her collaborators in the Christian Practical Wisdom project, her chapter begins by expressing concern that in today's most influential epistemologies the practical 'has been disregarded, even degraded'. Furthermore, whilst she welcomes the current interest in practical wisdom in many disciplines, in her view this 'fails to establish practical wisdom as other than a form of cognitive rationality (2016:276). She maintains that *Christian* practical wisdom arises from how a person lives and prays in relationship to the ultimate goal of loving God and neighbour. Her understanding of the connection between spiritual disciplines and practical wisdom is summarised in this way:

> I want to show that there is a particular kind of knowing that arises within Christian spiritual practice, a knowing of God that emerges through the intentional, disciplined practice of attending to God through scripture, in which the scriptures act back upon the self. Further, I want to take seriously the ancients' insistence that it is only through rigorous practice that one becomes discerning, humble, and able to comprehend the limits of all knowledge (2016:279).

Cahalan focuses on three dimensions of early Christian spiritual practice that illuminate features of practical wisdom that are not found in Aristotle: discernment, humility and the encounter with unknowing. She explores the first two of these through the works of John Cassian (360-435 CE) and the latter through the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 CE) and the anonymous work *The Cloud of Unknowing* (c 1350 CE).

Cassian's writings arise from his travels among monastics in Egypt and Syria; his purpose is chiefly to advise people in the Latin West on the formation of religious communities. In the *Conferences* Cassian and his fellow traveller Germanus present themselves as model novices in conversation with the great desert masters or 'abbas', seeking to learn a monastic way of life (Cassian, trans 1997). For Cassian practical knowledge is evidenced by the correction of one's moral acts and the purging of sin, and this is acquired through the virtue of ceaseless prayer (1997:14.3). The discipline of prayer is based on memorising and repeating biblical texts as a way of driving out thoughts and inclinations that fuel the passions towards sin.[15] Cahalan shows that for Cassian, spiritual knowing 'is entirely dependent on practical knowing through disciplined practice' (2016:286). Discernment and humility may be received through a structured practice of recognising the problem of the thoughts, engaging a new practice to counter the problem and sustaining the practice at all times (2016:294).

Cahalan goes on to observe that 'in the patristic period and well into the Middle Ages, spiritual practice and theology were not distinct discourses' (Bass et al 2016:304). Theology grew out of spiritual practice or was expressed in and through spiritual practice. To illustrate and explore this she turns, somewhat paradoxically, to the idea of 'unknowing' as a form of encounter with God, particularly as it is expressed in Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses* (from about 390 CE). Following Origen's approach to biblical texts, Gregory first reads Moses' life as history, then re-visits it as allegory. In the latter he identifies a movement from purification and illumination (the burning bush) to separation from the world (the desert) and then to the encounter of knowing and unknowing (the darkness on Mount Sinai). The darkness on Sinai represents for Gregory the ineffable knowledge of God; beyond spiritual disciplines he believes the mind 'gains access to the invisible and incomprehensible, and there it sees God' (quoted Bass et al 2016:305). This is an experience of knowing that is beyond language and that led Gregory to the negative, or apophatic, method of theology which, whilst not denying the knowability of God, does not believe it enables us to describe in words what God is, but at best to say what God is not.[16] Finally in Gregory's scheme, Moses comes

[15] This is one of the methods that later became known as *lectio divina*. Robertson (2011) traces the chronological development of *lectio divina* as a spiritual practice.

[16] Cahalan goes on to discuss the anonymous text *The Cloud of Unknowing* (c 1350 CE) which similarly asserts that God cannot be known by thinking about God's supposed qualities but only through being held by love (2016:311-316).

down the mountain and returns to serve his community; the contemplative encounter with unknowing is not an end in itself but a preparation for daily life.

My research raises questions about the relationship between the acquisition of practical wisdom and the practice of Christian spirituality. The continuing development of ministers and their spiritual practices are inextricably connected. In Chapter 4 I will seek to develop Cahalan's insights as I discuss the way ministers describe the importance of spiritual development.

d. Habits and Practices

Closely associated to the acquisition of practical wisdom and nurturing of Christian spirituality is the cultivation of habits and practices. I noted above that for Aristotle *phronesis* is a type of moral know-how that enables a person with a virtuous end in mind to deliberate correctly to ascertain the means to achieve that end. In the Aristotelian scheme, however, deliberation is not the only requirement for achieving virtue. It also requires the formation of habits, those dispositions that incline us to a certain end. Simply put, 'moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit' (Nicomachean Ethics, translated Crisp, 2000: 1103a.14). Historically virtue ethics have been accepted as one of several streams of thought in Christian approaches to ethical practice. N T Wright has been a recent proponent of this approach in his book *Virtue Reborn* (2010), where he maintains that the New Testament presents growth in discipleship as virtue gained through cultivating habits of the heart. In particular Wright draws attention to the Apostle Paul's idea of putting on the armour of God (Ephesians 6.10-17) and his exhortation to think about 'whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable…' (Phil 4.8) as examples of the apostle's belief that Christ-reflecting habits give birth to righteousness.

Canadian-American philosopher James K A Smith has also drawn attention to the significance of habits and practices within the life of the Christian community and I will now turn to his work and its foundations in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the practice theory of Pierre Bourdieu.

In *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009) Smith proposes an anthropology based on love and desire and argues that education is the formation of our desires through embodied common rituals or 'liturgies'. He therefore considers that Christian education and disciple-making should be situated within the ecclesial practices of Christian worship and liturgy. In other words, the shared habits of the Christian community give rise to the character of the community.

In *Imagining the Kingdom* (2013) Smith explores the non-conscious, pre-theoretical drivers of our actions and offers an account of 'the bodily formation of our habituated orientation to the world' (2013:14). This arises from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception which maintains that knowledge is inevitably embodied; as Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'The world is not what I think but what I live through' (quoted in Smith 2013:43). Smith rejects the Cartesian conception of human beings as primarily 'thinking things', in which case habit would 'always be some kind of intellectual accomplishment – the outcome of thinking' (2013:57). Rather habit 'is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made' (2013:58, quoting Merleau-Ponty).

With Merleau-Ponty's understanding of knowledge in mind, Smith then turns to Bourdieu's critique of theoretical reason. He points out that Bourdieu rejects both the 'objectivism' that suggests we can understand the world as impartial spectators and the 'subjectivism' which envisages subjects as radically autonomous creatures whose every action is the fruit of an unencumbered decision (2013:77-79). Instead Bourdieu offers the idea of 'habitus', a kind of embodied tradition which he describes as a 'system of structured, structuring dispositions' which leads us to construct (or constitute) our world in certain ways (2013:82). Habitus arises from participating in the practices of a community to the extent that its embodied history becomes internalised in us as second nature.

Thus for Smith the habitus is the non-conscious or pre-theoretical driver that forms our orientation to the world. It arises from what he has summarised as

> …the (de- and trans-) formative power of practices – communal, embodied rhythms, rituals, and routines that over time quietly and unconsciously prime and shape our desires and most fundamental longings (2013:4).

These rhythms, rituals and routines comprise liturgies, both secular and sacred, which 'effectively "deposit" an orientation within' (2013:94). In this way Smith demonstrates his central point that Christian education and discipleship must be situated within the ecclesial practices of Christian worship and liturgical formation. Telling and embodying the Christian story through prayer, reading scripture, singing, acts of mercy, seeking justice etc habituates us into the Christian way. In the face of many secular liturgies

> Christian worship invites us into a very different social ontology, through a different set of rituals—a counter-liturgy (2013:149).

In Chapter 7 I will return to the work of Smith as a framework for my consideration of the habits and practices of ministers as they pursue continuing development.

2.2 The Specific Locality of CMD

I will now explore the locality of CMD within the wider landscape of practical theology. As will become apparent, it is a territory that has its own set of beliefs and customs. First of all I will examine some established beliefs about why CMD is necessary and what theological and educational values underpin this. Then I will consider the current customs and practices in CMD and note the gap that remains in the literature for the analysis of the form of CMD I am researching.

a. Beliefs about CMD

Tim Ling identifies three reasons why CMD has become a pressing issue in the UK in the early 21st century (Ling and Bentley, 2012:178-190). Firstly the impact of *legislation*, and specifically the Employment Relations Act of 1999, has brought religious office holders within the scope of employment protection legislation. This means that ministers should expect to benefit from the best human resources practices, including clear terms and conditions, a regular review of their practice and support with continuing development. Secondly, Ling suggests that the growth of *managerialism* in the church, anticipates a potential payback of CMD through optimising clergy performance. He notes the way this stands in tension with a traditional vocational view of ministry, remarking:

> You cannot ignore the sound of epistemic cultures clashing as you place management, audit and accountability alongside professional autonomy, community and folly for Christ's sake (2012:179).

Thirdly, he notes the *role confusion* that results from the changing patterns of ministry in late modernity, as the ministerial role that was once located at the centre of society now finds itself removed to the margins. Some form of CMD is important if ministers are to adapt fruitfully to this change.

Ling's analysis reflects his context in the Church of England (C of E), where he previously served as the National Adviser for Continuing Development. The legal challenges the C of E has faced over clergy employment issues may have galvanised the response to employment legislation more robustly than in other denominations and the change (or confusion) in clergy role is likely to be most pronounced in a part of the church that maintains a parish system. Nevertheless, the other main

Protestant denominations have clearly followed a lead from the C of E as their various guidelines demonstrate.

Over and above these practical reasons for the implementation of CMD, Ling identifies a more fundamental and theological reason for CMD: it is done as a response to God's ongoing call. He writes, 'It is because we truly care about God's mission that we take care in our practice' (2012:180). Specifically he notes three principles at the heart of this commitment: a] our development is rooted in God's trusting and entrusting, b] God is interested in our present realities and 'the rich eccentricity of human life', and c] because of a] and b] we should continually practise the wisdom that is achieved from remembering what we value, learning in community and having the vulnerability to be open to new learning (2012:189).

Anglican priest and academic Frances Ward, writing some years before Ling, presents a framework for the kind of learning that is required for CMD. She maintains that *phronesis*, which she defines as 'knowing in action by reflection on practice' is at the core of CMD (Ward 2005:3). Setting her work in the context of six personal accounts of three days in ministry by different practitioners, she argues that pastoral supervision 'can sustain lifelong learning and that, therefore, it is primarily an *educational* process rather than a *therapeutic* one.' (2005:8, author's italics). Ward's emphasis on the formative and transformative power of supervision anticipates the work of Hawkins and Shohet (2012) and is developed further with extensive focus on practical exercises for supervising people in specifically Christian pastoral ministry by Leach and Paterson (2015).

Ward also proposes 'seven anchor ropes' for lifelong learning that resist the notion of learning as simply that which is passed on from a teacher. She advocates the idea of education not as a commodity but a process (2005:65, referencing the work of Michael Polanyi) and the need to move from a model of banking knowledge to learning as something that develops in action (2005:65, referencing the work of Freire). She also contrasts the idea of learning arising from a series of building blocks with the idea of change arising from a constructivist network (2005:66, referencing the work of Moon). This leads to the proposal that it is in the playful space of supervision (2005:88) and through learning to write the Living Human Document (2005:129-152) that lifelong learning can take place.

A more directly theological rationale for CMD was pursued by a partnership of C of E, Methodist and United Reformed churches, in *Towards a Theology of Ongoing Ministerial Development* (South Central Regional Training Partnership 2010). This report acknowledges the legal changes that have brought to the foreground the need for CMD, but begins from a theological commitment to the *missio dei*, asserting that 'the purpose of ongoing ministerial development is to continue the

development of the Church's licensed and commissioned ministers so that they in turn can continue stimulating and enabling the whole Church to participate more fully in God's mission' (2010:3). It commends a form of CMD that is 'Benedictine in ethos' (2010:4), embracing the development of the whole person rather than 'focusing on training in any narrow sense' and seeking a balanced life which can 'produce the kind of spiritual groundedness upon which human flourishing and ministerial effectiveness both depend' (2010:3). The report goes on to offer an ecclesial purpose for CMD:

> Ongoing ministerial development is not just about offering opportunities for personal development to individuals. It has as its primary purpose the aim of equipping God's people for service. We expect of ourselves and one another that we will endeavour to make and keep ourselves 'fit for purpose" (2010:6).

This reflects the notion in Ephesians 4.12 that Christ gives ministry gifts to equip the church and the suggestion here is that CMD has a congregational function; it is not just for the better performance of clerical duties but for the enabling of the whole church. This is of particular relevance to the part of the church which I mostly inhabit, which is inherently cautious of clericalism and tends to value the role of the minister in terms of community function more than ecclesial office.

Finally, the report identifies a prophetic dimension to CMD. Recognising that vocational journeys are never static it states that CMD 'does not simply equip us for the here and now but also has a part to play in preparing us to inhabit what is to come. It is one of the means by which attitudes of openness, trust, hope, optimism, flexibility and entrepreneurialism can be fostered and transmitted' (2010:6-7). This reflects the earlier Benedictine approach to CMD as whole-life formation, giving birth to virtues which ultimately lead to lives lived wisely and faithfully for others.

b. Customs and Practices in CMD

The main denominations in the UK have produced guidelines for CMD. The Church of England CMD 'Statement of Expectations' requires that clergy set aside at least 5 days for CMD and the best part of a week for retreat each year plus regular participation in a Ministerial Development Review, using the outcomes to plan their own learning (Archbishops' Council 2010a). No instructions are given as to the content or process for the 5 CMD days. The Ministerial Development Review is an episcopally-led 'guided discussion framed around an office holder's ministry' which must happen at least every two years, including 'an assessment of how far past objectives or priorities have been met' and the setting of 'fresh objectives or priorities for the forthcoming period'. Any continuing ministry

education requirements should be noted along with how the reviewee seeks to address them (Archbishops' Council 2010b).[17]

This review-focused approach to CMD is reflected in other denominations. The Methodist Church (2018) mandates a Ministerial Development Review with extensive literature on how to run a review, though again does not discuss how any required or desired CMD will be assessed. The Church of Scotland requires an annual Ministry Development Conversation which is

> a confidential conversation with a trained facilitator that supports and enables Ministers to reflect on their practice of ministry in their particular context. This conversation is intended to encourage and identify opportunity for learning and growth, both professionally and personally (Church of Scotland 2017:5.2.4).[18]

Unlike the other major denominations, the Church of Scotland is also offering Pastoral Supervision to all its clergy. United Reformed Church ministers are encouraged to take part in 'accompanied self-appraisal' and receive study leave to pursue CMD of their own choosing (United Reformed Church, *Support in Ministry*), whilst the Baptist Union of Great Britain encourages ministers to hold a 'CMD Annual Audit' with a 'CMD peer' (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2021:29).

The approach of these bodies (with the exception of the Baptist Union of Great Britain[19]) is significantly different from the Baptist Union of Scotland where my practice is located. Here we have an expectation that all ministers will regularly participate in six core habits of continuing ministry development[20], that they will record their participation in (and key learning from) these practices

[17] Hazel Whitehead, who as Director of Discipleship, Vocation and Ministry for the Diocese of Guildford has led many Ministry Development Reviews and also undertaken research into the theological and biblical rationale for such reviews, has identified three multi-dimensional themes which form their theological foundation: i) vocation, response and obedience, ii) location, context and community, and iii) the nature of the human condition (Ling ed. 2013:147).

[18] The term ministry development conversation is explained in this minute: 'A number of Ministers expressed concern over the term review which felt more like an examination which is wholly contrary to the programme intentions, therefore the term 'conversation' has been used to more accurately express the way the programme operates.' (Church of Scotland 2017.5.2.3).

[19] I am gratified to note that whilst I have been working on this research The Baptist Union of Great Britain has revised its approach to CMD, now basing its practice largely on the model developed by the Baptist Union of Scotland.

[20] These habits or practices are: 1. Reading; 2. Conferences or training courses; 3. Spiritual development, eg retreats, journaling, reflective writing; 4. Meeting with a mentor or pastoral supervisor; 5. Fellowship with other ministers in a spirit of encouragement and accountability; 6. A ministry review with the local church, at least every three years. (Baptist Union of Scotland, 2018).

and will review them in a spirit of mutual accountability with a colleague each year (Baptist Union of Scotland 2018).

There is a significant absence of literature about any approach to CMD that goes beyond an annual review and (in the case of one denomination) the provision of pastoral supervision. A range of evaluative studies have sought to measure the effectiveness of existing models of CMD (eg Hamill 2010, Wilkin 2014, Clinton, 2016, Denton and Thomas 2017) but no study has begun by asking ministers to share their experience of what they have found fruitful without assuming there is a system they *should* be adhering to. So here is a gap in the literature which my research will seek to fill as I invite ministers to tell their stories of fruitful CMD and reflect on whatever they say, unencumbered by an intention to evaluate an existing model.

2.3 Adjacent Territory - Continuing Professional Development

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been mandated in virtually all professions in recent decades and a significant body of research has developed.[21] This is academic territory that sits immediately adjacent to CMD and many of the discoveries and principles from CPD will easily travel across the border into the territory of CMD, introducing another set of cultural viewpoints.

a. Definition

Career-related continuous learning has been conceptualised as a pattern of formal and informal activities that people sustain over time for the benefit of their career development (London and Smither 1999:5) or put more succinctly, 'practices aimed at employees' development beyond that derived from their initial training' (Collin et al 2012).[22] A fuller description of lifelong learning is offered by UK educationalist and founding editor of the *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* Peter Jarvis:

> The combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person—body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses)—experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and

[21] Useful summaries of this can be found, for example, in relation to teachers (Kennedy 2014), nurses (Lee 2011) and doctors (Mann and Sargeant 2013). However, there is also a broad literature concerning CPD more generally, and in this review I seek to examine the main themes in this, without deviating into the profession-specific material except by way of occasional example.

[22] This may be seen as a somewhat reductionist view of the subject and other writers clearly locate CPD within a larger framework of lifelong learning. The Oxford Handbook of Lifelong Learning quotes a 2011 European Commission report which defines lifelong learning as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective' (London 2011:3).

integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person (Jarvis 2006:134).

This latter definition resonates most strongly with the continuing development of a minister, whose vocation involves not only cognitive and social development but also embodiment in a community, and for whom growth in character is prior to growth in the skills for the job. Development is inevitably more than skills acquisition. It also transcends the notion that CPD is specifically for employees, which is problematic in the context of ministry where I have both experienced and observed the continual challenge to nurture a sense of calling to serve God and the world rather than see oneself simply as an employee of a religious organisation.

Purpose

A crude understanding of CPD might suppose that its sole purpose is to increase the profits of the employer or enable the public service provider to meet its requirements more efficiently. This certainly justifies spending on CPD in a profit-based organisation and in a ministry context equipping people to serve better is highly desirable. However, much of the literature focuses on the benefits of CPD for individuals. Sadler-Smith et al (2000) identified the three main benefits of CPD as updating, competence and enhanced mobility. Empirical research among members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development identified six motivations for undertaking CPD (Rothwell and Arnold 2005):

1. To avoid losing one's licence to practice
2. Because it's enjoyable in itself
3. To make up lost ground
4. To maintain one's current position
5. To get ahead of the competition
6. To affirm one's identity as a good professional

David Megginson and Vivien Whitaker, UK academics who work closely with the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, have written a textbook on CPD which in some respects reflects the genre of the self-help book. They maintain that CPD 'adds zest and direction to work and learning' and that 'the need for CPD arises because security for individuals no longer lies in the job or organisation we work for but in the skills, knowledge and experience that we have within ourselves' (Megginson and Whittaker 2007:5).

In the context of Christian ministry, increased profitability is certainly not the aim of continuing development. Increased fruitfulness would better describe the desired outcome, which may be

variously defined as numerical growth, richer pastoral care, more insightful teaching, wiser leadership or a more authentic grace-filled life. It is easy to see how the benefits identified above would contribute to this purpose, increasing motivation, developing character ('one's identity as a good professional') and equipping with up-to-date skills. The motivation 'to get ahead of the competition' would not in this context imply a competing market-place of churches (though some of my colleagues may see things this way) but rather the desire to compete intelligently and graciously with alternative worldviews. Furthermore, the potential of CPD to enhance mobility is pertinent to the challenge of longevity in ministry, in which the discernment of a call to new ministry requires sensitive understanding of 'what I am becoming'.[23]

b. Compulsion vs Voluntarism

Megginson and Whittaker identify a series of 'paradoxes within CPD', the first of which is 'compulsion or voluntarism' (2007:19). Similarly Collin et al differentiate between 'directed' and 'self-directed' CPD. Examples of the former would be 'formal training courses, coaching and mentoring', whereas self-directed CPD might include reading professional journals, attending self-selected courses or reflecting on practice (2012:157).

In an earlier work Megginson and Whittaker suggested that voluntarism has motivational advantages but that compulsion can also be important because some people need a 'prod' to get going (1996:46). Subsequently they seem to favour voluntarism, stating 'individuals should decide for themselves their learning needs and how to fulfil them' (2007:5). In support of voluntarism, it has been questioned whether a reflection undertaken under compulsion constitutes valid reflection: 'The appearance of complying with requirements to 'reflect' becomes more important than the intended educational purpose', raising the questions as to whether 'forcing to reflect' is beneficial by encouraging the reluctant (who will then engage) or detrimental by forcing 'reflection by rote' (Murdoch-Eaton and Sandars 2014:281).

In my own experience of working with pre-accredited ministers[24] the benefits of required reflective writing seem evident from the number of times I have been told, 'I'm so glad you made me do that,' or similar, by ministers who have been surprised by discoveries they have made through reflection.

[23] Recent work on the sustainability of careers recognises that the classic factors in career fulfilment (time, social space, agency and meaning) need to be accompanied by a strategy for long-term development (de Vos and Van der Heijden 2015).

[24] In a Scottish Baptist context, 'pre-accredited' refers to people in the first three years of ministry, undergoing a structured programme of continuing formation for ministry. This parallels what elsewhere may be referred to as curacy, probation, IME3 or newly-accredited ministry.

However, I am wary of mandated reflection as a lifelong model; I see the idea of reflective practice being agreed upon by all colleagues as a life-giving practice which we then seek to habituate as one aspect of our continuing openness to the work of God's Spirit around us, in us and through us.

c. Formal vs Informal Learning

Traditionally CPD has been envisaged as a provision made by employers for employees, typically through the medium of formal training courses (Collin et al 2014:156). This has also been a main strand in the provision of continuing development for ministers. However, Eraut has identified a spectrum of learning episodes from the formal to the highly informal, such as consultation and collaboration within the work group, the challenge of the work itself, consultation outside the work group and life outside work (Eraut 2011).[25] He noted that 'the two modes of non-formal learning reported as important by nearly all our respondents were learning from the challenge of the work itself and learning from other people' (Eraut 2011:8). He concluded:

> …over a wide range of professions and workplaces, informal workplace activities provided between 70-90 percent of the learning (2011:12).

Cheetham and Chivers (2001) developed the study of informal learning for CPD further,[26] developing a 'taxonomy of informal professional learning methods'[27]. Whereas Eraut had compared the effectiveness of formal and informal learning methods, they looked for the most effective of the informal learning methods. Their research found that professionals rated the following as making the greatest contribution to their professional competence:

- On the job learning
- Working alongside more experienced colleagues
- Working as part of a team

In some aspects of Christian ministry it is clear that on the job learning is highly necessary. I am aware that when it came to conducting my first funeral, the classroom learning I had previously undertaken paled into insignificance as I discovered what it really felt like to stand beside the coffin and meet the expectations and emotions of that moment. However, if working alongside more experienced colleagues and working as part of a team are fundamental to informal learning, then

[25] Eraut's generative work in this area was undertaken in 1997, studying the development of knowledge and skills in the workplace among a group of mid-career workers.
[26] This was through research among several professional groups, including Anglican clergy.
[27] They note this intentionally reflected Bloom's renowned *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Bloom, 1956).

one aspect of continuing ministry development must be to challenge the solitary nature of most ministerial practice and create spaces for co-working which will host informal learning opportunities.

d. Mentoring

Learning from colleagues may occur informally but it is widely recognised that structured mentoring relationships can be an effective way of supporting continuing professional development, both for beginners and for more seasoned employees. I will now examine some important themes in mentoring scholarship which will form the grounding for the discussion in Chapter 5 of my research participants' experiences of mentoring.

It is often noted that the concept of mentoring derives its name from Mentor, a character in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* who becomes a friend and adviser to Odysseus' son, Telemachus.[28] Mentor is no ordinary assistant however; he is the embodiment of Athene, goddess of war, who accompanies Telemachus on his quest to be reunited with his wandering father and secure Odysseus' throne against his adversaries. The modern usage of the term 'mentor' is rooted in this story of a sagacious friend teaching a young man what he knows and guiding him towards wise decisions and successful outcomes.

Recent scholarship has questioned whether the Homerian narrative can bear the weight of this straightforward interpretation. It has been argued that the violence of the original story is too readily glossed over and not incorporated into modern interpretations (Garvey and Meggison 2004) and that the confusing gender issues are inadequately explored in the way mentoring theorists use the story (Colley 2002). Some have maintained *The Odyssey* exemplifies a directive approach to mentoring (Whitmore 2002) whilst others find a developmental model for counselling in the story (Starr 2014). At least one view rejects the idea of any connection between Homer's character and modern mentoring, suggesting that Mentor was not the 'counsellor, teacher, nurturer, protector, advisor and role model' as implied in much modern literature but was in fact

> little more than an old friend of King Odysseus…quite simply, Homer's mentor did not mentor (Roberts 1999:19).

It appears that the modern connection between mentoring and Homer's Mentor owes its origins largely to a work by Francois Fénelon (1651-1715), Archbishop of Cambrai and tutor to the son of

[28] I have enjoyed Emily Wilson's 2018 translation of *The Odyssey*, in which the word most commonly used to describe Telemachus, *pepnumenos,* (typically rendered wise, shrewd, sensible) is stretched to suggest that he can be variously moody, sullen or decisive.

Louis XIV. Widely read in its day, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* is effectively a study of human development proposing that all life's events are potential learning opportunities which, if explored deeply with the support of a mentor, enable the learner to acquire high level understanding of the ways of the world. Garvey and Stokes have traced how the generative work of Fénelon gave rise to the concept of mentoring in subsequent European literature (2022:8-12) and became a familiar concept in business, education and personal development.

The outcome of this is, according to Simon Western, that there are currently four main discourses in mentoring, which he characterises as *Soul Guide, Psy Expert, Managerial* and *Networking Coaching* (2012).[29]

The *Soul Guide* approach to mentoring is about working on 'interior aspects of the self' (Western 2012.132). This tends to be concerned with emotions, spiritual concerns, identity and relationships, values and beliefs and how to live with meaning. There is clearly a close relationship between pastoral care or counselling and the Soul Guide approach to mentoring. This suggests that it might be a natural model for people such as the participants who are accustomed to pastoral practice, though a risk is that such a mentoring relationship could drift into an encounter which would be more accurately categorised as counselling or pastoral care.

The *Psy Expert* model focuses on performance (in a variety of ways) and emphasises changes in behaviour and improvement of skills. It draws on insights from psychology that propose deeper understandings of how the mind works and therefore how thinking differently can impact performance. Western points out that this discourse is a product of the scientific or objectivist mindset which has prevailed in modernity (2012:158). There is a strong focus on measurable results. The participants do not present themselves as being in a performance-driven vocation so the Psy Expert may not immediately seem to address their mentoring needs; however, there may be resonances with the pursuit of right thinking or 'the renewal of the mind' as one aspect of vocational formation.

The *Managerial* discourse normally takes place in an organisational setting and tends to value simplicity and practicality, asking above all how to get the job done. Western argues that if the Soul Guide and Psy Expert discourses work with the inner self and the outer self respectively, the

[29] Western suggests these discourses are reflected in both coaching and mentoring. Western (2012) along with Garvey and Stokes (2022) consider there to be considerable overlap between these two disciplines and no agreed differentiating definition of each. They often use the terms interchangeably. Stokes et al provide a table suggesting 'typical' characteristics of each discipline in areas where they may be perceived to differ (Stokes et al 2020:2). For the purposes of this thesis I will normally use the term 'mentoring' as this is the language employed by the participants and also used in the CMD guidance for Scottish Baptist ministers.

Managerial discourse is more about the person-in-role (Western 2012:187). The orientation of mentoring in this mode is to enable a person to fulfil the expectations of their role successfully. Western points out that a risk of this approach is that the mentor's thinking becomes 'infused and underpinned by the logic of managerialism' (2012:178), centring on controlling processes and measuring outcomes but restricting imaginative contributions. The participants all appear to be very aware of the importance of the role of the minister, and some expectations that accompany that, so there are clearly ways in which the managerial discourse could be evident in their experiences of mentoring.

Networking Mentoring accepts that mentoring does not necessarily exist in one-to-one relationships but that 'a developmentally aware learner may have a network of supportive, challenging and development relationships' (Garvey and Stokes 2022:6). This recognises that in a rapidly changing yet increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, one mentor may not have sufficient breadth of knowledge and experience to be a secure guide. A practitioner who has been successful on the terms of the previous generation cannot be presumed to be a sagacious guide for the next, or certainly not the sole mentor for someone facing the challenge of changing times. As the participants in this project face multiple complex transitions in society, technology and church, the prospect of a network of mentors may be attractive.

Mentoring and Christian Leadership

Mentoring has been widely explored as a means of supporting the growth of Christian leaders, with roots clearly evident in the biblical tradition. In a collection of essays edited by Thompson and Murchison, Brueggemann traces the notion of mentoring in the Old Testament (Thompson and Murchison 2018:14-30). He notes the father-to-son mentoring pattern in the Wisdom literature and the mentor-like relationships between Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, Eli and Samuel and Elijah and Elisha. Though women are largely occluded in these accounts, Brueggemann draws attention to the mentoring of Josiah by Hulda and of Esther by Mordecai, as well as the proverbs of King Lemuel who repeats 'an oracle that his mother taught him' (Proverbs 31.1). He characterises the mentoring advice as 'an urging to stay faithful to YHWH' which is generally accepted by mentees in a one-directional mentoring process (2018:30), with the notable exception of the poem of Job which 'bears witness to critical restlessness with such an authoritative tradition' (2018:16).

In the same volume Bartlett considers the New Testament evidence of mentoring. He is cautious of a simplistic quest for 'Jesus the mentor' which to him sounds too much like a very contemporary

search for 'Jesus as CEO'. Similarly he comments that 'Jesus as mentor can seem a little tepid compared to the more common descriptions of him as Lord, Savior, Redeemer, King and Master' (2018:35). Bartlett finds it easier to recognise mentoring relationships cultivated by the Apostle Paul, notably with Timothy and Titus but also Philemon, as well as Paul's own experience of being mentored by Ananias. Paul's method of mentoring can be most clearly seen in 2 Timothy where a dual pattern emerges of urging his mentee to remember his teachings and to model his way of behaviour (2018:37). After discussing Paul's approach to mentoring, Bartlett returns to a consideration of Jesus as a mentor to his disciples, observing that he has 'an ethic of imitation' (2018:51), typified in his instructions that his disciples should wash the feet of others as he has washed theirs and love others as he has loved them.

Identifying these threads of mentoring in the Bible helps me and the participants to welcome mentoring as a normative Christian practice. Furthermore, a range of literature in recent years aimed at church leaders has celebrated the benefits of mentoring in a number of ways, including the promotion of spiritual growth (Horsfall 2008), avoiding burnout (Lewis and Robinson 2009) and shaping future generations (Keay 2020).[30]

e. A Learning Climate

Finally in this section I note the emphasis in the literature on the importance of creating a climate that is congenial to CPD. Garvin suggests that the building blocks of a learning organisation, are a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and leadership that reinforces learning (Garvin 2008: 109).[31] If an organisation became intrusively proactive in establishing these building blocks then it could violate the principle of voluntarism we noted earlier. However, it is possible to create the conditions in which an activity may flourish without mandating the activity.[32]

I can see that a network of churches will not be able to enrich the continuing development of its ministers in any way that has longevity unless it can establish the right balance between voluntarism

[30] It should be noted that not all the literature on mentoring Christian leaders is positive. Notably Uroko (2020) has reflected on the dysfunctionality of some pastor mentoring in Nigeria and called for a rediscovery of the values he sees embodied in the Jethro-Moses relationship.

[31] These form the basis of a tool he produced at Harvard Business School to evaluate an organisation's learning culture.

[32] This seems to be the ethos promoted by Rowold and Kauffeld, whose study of the impact of career-related continuous learning (CRCL) on 372 employees from 19 companies concluded that there is an important role for organisations to foster informal CRCL. They suggest relatively subtle nudges in this direction, such as equipping supervisors with techniques which help them to communicate the importance of informal CRCL, introducing job rotation or using job-analysis to identify the potential of certain functions to generate learning (2009:98).

and compulsion, foreground informal learning as well as structured courses, encourage mentoring of various kinds and develop and sustain a culture where CMD is normal. It would be unfair to my colleagues to suggest such a culture does not currently exist at all within our family of churches, but my enthusiasm (which is also the itch I am seeking to scratch with this doctoral research), is to discover and establish a richer and more authentic culture of continuing development for Baptist ministers now and for years to come.

2.4 Echoes Across the Landscape from Communities of Practice

The continuing development of ministers cannot be reduced to the notion of a collection of individualised learners seeking to enrich their understanding through isolated study. I have already noted that learning that is fruitful for ministerial practitioners is both communal and practice-focused. For this reason I am keen to explore how the study of what are termed 'Communities of Practice' might influence the development of CMD.

The concept of Communities of Practice is developed in the seminal work of educational theorist Etienne Wenger (1998) and refined in his subsequent work (2002, 2015).[33] I will examine his theory and some critiques of his work, noting its potential relevance for CMD.

a. The Theory

Wenger describes a 'social theory of learning' (1998:3) in which the primary focus is on learning as social participation as individuals engage in and contribute to the practices of communities. Thus communities refine their practice and ensure new generations of members (1998:7).[34] *Practice*

[33] Prior to his work on communities of practice, Wenger had undertaken ethnographic studies of apprenticeships, with anthropologist Jean Lave (Wenger and Lave, 1991). In seeking to articulate what made apprenticeship so compelling as a learning process they used the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, recognising that over time learners such as apprentices could move from legitimate peripheral participation to full membership of a community. This broadened the traditional idea of apprenticeship from a master-student relationship to one of participation and identity transformation in a community of practice.

[34] Wenger frames the explanation of his theory with a description of his ethnographic research amongst claims processors in a company he pseudonymously calls Alinsu, noting particularly how learning occurs in that context. He summarises the fundamental principle that emerges from these observations: 'Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained

connotes not just doing in and of itself, but doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do (1998:47). This meaning arises from a process of negotiation involving two constituent processes: participation and reification. The former entails engaging in the shared practice of the group, be that in a workplace, a learning environment or elsewhere. Reification is the way we project our meanings into the world and then perceive them as existing in the world and having a reality of their own. So 'any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms and concepts that reify something of that practice into a congealed form' (1998:59). Wenger's point is that meaning exists neither in us nor in the world, but in the dynamic experience of living in the world, through which participation and reification enable us to negotiate meaning with others. Thus, in the context of CMD, practice might mean participating in a practice common to all ministers, such as leading a Bible study group; reification might be a description of the work of the Spirit or of the group processes involved in this.

A community of practice is then comprised of three dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire (1998:72). *Mutual engagement* means being engaged with others in practices that have been mutually negotiated. 'Being included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community's practice' (1998:74); it is more than simply being named as part of a group, team or network. Thus the work of community maintenance is an intrinsic part of any practice. A *joint enterprise* is defined by the participants in the very act of pursuing it. It is not just a stated goal but is 'their negotiated response to a situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense' (1998: 77). As such, it creates relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of the practice. A *shared repertoire* refers to the community's resources, which may include routines, words, tools, stories, symbols and concepts that the community has produced or adopted (1998:83).[35]

b. Critique and Development

pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities communities of practice' (1998:45).

[35] In a more popular explanation of the theory on his website, Wenger describes the three defining characteristics of a community of practice as the domain, the community and the practice. These would seem to correlate respectively to joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire. (Wenger 2015).

Although Wenger's insights were greeted enthusiastically by many in the corporate world[36], numerous critiques have arisen. Joanne Roberts, of Durham Business School, expresses a range of concerns (Roberts 2006). In summary these are:

- Power: members of a community of practice will have unequal standing in the group and it may be subject to outside authority figures, which may negatively affect the negotiation of meaning.
- Trust: Adversarial relations and competition may prevent the emergence of healthy community.
- Predispositions: group members arrive with these and knowledge may become aligned with the specific predispositions of a community.[37]
- Size and spatial reach: it is questionable whether the same dynamics are at work in a small community of practice as are considered to be in a community of practice of 1,500 within a large corporation

Furthermore, a range of critiques exist concerning the instrumental use of communities of practice for business advantage.[38] In particular, attempts to purposefully design communities of practice risk losing sight of the original emphasis placed on learning as an investment of identity in the social context and failing to recognise the spontaneous nature of communities of practice (Amin and Roberts, 2008; Lave, 2008).[39]

[36] Especially enthusiastic were those who saw communities of practice as a potential method for increasing profitability. In 2002 Wenger collaborated with US business leaders Richard McDermott and William Snyder to write *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. This seeks to identify how communities of practice can be 'a key to success in a global knowledge economy' (Wenger et al, 2002:5), 'improving business outcomes' and 'developing organizational capabilities' (2002:14). This in turn gave rise to a considerable body of knowledge on the relevance of communities of practice in a business context, not least as part of a knowledge-management strategy (eg Saint-Onge and Wallace 2003).

[37] Roberts refers to Bourdieu's idea that habitus consists of modes of thought that are unconsciously acquired, resistant to change, and transferable between different contexts (2006:629).

[38] Many organisations have sought to establish communities of practice with a view to improving the performance of staff, for example in business (Probst and Borzillo, 2008), in higher education (McDonald and Cater-Steel 2017) and in nursing (Morley 2016).

[39] Waring et al (2013) have similarly questioned attempts to set up communities of practice in order to obtain knowledge as an output. Questions have also been raised where planned communities of practice were expected to implement certain pre-specified strategies based on 'evidence' (Anderson-Carpenter et al., 2014; Evans et al, 2014).

In 2015 Wenger-Trayner[40] developed his work further, co-editing *Learning in Landscapes of Practice* (Wenger-Trayner et al, 2015).[41] Accepting that there has at times been too great a focus on single communities, the writers now maintain that bodies of knowledge 'are constituted by a complex landscape of different communities of practice' (2015:15). These landscapes are *political*, as they contain competing claims to knowledge; they are *flat*, insofar as knowledge does not flow from producers to receivers in a hierarchy; and they are *diverse*, since boundaries are always a matter of negotiation, potential misunderstanding, yet also 'hold potential for unexpected learning' (2015:17). Thus our personal experience of learning can be thought of as a journey through this landscape. Practitioners are able to provide a service by being competent in their own practice and also knowledgeable with respect to other practices in the landscape of their specialization. Thus they coin the term 'knowledgeability' to refer to 'the complex relationships people establish with respect to a landscape of practice, which make them recognizable as reliable sources of information or legitimate providers of services' (2015:23).[42]

The idea of landscapes of practice has made me recognise how knowledgeability is essential for ministers. I have addressed this in an article elsewhere (Hodson 2020) demonstrating that alongside competence in our own practice, we may well need knowledge of other domains such as education, community development, counselling, politics, biblical studies, music, etc in order to be those 'reliable sources of information or legitimate providers of services.' So an approach to CMD which assumes ministers are a community of practice also needs to recognise the wider landscape of learning through which we travel and be aware of the negotiation skills we require at the boundaries.

Theological reflection on communities of practice is at an early stage, but this has been started by Bennett et al (2018), who reflect on the experience of establishing a professional doctorate in four UK universities. The authors note that several elements of the concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which is fundamental to the self-understanding of practical theology, can be identified in communities of practice: 'an epistemology of the generation of knowledge and understanding

[40] Since 2015 Etienne Wenger has been known as Etienne Wenger-Trayner and has published jointly with his wife, Beverly Wenger-Trayner.

[41] This arose from conversations with the Practice Based Learning Centre at The Open University. The work brings together a range of academics and practitioners, combining theoretical writing with accounts of real-life experiences.

[42] The book continues by exploring stories from different landscapes of practice. Particular attention is paid to the emotional impact of moving through a landscape, which may encompass failure and the development of resilience. There are different trajectories of participation, where some may be sojourners in a community, others long-term participants and some may experience marginality. Inhabiting landscapes of practice may give rise to hybrid identities and the work of brokers at the boundaries of landscapes is essential for cross-boundary learning

through action and practice; the centrality of community for the generation of understanding and wisdom; and the performative element of wisdom' (2018:81). However, they observe that communities that are founded on affinity, common purpose and proximity face the risk of 'a kind of narrowing of horizons' and therefore it is vital for communities to avoid mutual reinforcement of prejudice and 'embody forms of questioning and critique which come from the opening of critical spaces through difference and disagreement' (2018:88). Communities of practice exhibit the sacramental motif of 'being met and fed in community' and resonate with the Pauline image of the 'diverse and yet united' body of Christ as well as insights from contemporary missiology about the quest for truth through mutual discovery and dialogue (2018:98-99).

The emergence of practical wisdom through communities of practice in the ways described above may also be a highly desirable outcome of CMD; and for ministers who often struggle with the isolation of our practice, the biblical idea of being 'met and fed in community' is a striking metaphor for learning in communion with one another. The greatest challenge is certainly how we might avoid 'a narrowing of horizons' given the homogeneity of the participants and perhaps the right use of power or influence in the group would be to intentionally introduce diversity of voices and ideas.

2.5 Conclusion

I set out to explore the contours of the landscape of practical theology, along with some adjacent territory, in the hope of identifying a plot on which the construction of this thesis can take place. At the end of this literature review I have identified a site within the context of practical theology. It seems clear that what I construct will be situated in the general area of ministerial education. In this field extensive research has been undertaken on initial ministerial education and the limited work that has already been undertaken with regard to CMD has focused on the role of theological educators and seminaries. My particular interest in understanding *from ministers* how they have experienced fruitful CMD remains undeveloped by other scholars. The plot on which I intend to build is a green field site.

However, the materials for the construction cannot all be sourced locally. It will be necessary to import some raw materials from the scholarship on social learning, in particular the development of communities of practice, and from the study of ministry, in particular the concept of pastoral imagination, to situate the work in a wider academic context. I will also need to cross the nearby border into the domain of continuing professional development to supply expertise on lifelong learning in the workplace which has been cultivated there for many years.

Taking all this into consideration, it now seems possible to construct something new and valuable in this space, though I find my own role in the project fluctuates between architect, builder, surveyor, project-manager, estate-agent and site-worker.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Reflexivity

As a researcher I seek to become appropriately and self-consciously situated in relation to the project. This requires a commitment to reflexivity, described by Denzin and Lincoln as 'a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself' (2018:143). It is necessary to find a way to look at the self (as far as is possible) as if from the outside. This is not necessarily a comfortable process that promises a secure outcome; as Schön points out, practitioners must 'move into the center of their own doubts' (1987:83).

I approach this research as an English Baptist minister serving among a community of predominantly Scottish ministers. I value the welcome I have received in this community over the last five years but often I am aware of being an outsider; every time I speak my accent says, 'I'm not from here'. Yet I am simultaneously an insider. As the General Director of our network of churches I am right at the heart of things, in a position with some structural power and considerable organisational capital. As a researcher I embrace these two aspects of my presence, aware that my inner sense of being an outsider seems to be less significant to colleagues than the implications of my institutional role. The power I have, especially in relation to pre-accredited ministers who need to successfully complete a Baptist Union process to become fully accredited, needs to be named and owned as I approach the research, giving rise to a diligent awareness that what I consider an invitation may be perceived by those who receive it as a requirement.

My involvement in Christian ministry stretches back thirty years. I have often felt the tension between an inner sense that my calling is to follow Jesus Christ in a life of prayer and faithfulness, and the outward appearance that my vocation is to be a minister. Of course these are not mutually exclusive, and exist in fact in a symbiotic relationship, but my own continuing ministry development has focused more on spirituality and discipleship than the 'hints and tips' of pastoralia. As a researcher I am seeking an openness to witness and celebrate whatever kind of CMD my colleagues find fruitful, but I am aware of a bias towards the internal rather than the external requirements of ministry.

If practical theology is a 'response to a wound' (McClintock-Fulkerson 2007:12),[43] then the particular wound I am bringing into this research is a lack of any organised or accountable focus on CMD for most of my years in local church ministry. My enthusiasm for developing a CMD programme when I was appointed Ministry Development Coordinator in 2015 arose in part from my own disappointment at the neglect of this in the network of churches to which I had previously belonged. I therefore bring into this research the enthusiasm of the convert, which I appreciate can deafen a person to alternative voices or cause me to project my own 'pre-conversion' state onto others. Also, as the creator of the habits-based approach to CMD we have been using for the last four years, I can be protective and defensive of our current practice. Despite my assertions earlier in this thesis about wanting all ministers to discover or experience CMD in a form that is fruitful for them, I have (gently, I think) promoted compliance rather than experimentation with our current CMD structure. The research is not, and must not become, a check on observance but instead of humble listening to the lived reality of others.

Why am I doing this research? I have generally told others and myself that I see it as a contribution to enhancing the CMD experience of other ministers. My primary justification is serving others, enabling them to be better equipped for their vocation. This is true. But it is not that simple. Partly I am simply curious; I want to create a window into what is going on in CMD, or at least take a good look under the CMD bonnet. Associated with that, I have a desire in some way to become an expert in the area in which I have been working. The apparent kudos of completing doctoral studies beckons me alluringly yet I am not at a stage where my 'career' is likely to be significantly advanced by completing doctoral research. I recognise that if my predominant intention is not to serve and enrich the practice of my colleagues then there remains a moral question of whether I am treating the participants in an instrumental way – claiming to listen and co-create knowledge whilst actually seeking to harvest data to promote my own ends.

3.1 Worldview

I approach this research with a Christian worldview focused on pursuing the way of Jesus Christ, recognising a need for transformation of thoughts, deeds and relationships towards an ideal called the kingdom of God. This presupposes an immediacy of God's relationship with the world in which

[43] McClintock-Fulkerson coins this phrase when describing the methodology of her ground-breaking ethnographic study of a multiracial United Methodist church that included people with disabilities. She goes on to express this sentiment in a similar way: 'Theologies that matter arise out of dilemmas—out of situations that matter' (2007:13).

things may happen, explicitly or implicitly, under God's rule, evident because they reflect God's fundamental qualities of love, justice and mercy, as revealed in Jesus Christ. This is not an individualistic way of being but is necessarily espoused by communities (typically church congregations) who seek to embody and enact a shared life under the rule of Christ. These communities mostly recognise ministers, who carry a gift and a responsibility to enrich, support, strengthen, focus and bind them together in the common purpose of following the way of Christ. In congregations to which I have belonged I have witnessed and been affected by ministers who *have* and *have not* attended to their own development. This has left me with a conviction that the purposeful pursuit of CMD is essential for the well-being and growth of both ministers and congregations.

3.2 Epistemology

What sort of knowledge am I attempting to present when I ask 'What constitutes fruitful CMD for ministers?' I do not assume I can offer an accurate, generalisable account of reality which will provide an answer that is representative of or applicable to all ministers, or indeed that could be replicated if I made the same inquiry on a future occasion. I am therefore not working within a positivist epistemology in which 'ideas can only be treated as knowledge if they can be put to the test of empirical experience, thus producing generalisations known as "scientific laws'" (Gray 2018:23).

The uniqueness of human experiences of God, the varieties of Christian community, and the divergent priorities and expectations of ministers suggests to me that there is not one normative process resulting in fruitful CMD which can be elucidated and defined. The knowledge I am seeking is situated in the diverse contexts and callings of a number of ministers who will experience the benefits of CMD in different ways. The world I am interested in is not simply 'out there' waiting to be discovered but is the locus of complex interpretive processes within which colleagues are seeking to make sense of their experiences.

Therefore I will approach this research with a constructivist epistemology[44], which Denzin and Lincoln describe in this way:

[44] In my view a Christian approach to constructivism seeks to honour the human agency of meaning-makers whilst acknowledging that meaning-making is only possible because God has breathed meaning into the creation. Living life in communion with Jesus Christ means constructing meanings for life specifically in the light of his incarnation, death, resurrection and coming kingdom.

> The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Terms like *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability* replace the usual positive criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. (2018:20)

As a researcher, and in particular as one who is already immersed in the community where my inquiry will take place, I believe that knowledge will be co-created with the other participants in the research and will arise from 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty 1998:67).

I recognise that there will be various interpretations of the same phenomena, all of which will hold independent validity. The quest is not for a single, pure or ultimate way of knowing, but for deeper perceptions and insights which will be mutually beneficial for those who undertake the practice of CMD. This can be illustrated by the contrast between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge[45]. Nomothetic knowledge is discovered using the scientific method and is expected to be falsifiable, replicable and generalisable. Idiographic knowledge 'presumes that meaningful knowledge can be discovered in unique, non-replicable experiences' (Swinton and Mowat 2016:41). Though no two people experience the same event in the same way, inquiring into those experiences can yield meanings and understandings which have the potential to enrich shared knowledge and inform shared practices.

Idiographic knowledge cannot be generalised in the same way as scientific knowledge (which demands replicability as part of its very claim to be knowledge). Denzin and Lincoln use the term 'transferability' (see above) to suggest how such knowledge can achieve wider value. Earlier Lincoln and Guba observed that the constructivist

> cannot specify the external validity of an enquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility.' (1985:316).

I envisage the knowledge generated through my research will fulfil Swinton and Mowat's criteria of creating 'a *resonance* with people outside of the immediate situation who are experiencing phenomena that are not identical, but hold enough similarity to create a potentially transformative resonance' (Swinton and Mowat 2016:44, my italics). This will not give rise to a knowledge about

[45] Widely used in qualitative research literature, these terms were originally coined by Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), a German philosopher of the Baden School.

ministers' experience which can be universalised to define 'best practice'. It will however provide insights which I can bring into an ongoing dialogue about CMD practices. The embodied practice of ministers pursuing continuing development is the only reality here; how this aspect of discipleship (and leadership) is incarnated in specific people is an object of wonder to be treated reverently, not to be used as data to prescribe how others should or should not act.

3.4 Research Paradigm and Methodology

This research anticipates that different people will interpret and practice CMD in different ways. It is an inquiry into what participants find fruitful, and that will surely vary. In this respect, a critical realist approach would allow me to recognise diverse standpoints and value a range of viewpoints that arise from differing life experiences and resultant perspectives.[46] However, a realist approach retains the assumption that there is a specifiable reality called 'fruitful CMD' that exists in its own right, albeit that it is perceived differently by various practitioners. A critical-realist approach would locate the context of the research in a controlling meta-narrative and seek to identify how this is accommodated or resisted in practice. CMD could be explored within the meta-narrative of the Christian tradition, and specifically that part of it which identifies learning/growth/maturity as goals for all believers. Whilst this context cannot be ignored, this study is primarily seeking to foreground the voices of practitioners in order to gain a deep understanding of their experience which will enrich an ongoing conversation about practice, not to challenge or affirm a meta-narrative.

For this reason I have chosen to adopt Narrative Inquiry as my research methodology.

What Is Narrative?

Narrative is storytelling. It is more than chronicling events. Stories provide a structure to organise events or experiences in a way that reveals what is important or significant for the teller or the audience. Human beings live storied lives and through story we experience the world and make sense of it. We shape our daily lives by stories of who we are and who others are. We interpret our past and our present through stories. Story is 'a portal through which a person enters the world and

[46] Critical realism is a branch of philosophy that evolved from the generative work of Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975). It differentiates between the 'real world', which cannot be observed and exists independent from human perceptions, and the 'observable' world, constructed from human perspectives and experiences. Thus critical realism maintains that unobservable structures cause observable events and the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures that generate events.

by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful' (Clandinin 2006:44-45). Bruner (2002:90) suggests 'story is our medium for coming to terms with surprises and oddities of the human condition'.

What Is Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative Inquiry is one of many methodologies that have arisen as scholarship has shifted from a predominantly positivist paradigm for research. Since people invariably lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, 'narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of experience' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990:2). Pinnegar and Daynes maintain that how fully the researcher embraces narrative inquiry is indicated by how far they turn in their thinking and action across 'the four turns toward narrative…

> (1) a change in the relationship between the person conducting the research and the person participating as the subject (the relationship between the researcher and the researched), (2) a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data, (3) a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific, and finally (4) a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing' (Clandinin ed. 2007:5).

Narrative Inquiry assumes that human subjects are best studied in their natural settings and that 'authentic understanding is gained from the meanings people bring to phenomena' (Lewis 2017: 164). Narrative Inquiry could also be described as 'inquiry into narrative' since narrative is both the phenomenon studied and the method of study. Chase (2005:651) has described Narrative Inquiry as

> an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them.

She goes on to point out that narrative researchers distinctively

> treat narrative, both oral or written, as a distinct form of discourse…Unlike a chronology, which also reports events over time, a narrative communicates the narrator's point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling in the first place. In addition to describing what happened, narratives pay attention to emotions, thoughts and interpretations (2005:656).

Temporality, Sociality and Place

Clandinin (2006) maintains that temporality, sociality and space are vital considerations in all Narrative Inquiry research.

Temporality points to the fact that all the events being studied are in transition. Every narrator, event and object has a past, a present and a future. Participants' stories and inquirers' stories are ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field is 'walking into the midst of these stories' (Clandinin 2006:47).

Sociality refers to the relational and personal conditions of the inquiry. Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry; they themselves are part of the landscape; they write themselves into the work, not out of it. The relationship between the researcher and participant is an integral part of the way a researcher inquires into the participants' experiences and their own experiences. Co-constructed experiences are developed through the relational inquiry process. Lewis points out that as researchers

> enter into a relationship with the storytellers a new narrative is being created and woven through the shared stories. Not only is there the story itself, there is also the meta story 'the story of the story's telling' (2017:14).

Place may be a single location or a sequence of locations but in Narrative Inquiry the specificity of place is crucial. Narratives have settings, they do not exist without some kind of locality. Narrative is inherently situated and any attempt to dislocate it will do the narrative violence.

Justice

Narrative Inquiry gives storytellers a voice to describe their experience on their own terms. It seeks not to conquer or change the worlds it encounters (Lugones, quoted in Lewis 2017) but to understand them and be enriched or challenged by the truths that may be revealed. As such it is not a means of assessing whether the disempowered are complying with the expectations of the powerful but a recognition that everyone's stories are valuable and revelatory. As Ricoeur has pointed out, we 'tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated' (1984:75).

Data Collection and Sampling

There is no required sample size for Narrative Inquiry. Indeed, in some contexts there could be as little as one participant because the purpose is to listen to one story. Recruiting participants 'may require some preliminary relationship-building at your planned inquiry site' (Lewis 2017:7) because

narrative inquiry entails an intimate engagement of the researcher and participant(s) in the story of the relationship.

Data collection can involve participant stories (in written or recorded form), conversation, poetry, imagined dialogue, field notes, artwork, photographs or other artefacts. Narrative researchers often use a journal for reflection alongside data collection tools such as notebooks and recordings. Reflection on the data when it is newly gathered is the first step in a longer process of re-reading and looking not just for fragments but for an emerging story.

Validity

Along with most forms of qualitative research, Narrative Inquiry does not seek prediction or control but rather understanding. It 'does not purport some bold TRUTH, but rather provides some *truths* about being human and human being' (Lewis 2017:9). Therefore the validity of Narrative Inquiry arises from ideas of believability, trustworthiness, persuasiveness and authenticity. (Lewis reviews late 20th century writers who took views on this, 2017:10). Critical questions for assessing believability or authenticity include: a) Are story and the storyteller credible? b) Do they engage the human imagination in the sharing of their story? c) Does it resonate with wider human experience?

Hendry (2007) pushes this approach further, arguing that narrative enquirers must shift their sense of trust from method to relationship. By applying criteria such as verification and validity to narrative, she maintains, we violate the sacredness of stories. So narrative may be the methodology but storytelling is the method. Hendry maintains that staying true to our informants' stories (not imposing our own narratives on them) is the aim of narrative research, so validity is not about correct interpretation but a faith that trusts the stories and the storyteller.

Why I Have Chosen Narrative Inquiry for this Research Project?

1. The Open-Ended Nature of the Question

As I reflected on the research question, 'What constitutes fruitful continuing ministry development (CMD) for Baptist ministers in Scotland?' during the first years of the DPT programme, I realised that I have no authority to define the *goal* of CMD. This insight took some time to develop. Initially I had an (unrecognised and unacknowledged) belief that CMD was based on a generally-agreed curriculum – that ministers should improve in areas such as theological knowledge, communication skills, pastoral care, leadership, community engagement and spiritual vitality. These were the goods which CMD was seeking to achieve. My first understanding of the purpose of the research therefore was to

discover the practices which most efficiently give rise to these goods. I was asking: What are the most fruitful ways to fulfil this implicit curriculum?

Now, however, I recognise that the goal of CMD cannot be so tightly defined. The question is not, how successful is a minister in developing to fit a certain template and what is the key to that success? The unique crafting work of the Holy Spirit is wider, deeper and more unpredictable than I had previously envisaged when I set about this project. There are innumerable ways in which a minister may have developed – through the best or the worst relationships, through diligent habits or chaotic discoveries, through finding strengths or leaning into vulnerability, through structured learning or momentary revelations. Any of these may have given birth to the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) of ministry and thus would certainly be ministry development.

So now instead of me defining the goal, I understand the need to ask ministers, 'What are you becoming and how did you get there?' I need to hear what their destination(s) have been and learn about the journey by which they arrived. This will inevitably require a narrative. Narrative Inquiry is a methodology which will help me explore the storied nature of ministry development, allowing a narrative to emerge in the participants' own terms, told according to their priorities, focusing on what is significant to them. I relinquish my right to set the desired outcomes and instead become both open and attentive to how the participants tell of their outcomes.

2. The Opportunity for Empowerment

The power dynamics in this research could easily corrupt the intentions. If I give the impression that I am interested in how well ministers are achieving a set of curricular expectations that I (and our organisation) have pre-determined, then I am effectively inviting people to demonstrate that they make the grade on my terms. Power lies on my side of the scales, where I have developed the current CMD programme and work on the national team of the organisation that requires ministers to pay some heed to this in order to maintain their accreditation.

Inviting ministers to tell *their* story of *their* development on *their* terms recognises the power imbalance and has the potential to mitigate some of the harmful effects of this. Narrative Inquiry expects to hear the point of view and the priorities of the participants. Welcoming their storied accounts of what has counted as success, and perhaps failure, for them in their continuing development transfers the power to define CMD from the researcher to the participants. There may be as many definitions of CMD as there are stories told, so I need to be prepared to broaden my understanding and not to funnel the data in the narrow measuring jar of my present framework.

3.5 Research Methods

Preparatory Focus Group

It is conceivable that this narrative enquiry could have taken place simply by asking the participants to tell the story of their development in ministry and waiting to see what came forth. One opening question could perhaps unlock a unique story laden with significance. However, I recognised that to elicit a narrative from some participants various prompts might be needed along the way. Since I am aiming to avoid shoe-horning the participants into my own presuppositions about the nature of CMD, it was important that subsequent prompts were in the form of open questions and, as far as possible, avoided implying a desired response. Therefore I developed a series of questions to be deployed as needed.

I thus began my data collection by running a focus group to trial these questions. I was especially attentive to the way they were understood and the responses they elicited. Posing them in real time to real practitioners enabled me to observe how they were received. I anticipated this might give me cause to modify the questions or simply to reflect on the way they were construed to be value-laden or indicative of my own priorities. The specific questions were:

1. Please prepare in advance a short response to this question: Would you tell the group what has contributed to your continuing development as a minister since you began serving as a minister?
2. What does the phrase 'Continuing Ministry Development' mean to you?
3. What habits have contributed to your continuing development?
4. Have any specific events been significant in your continuing development as a minister?
5. What has impeded your continuing development?
6. What impact has the Baptist Union of Scotland structure for CMD had on your development as a minister?
7. Based on your own experience, what advice would you give about continuing ministry development to someone just starting out as a minister?
8. What attitude to CMD have you perceived in the church(es) where you have been a minister?

When working well focus groups allow participants 'to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms' (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999:5). I was pleased to discover that using the questions I had prepared the focus group quickly did this, creating an energy of its own and stimulating one another to share experiences and insights about CMD with only minor prompts from myself. I had read that 'focus group discussions act as a social arena for the negotiation of social norms and normativity' (Kristiansen and Grønkjær, 2018:3), and it

was clear (as my research results will show in subsequent chapters) that the focus group began to converge around certain norms the group recognised for CMD, exposing me to assumptions which challenged my own and leading me towards deeper reflexivity.

The focus group was lively, engaged and important data for my research arose from the conversation. Nevertheless, I drew two specific conclusions from the focus group which affected the way I conducted the subsequent interviews. Firstly I realised that I was unlikely to explore all the questions I had devised in a one hour interview, especially if I was seeking to elicit narratives and allow the interview to be led by the stories rather than controlled by the questions. I therefore decided to focus on questions 1-4 in the interviews, holding questions 5-8 as additional questions if required.

Secondly I realised that question 1 logically precedes question 2 so it made more sense to begin with that question. However, question 2 was less likely to give rise to a narrative response; it could easily elicit a series of bullet-points or a highly theoretical response. If I was to begin with a question about the meaning of CMD, I needed to find a more creative way of presenting this. I therefore turned to the method of object elicitation to begin the interview.

Object elicitation is a development of the photo-elicitation method. Harper, in a frequently quoted article, 'Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation', describes the use of visual stimuli such as photographs in interviews to evoke not only deeper information but different information in comparison to interviews that use words alone (Harper 2002:15). Wilig, reflecting on research in psychology and counselling, observes that:

> object elicitation provides an opportunity for participants to talk about their relationship with the objects and in this way hopes to shed light on their wider experience (Wilig 2017:211).

My aim was that the objects would involve the participants in some preparation and reflection prior to the interview, yet give them freedom to enter the conversation on their terms, and to do so in a creative, even playful, way. This worked well as each of the participants seemed to enjoy sharing their object and telling its associated story at the start of our meetings.[47] I found, as Wilig goes on to observe, that 'the use of object elicitation as a method of data collection offers research participants an active role in setting the agenda' (2017:212).

[47] In fact, one participant forgot about the object but nevertheless improvised in a fascinating way; see results in Chapter 4.

Interviews

I used interviews with seven ministers as the primary component of the research, commencing with the object elicitation exercise, then using questions 1-4 above, with the occasional deployment of questions 5-8 where time permitted. Although less naturalistic than a focus group, these interviews proved to be 'a site of narrative reproduction' (Czarniawska 2014:31). Thus they became one of the 'disclosive practices' which 'allow social practices, embodied intentionality, common taken-for-granted background meanings, habits, rituals, practices, and everyday life to show up (i.e., become visible and intelligible)' (Benner 2008:np).

The interview is a co-creation, 'a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together' (Czarniawska, 2014:32). Initially I intended to refer to the participants as co-researchers because I considered the interplay of my questions and their story-telling as the generative process from which knowledge and understanding arose for both the participants and myself. However, I discovered the term 'co-researcher' is generally used to describe participants in collaborative research who are 'collaborators in the process of gathering and interpreting data' (Given, 2008:np).[48] Although I found many of the arguments for fully collaborative research in Practical Theology advanced by De Roest (2019) to be persuasive[49] and I recognised the impact of the model of 'Participative Black Theology' described by Reddie (2015),[50] I chose not to take a fully collaborative approach for two reasons. Firstly I was conscious that the potential for both competitiveness among participants as to how *much* CMD they were perceived to have undertaken and also the dynamic that some might feel to prove they had met the CMD requirements I expected would adversely impact attempts to interpret the data collaboratively. Secondly, with participants scattered across the country and committed to the complicated diaries of ministers, I decided this would add a cumbersome load to the project. So I have avoided the term 'co-researchers' but with equal commitment I have avoided terms such as 'interviewees' or 'research subjects' which reduce the participants to the objects of my work rather than meaningful partners in it. I have chosen to generally use the term 'participants', holding in mind that this does not just mean people who

[48] Similarly Benner (2008) observes of collaborative research: 'Rigor involves staying true to the text, engaging in consensual validation, and allowing the readers to participate in the validation process by presenting texts associated with the interpretations made by the researcher.'

[49] De Roest advocates 'a turn to the community' in Practical Theology and argues for collaborative research on six grounds: the *mission dei* rationale, the emerging community rationale, the epistemological rationale, the innovation and professionalisation rationale, the post-colonial rationale and the utility rationale (2019:158).

[50] Reddie describes his use of 'experiential models of learning' in which the participants are 'enabled to reflect critically on the immediate experiences and feelings that have accrued from the participative activity itself' (2015:64).

participate in *my research* but conversation partners with whose knowledge and reflections I am co-constructing an understanding of fruitful CMD.

My questions focus on the participant's experience and it was crucial to ask them in a way that 'draws out the story without leading the participant into a set answer'. In particular I endeavoured to set the tone of the research 'by generating an opening question that is representative of the phenomenon and asking it using a reflective affect of voice quality' (Vandermause and Fleming, 2011:366). This applied both to my invitation to tell me about the object they had brought and then the way I presented the first question I asked after that. Offering this reflective tone myself, I hoped to help participants bring to mind storied events without an overlay of conscious explanation.

Protocol Writing

'Protocol' derives from a Greek term (*prōtokollon)* for an original draft (literally the first sheet of a roll of papyrus). In order to investigate the nature of a participant's experience it seems natural to ask them to write it down – to create a protocol, an original draft offering a description in their own language, telling the story in their own words. Although many people find writing more difficult than speaking about an experience, van Manen observes that 'writing forces the person into a reflective attitude' (1997:64). Most of the Baptist ministers are articulate and in the habit of writing about faith and experience in one way or another, so I had no hesitation about asking six of them to write a protocol about their experience of CMD.

On reflection I may have impeded this aspect of the research by restricting the word-count to 500 words. My intention was to encourage responses by making it clear I was not seeking a long essay. However, whilst all the participants attempted to give the protocols some narrative content, the relative brevity I had requested meant that they used most of the words to describe the breadth of CMD experiences they had undertaken. This left little or no space for setting it in the context of their whole ministry or reflecting on why any aspects of it were fruitful.

Diaries, Logs and Journals

Qualitative research can be seen as making the most of what is available, or 'gathering together a variety of available resources to create a bricolage' (Denzin and Lincoln 2018:11-12). One of the resources that I thought would be easily available to me was the annual log of CMD which each minister should keep. These are artefacts which not only record actions undertaken (eg books read, courses attended, spiritual exercises undertaken) but what the minister considered they gained from this at the time. This they may offer another insight into the immediate experience of the phenomenon of CMD by the participants.

Despite inviting 12 ministers to send me this, only four did so. On reflection, I think I had misread the sensitivity ministers feel about sharing their CMD log. They are used to a system where they review their CMD annually with a peer of their choosing – a process that was devised to avoid a feeling that there was a top-down assessing of the quality of a minister's CMD by denominational leaders. Despite my promise of confidentiality and anonymity in the research, I think a sense that I was violating the principle that CMD is reviewed by peers caused a reluctance to share the CMD logs. In some cases it may have been that the ministers had not completed CMD logs, but the sample I chose was of people who I knew in previous years had taken this seriously. Therefore this aspect of the research played only a small part in my reflection on the results of the research as a whole.

Sampling

If I were seeking to draw inferences about an entire population it would be necessary to choose a sample presumed to represent that population, either through a random process or by incorporating appropriate proportions to reflect the population as a whole. However, qualitative research typically employs non-random *purposeful* sampling (Leedy and Ormrod 2013: 152), selecting individuals that will yield the most information. Laverty suggests that the aim in participant selection is

> to select participants who have lived experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience (2003:28).

This corresponds with Leedy and Ormond's advice to ensure the sample includes not only typical but also seemingly non-typical examples and, when a power hierarchy exists, to sample from various levels of the hierarchy (2013:152). In the context of my research typical and non-typical may be best represented by those who are openly enthusiastic about the practice of CMD and those who express reservations about any obligation to pursue CMD. Given the under-representation of women in Scottish Baptist ministry, typical and non-typical will also mean listening to male and female voices. Whilst there is theoretically not a hierarchy among Baptist ministers, informal hierarchies are implied through, for example, age, years of experience in ministry and church-size.

The distribution of people who finally took part in the research was as follows:

	Female	Male	0-5 years ministry	5-15 years ministry	15+years ministry	Church size <50	Church size 50-120	Church size >120
Focus group	2	6	1	3	2	1	4	1
Interviews	2	5	2	2	3	1	4	2
Protocols	1	4	1	2	2	0	1	4
CMD logs	2	2	1	2	2	0	4	0

3.6 Data Analysis and Reporting

Having generated a substantial amount of data, most extensively through interviews and the focus group, but also in the form of protocols and CMD logs, I set about organising and reflecting on it. I transcribed the interviews and focus group recorded on Zoom and examined them in detail, listening to them multiple times over a period of weeks and re-reading the transcripts. As I did this I kept a journal, noting my observations about the shape of the narratives and the content. In particular I kept in mind the heuristic for analysing narrative proposed by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann:

- What is presented?
- How is it presented?
- For what purpose is this presented – and not something else?
- For what purpose is this presented now – and not at a different time?
- For what purpose is this presented this way – and not in a different way? (Quoted in Flick 2015:187)

I came to understand that narrative research demands self-reflexivity, which is 'an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment, actively constructing interpretations of the experience and questioning how those interpretations came about' (Hertz 1997:np).

As themes grew and took shape, I found that the act of writing is 'not a mechanical procedure [but itself] a creative, hermeneutic process' (van Manen 1997:95). The poietic act of text-creation became the moment at which I moved from simply representing the experience as originally interpreted to realising the fusion of horizons with the participant. Writing, reflecting and re-writing, moving repeatedly between the extrapolated themes and the text as a whole in a hermeneutic

cycle, characterised the continuing writing process. Through this process I realised that the narrative dimension of the work was growing deeper. To report the data I would not only describe the narratives shared with me by the participants; I would tell the story of how the stories were told to me. Their story of CMD would be embedded in the story of our meeting.

These narratives-about-narratives now comprise the opening section of Chapters 4-7 where I report on the findings of the research.

3.7 Ethics

Any research that involves data gathering from human participants must consider ethical issues. Gray states that ethical principles for research fall into four main areas: 'Avoid harm to participants; Ensure informed consent of participants; Respect the privacy of participants; Avoid the use of deception' (2018:75). In my application to the University Research Ethics Committee I took each of these factors into consideration.

In this research there was no *serious risk of physical harm to participants*. However, it was possible that emotional harm could be caused if an interviewee described something of deep significance and felt that was not received with the weight it should be. I believe that creating an environment of trust and being attentive and affirming helped to minimise this. None of the participants showed any evidence of finding the research context troubling or unusually stressful. I made it clear in the invitation to the research and again verbally at the start of the focus group and interviews that the participants were free to leave the meeting at any point without question if they felt that necessary. The University Ethics Committee also required me to arrange and offer an option for pastoral support should anyone be distressed by the experience. I gladly complied with this but to the best of my knowledge, this was not required.

Ensuring informed consent required that I provided all the participants with sufficient and accessible information about the project so they could make an informed decision as to whether to be involved. To do this I produced separate Information and Consent Forms for all participants. The University Ethics Committee suggested I merge these into one combined Information and Consent Form to mitigate the risk of 'either you or the participants getting lost in the paperwork'. It was also important to gain consent from organisational stakeholders, who in this case are the Trustee Board of the Baptist Union. This consent was granted at a routine Trustee Board meeting. Gray advises that a researcher should 'get the description checked and critiqued by others' (2018:77) and I was

grateful to a colleague for reading the Information for Participants and suggesting some adjustments for clarity.

Respecting the privacy of participants entails ensuring that any information I possess about participants is treated with an agreed level of care. Personal details and data we co-created has been stored on the secure University of Glasgow system and in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's data management policy. Participants understood that interviews would be carried out in a suitably private context, not overheard or interrupted by others, and that their identity would be anonymised as far as reasonably possible, though in a relatively small network of churches it was made clear that they may be recognisable because they express ideas that they have articulated elsewhere. The University Ethics Committee advised that I establish a clear process for redacting transcripts of the focus group and interviews to remove names and as much identifying information as possible, storing one tally document carefully which links the pseudonyms of participants to their Consent Forms in case they should wish to withdraw before the completion of the project. This I have done and once the project is finally complete I will destroy the tally document.

Avoiding the use of deception is not simply about avoiding covert methods of observation or wrongly describing the purpose of the research. Inaccurately describing the duration of the interview would be a form of deception, as would exaggerating the potential outcomes of the research. In the Information for Participants I provided a clear description of what would happen and how information would be used. I have given the participants sight of the way their responses are described in my results with an opportunity to confirm they are content with how they are represented, albeit anonymously. Once the project is completed I will offer the participants a copy of the thesis, which I am confident will provide reassurance to participants that the research has taken the direction promised when they were invited to become involved.

A further issue raised by the University Ethics Committee was the correct use of power. I had recognised that my senior position in the Baptist Union of Scotland (BUS) could cause concern that there was a coercive element to my research. I was advised to pay careful attention to this and adapted the Consent Form to explicitly address this with a section entitled 'Could my data be used to disadvantage me'. This read as follows:

> Your data will be used solely for the purpose of this research. It will not be shared with other members of the BUS staff team and will not be used to make value judgments about your ministry which might affect, for example, your future settlement or ministerial accreditation. I am accountable to the Trustee Board of the Baptist Union of Scotland and also to the

University of Glasgow for acting with integrity. If you believe your data is being used to disadvantage you in any way, you should contact the Convenor of the Baptist Union [*contact details provided]* or my research supervisor [*contact details provided*].

With these adjustments in place, I received consent from the University Ethics Committee to proceed with the research.

Chapter 4

How Ministers Define CMD

Introduction

The chief focus of this research is on the way ministers practice CMD and what they find to be fruitful. This inevitably requires a definition of CMD, which in turn raises the question of where that definition comes from and who has the right to authorise it. I have earlier (in the literature review) discussed some understandings of CMD but the nature of this project is to listen to the stories ministers tell about CMD, stories which implicitly or explicitly express their perceptions of what CMD is. In subsequent chapters the narratives ministers share about their practice will reveal what CMD means to them and I will not set out to contest this. This is a study of what is experienced as CMD and what could be, not what ought to be.

In this first section of reporting the results of my research we will listen specifically to ministers discussing the definition of CMD.[51] Hearing the conversation will serve as an opportunity to orient my discussion towards the themes and emphases that will arise in future chapters. Following this I will discuss in greater depth the themes they raise.

It must be noted that this conversation was amongst Scottish Baptist ministers who each, to a greater or lesser extent, would be aware of *How CMD Works for Baptist Ministers* (Baptist Union of Scotland 2018). This sets out six developmental habits for all minsters: spiritual development, reading, conferences or training courses, accountability, fellowship with other ministers and a review of ministry. I had not specifically drawn the participants' attention to this prior to the focus group but it inevitably formed the background to our conversation. It is also what is referred to when participants occasionally speak of a 'mandated' programme or 'the format that's presented.'

4.1 The Focus Group Conversation

> *You've stumped us all.* [52]

For the last 35 minutes the focus group had been talking about CMD. Eight participants, from different areas of Scotland, had been telling stories about our experiences of ministry development. I was aware of the mixture of ages and theologies in the room and I was relieved to see the group

[51] This interchange took place in the second half of a one hour focus group after each participant had discussed with the group their personal experience of CMD during the years they had served in ministry.
[52] In this and the following chapters I use italics when I report the direct speech of the participants.

gel as we discovered openness, attentiveness to one another, curiosity and even some humour emerging in our conversation. Everyone had made significant contributions, narrating episodes from their years in ministry and observing how some formational moments had arisen. Some of those stories will be recounted later in this thesis.

Then I asked what sounded to my ears like a simple question. 'What is continuing ministry development?' I was trying to move us from practice to theory, from the specific to the general. I understood that was one way practical theology could proceed. There was a silence that seemed to last way too long. Later I measured it on the recording: only 12 seconds in reality, but each one whispering to me to break the silence and answer my own question. I held back.

Beth stepped in to break the tension.

> *You've stumped us all.*

For a moment I believed she might be right, but the sound of one voice opened the way for others to speak again.

> *I could say what it's not* (offered Georgia).

That seemed like as good a place to begin as any.

> *It's not a hoop to jump through. It's not something I do just because the Union requires it.*

Then shifting to the positives and skilfully drawing together some key themes from the stories told in the preceding half hour she began processing:

> *So it's something about discipleship. Something about personal growth. I think a number of us have said things about relationships. I think that's quite a big part of it for me.*

Georgia saw a moment to illustrate this:

> *I think I've probably talked to nearly everybody who's on screen at different times and had some quite deep conversations and, yeah, whether it's in small ways or big ways, they have informed and sometimes transformed my thinking… So that's really about transformation.*

We were not stumped after all. Georgia had drawn out what the group had discovered through sharing stories. In our experience CMD is not about jumping through hoops. It is about discipleship, personal growth, relationships and transformation. This framed the conversation as other people joined in.

Beth, who also turned out not to be stumped after all, built on Georgia's point about personal growth and transformation.

> *The first thing that came to my mind with CMD is, who am I becoming? That's the biggest thing because our ministry flows out of who we are.*

She wanted to emphasise that CMD benefits churches because of the way it forms ministers rather than simply through imparting skills for ministry.

> *How does the content I engage with, the teaching I engage with, the training that I go to, how does all of that shape a person who can sit in front of a church or sit in front of somebody else and bring wisdom and care and knowledge and personal connection in a way that…that is beneficial and good for the people that you…you then walk away from? So for me the CMD is how to make sure that in every situation I'm leaving people better off than I found them, whether that's pastorally or biblically…errm… and being able to manage when I don't do that well and they don't carry it well.*

This struck a chord with Jack.

> *I would want to come in big time behind what Georgia was saying…we are first and foremost human beings, not human doings, and everything that we do emanates from who we are…*

He went on to say how this underpins his understanding of CMD as more than learning how-to skills.

> *The focus for me is, who am I as a person? who am I becoming as a person? and how…how do the things that I learn shape…shape who I am becoming? which then feeds into what I would do in terms of my pastoral role as a pastor of a church and a significant part of that is making sure that my boundaries are in place, making sure that my own personal walk with God is close, that my discipleship is authentic discipleship, because then out of that authenticity I then feel that I can legitimately call other people into, you know, a discipleship relationship.*

A consensus seemed to be emerging about the nature of CMD. No one was talking about it as a programme or a system or a requirement. Nor had anyone mentioned any of the specific practices that are generally associated with CMD, such as workshops, seminars, pastoral supervision, mentoring, reflective writing etc, though these had been the mainstay of the earlier part of the focus group conversation. The discussion had now moved to a different level, focusing on the telos of CMD, perhaps even idealising some of the potential outcomes. I had asked the group 'what is continuing ministry development?' and their answers so far were not a definition of the form it takes

but the impact they expect it to have. They were describing what CMD is through the lens of why they are motivated to pursue it.

Then Paul brought us down to earth, pointing out that he initially had viewed CMD through the lens of his previous career.

> *My initial reaction to CMD wasn't necessarily, 'Oh, that'll be great!' because in my previous profession we just had to do CPD to keep our career, if you like. So I'm just saying there is a disadvantage of that term too.*

He was adamant that he agreed with what the previous speakers had said about the need for CMD to be personally transformational, but the concept remained problematic for him.

> *The term in itself rings in my ears, a bit like hoops to jump through.*

Georgia had opened this part of the discussion by saying that CMD was not hoops to jump through and the conversation now returned to this issue. Beth found the idea that CMD might be defined as participating in a limited range of options offered by the Baptist Union as unhelpfully restrictive:

> *I don't always love the, maybe the…the format that's presented of the things we have to pick from and realising the option isn't then that I just don't do CMD; the option is trying to say, 'Can we recognise the other stuff we do that also?'*

Though she recognised for herself that CMD is not limited in this way, she was concerned that others may not see this.

> *I think some people do still have that connotation that CMD is the box ticking still. So I think the people you have in this group are brilliant, very in favour of 'We know what it's like to do the work for ourselves,' but that are probably still a few who would have that association of like, 'Ugh, box ticking!'*

Tom stepped in to try and synthesise the earlier focus on personal development and the concerns about hoop-jumping and box-ticking.

> *I wonder whether the attendance at the CMD is the goal, or is it…is it a part of the journey?*

He was bringing our attention back to the telos of CMD, the end of the 'journey,' whilst wanting to draw attention to the steps along the way. For him the outcome of CMD in whatever form was a transformation that would be recognisable to others:

> *This is the hope, that insofar as I'm doing CMD then people in the congregation that I'm a part of know it - not because I've told them but, if I do not tell them, they can nonetheless*

read back to me, relate back to me, 'I bet he's doing CMD on this, and this, and this, because these are the changes that I'm seeing.' And for me that's…that's at the heart of when it's working. It's developmental and therefore observable.

This opened the way for two other members of the group to challenge the box-ticking criticism, recognising that being offered a flexible programme is not incompatible with identifying your own development needs and pursuing those. First Georgia intervened.

And it's interesting because I was particularly fortunate, I spent 15 years in industry where CPD was mandatory. But it was exactly what Tom's saying. So I had such a good experience that for me moving into ministry, I never felt I was box ticking. I felt, yeah I mean, when I was in industry I could say, 'Well, can I do this or can I do that?'

Jack also reflected on his prior experience of CPD, noting the connection between structure and discipline.

I want to say something about jumping through hoops (and like you I had a previous career before I came into ministry and had to do continuing professional development). But I do think that there's a place for mandated CMD because it imposes a discipline. And it's easy when you're working on your own, even working within a team ministry, it is easy to set your own criteria all the time. And the CMD formal programme gives you a measure or gives you…gives you a criteria, gives you a set of…of things that you can measure against and adds to your body of knowledge. And I think that…that if that helps to keep us sharp, then I think that's…I think that's a good thing to do.

So far Gary had not contributed to this phase of the conversation but, perhaps sensing we were moving to a close on this question, he spoke up now, affirming Georgia and Jack's points.

The trouble with being the last one to speak is that you've…you've all really said it, haven't you?

Gary had not had a career prior to becoming a minister so no backstory of CPD in another profession. He was appreciative of the opportunity to be in the Scottish Baptist network in recent years which expected all ministers to demonstrate they were pursuing CMD.

Apart from my years in Scotland I've never had anyone who's made me be committed to ongoing personal development. But I've had mentors who have helped me to understand and appreciate why that is important for me and have provided accountability for me, but I have had to be intentional about the things that I've done.

In many ways it seemed that when Gary spoke about being 'intentional' he was reflecting a theme that permeated this conversation. No one defined CMD as something that is 'done to them' or as a fixed programme that exists quite apart from them. CMD is an experience (or a 'journey', as a couple of people put it) that you can enter into. This requires intentionality. The earlier contributors to the conversation stressed their intention to develop and be transformed, to grow in discipleship and deepen relationships. Others articulated the intention to serve their congregations more faithfully and to be demonstrably better ministers as the outcome of their CMD. The concerns expressed about jumping through hoops and box ticking betrayed a resistance to CMD being controlled by anyone other than the ministers. Agency matters enormously to this group. Ministry development occurs when they intend to develop; it does not accrue when the intentions of others are laid upon them.

4.2 Discussion of the Focus Group Conversation

In the following section I will consider the narrative shape of the focus group conversation I have just recounted in order to identify the key moments in that narrative which will give rise to the ensuing discussion. I will then explore the narrative using the concept of *phronesis,* or practical wisdom, as an axis around which to gather my ideas.

4.3 The Narrative Shape of the Conversation about CMD

I have retold the time I spent with the focus group in narrative form. In short, it is the story of an hour well spent; it is the account of how I enjoyed a fascinating conversation about a subject both they and I are interested in. As I have re-watched this conversation, transcribed it and relived it numerous times, I have asked myself if there is a narrative arc.

A narrative arc is a means of representing a story that traces its momentum and identifies key points in the plot that can be both focal points and turning points. Numerous formulations of a classic narrative arc have been proposed, such as Freytag's Pyramid, moving from exposition to rising action, to a climax, then falling action concluding with a resolution (Freytag 1894:114-140).[53] The

[53] Other popular formulations of narrative arcs include Vogler, C, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Storytellers and Screenwriters,* (Second edn) 1999, London: Pan; Campbell, J, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2008, Novato CA: New World Library; and Booker, C, T*he Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories, 2004, London: Continuum.*

focus group narrative is not amenable to having an off-the-shelf arc imposed upon it, but exploring its unique shape may illuminate some key moments that warrant particular attention.

The narrative begins at a low point when the group is apparently 'stumped.' The first contribution turns the arc slightly upwards since it is at least a voice breaking the silence, though the actual remark is Georgia's tentative statement of what CMD is not. This opens the way for her to offer a kind of exposition, setting out some key themes (discipleship, personal growth, relationships, transformation) by which much of the conversation will be framed. The energy rises as Beth builds on Georgia's words, suggesting CMD addresses the question 'Who am I becoming?' Jack agrees wholeheartedly adding his ideas about 'authenticity' and the upward momentum of enthusiasm and agreement rises further. Then Paul's negative intervention causes the energy level to plummet. CMD makes him think of his previous career where CPD was 'like hoops to jump through' in order to keep your job. Apparently sensing a shift to a more critical phase in the conversation, Beth shares her concerns about the format of the CMD workshops. If this led to a direct challenge and a strong argument the narrative shape may have moved towards an emotional climax. In fact she is mildly challenged by Tom's comment about the outcome of CMD being more important than the method. This nudges the trajectory upwards to a more hopeful place. Two further contributions by Georgia and Jack challenge the earlier concerns about hoop-jumping and box-ticking; at this point the conversation is gaining momentum again. The final intervention by Gary also notes the value of being accountable for CMD and comes across as a, not entirely successful, attempt to bring resolution to the debate over whether CMD should be compulsory.

The Narrative Shape of the Focus Group Conversation, shown diagrammatically in Figure 1 below, enables us to notice the flow of the conversation and the turning points. Regardless of whether these increased or decreased the energy and drama of the narrative, they identify moments of significance in this particular plot which highlight areas on which the following discussion will focus.

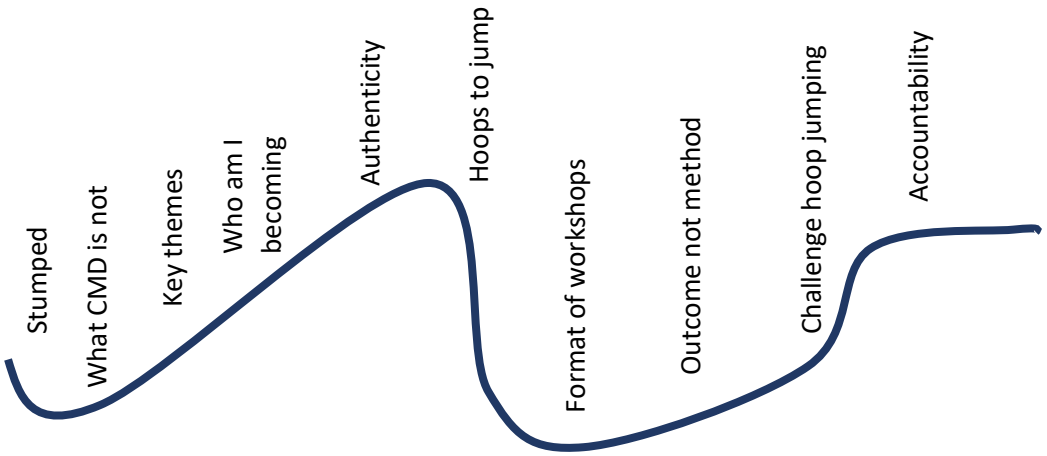


Figure 1: The Narrative Shape of the Focus Group Conversation

4.4 Reflecting on the Focus Group

It is immediately clear from the narrative of the focus group conversation that the participants view CMD as a means of becoming more faithful practitioners in their ministry calling. They are eager for it to bear the fruit of 'transformation', 'discipleship' and 'personal growth'. Beth sums this up when she says it is '*how to make sure that in every situation I'm leaving people better off than I found them, whether that's pastorally or biblically…'* They do not define CMD according to an outline curriculum of skills and competencies but according to its potential to deepen their practical wisdom.

I noted in Chapter 2 that practical wisdom has become an important concept in practical theology in the 21st century. The notion of *phronesis* or 'the intelligence of practice' (Graham, Walton and Ward 2019:204) has become widely recognised as a way in which embodied theology can be recognised and studied (eg Graham 2002, Bass et al, 2016). Therefore I will use practical wisdom as the primary lens through which to read and discuss this section of the research, paying particular attention to the work of Bass et al (2016).

4.4.1 Reflecting on the Focus Group: CMD as Hoops

The participants agreed without dispute that CMD is not about jumping through hoops. I assume the hoops they envisaged were requirements that may have been set out by their accrediting body to

complete certain courses or demonstrate a specific number of hours have been spent on CMD. The problem with 'jumping through hoops' is that it is what performing dogs do. They demonstrate their ability to jump in a particular direction and receive a reward from their owner for doing this, but the jumping is of no lasting value to them. It is just done to please others. This seems to be what the participants were rejecting. Georgia's early reference to this had evidently struck a chord with Paul who returned to this theme later, with obvious frustration that in his previous occupation '*we just had to do CPD to keep our career*.'

This sheds light on three things which are essentially incompatible with the acquisition of practical wisdom. First, the participants were rejecting any activities that lacked obvious value for them. They were reluctant to invest time in a programme which had been invented by others who thought they knew what these ministers needed. If it is not clear how CMD was a step towards the *telos* of becoming a more faithful minister, then it is not worth doing. In Aristotelian terms, the *telos* they are pursuing is faithful ministry and if *phronesis* (acquired through CMD) is not in some way the virtue that will lead them to this then it is a waste of time.

Second, the participants were questioning whether meaningful CMD can be imposed by someone else. Whilst a person can be required to learn specific objective facts, such as the correct way to spell ten words or the names of the planets that orbit the sun, and this learning can be tested and easily demonstrated, the acquisition of practical wisdom cannot be mandated in the same way. It is not possible to tell a minister to go away and learn how to lead a communion service in a way that is sensitive to the context and needs of a congregation on a given week, or how to guide a youth group through the bereavement that follows the death of one of their members. This is learning that can only be acquired through ongoing participation in the life of ministry. *Phronesis* is 'relational, situated and embodied' (Graham et al 2019:205). This kind of learning cannot be mandated externally because it arises contextually and its acquisition is very difficult to measure. In the focus group Tom made the insightful suggestion that CMD may be observable by congregations who look at their minister and say, *'these are the changes that I'm seeing*', from which they infer that the minister has been investing in CMD in that area. His point is that no one demanded that CMD be undertaken in a particular way yet its fruit is evident.

Third, the participants were keen to de-link CMD from permission to practice. I have no doubt that this group were deeply committed to their own CMD so I did not hear this as a desire to avoid CMD or characterise it as an optional extra in ministry. Paul was suggesting that in his previous work CPD was actually devalued because his right to continue practising depended on it. When Beth shared her view that some colleagues thinking about CMD would '*have that association of like, "Ugh, box*

ticking!'" she was implying a similar thing: boxes have to be ticked on forms to keep us on the right side of the authorities and enable us to get what we want. But the motivation for seeking the practical wisdom required for ministry cannot come from an underlying threat of dismissal; *phronesis* is the means to achieving a virtuous end, not a way of evading a punishment.

4.4.2 Reflecting on the Focus Group: CMD as Know-How

The focus group clearly did not think of CMD as a curriculum. They were not operating with a worldview that presumed there were certain principles of ministry that could be learned intellectually then applied practically. Nor did they envisage the existence of a code which they could learn as the key to successful ministerial practice. Rather their interest was in a process of becoming more faithful and fruitful in practice.

I listened again and again to Georgia's generalising remarks at the start:

> *So it's something about discipleship. Something about personal growth. I think a number of us have said things about relationships.*

At first I focused on the concepts of discipleship, growth and relationships. Then I noticed the repeated phrase, '*it's something about…*' For her the content of CMD could not be too tightly defined; she wasn't prepared to reduce it to an existing reservoir of knowledge from which she could drink. '*It's something about…*' suggested her definition was knowingly tentative. These qualities were yet to be discovered in their fullness as her ministry developed and she developed as a minister.

Jack's thinking was on a similar trajectory. For him CMD is about *'Who am I becoming as a person?'* then, *'How do the things I learn shape who I am becoming?*' which then *'feeds into what I would do in terms of my pastoral role.'* He sees CMD as the discovery of faithful living and its interpretation into faithful practice. Similarly Beth sees CMD in a deeply contextualised way, helping her be shaped into

> *a person who can sit in front of a church or sit in front of somebody else and bring wisdom and care and knowledge and personal connection in a way that…that is beneficial and good for the people that you…you then walk away from.*

The desire of the participants to acquire know-how through experience, with no expectation that there is a well of universal ministerial truth from which they can draw, reflects the contrast between a Cartesian model of rational truth and an Aristotelian approach to practical wisdom. Christian

Scharen has written about this in a chapter of *Christian Practical Wisdom* entitled 'Eclipsing' (Bass et al 2016:145-174). I will draw on this now, and follow Scharen's lead into the work of Charles Taylor, to analyse this aspect of the research results more deeply.

Scharen points out that Descartes' (1596-1650) understanding of knowing, which came to eclipse all other models of knowing in the West, is essentially the pursuit of disembodied, universal truth which is determined by dispassionate reason. Descartes' method led him to assert the existence of 'a distant, rational God' but it has no place for 'the peculiar story of a God who becomes flesh and blood, who dies and rises to new life, who sends the Spirit into the world.' Scharen maintains that the core of the Christian life is a kind of knowing that is 'closer to practical than to theoretical reason — closer, that is, to embodied, situated knowing-in-action than to disembodied, universal knowledge' (2016:145-146).

Drawing on the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (2007), Scharen demonstrates how Descartes was influenced by the Christianised Stoicism of Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), in whose writing grace is replaced by reason and love (*agape*) by equanimity (*apatheia*). The outcome for Descartes is a form of disengaged reason which 'has the effect of objectifying the world and at the same time withdrawing from it' (2016:149).

Descartes' impulse to determine right principles for action through dispassionate reason is foundational to what Taylor, in a 2011 essay entitled 'Perils of Moralism'*,* describes as 'code fetishism' or 'nomolatry.' He maintains that 'Christian faith can never be decanted into a fixed code,' primarily because 'it always places our actions in two dimensions, one of right action, and also an eschatological dimension.' The latter is a dimension of trust and reconciliation that points beyond history but can inspire 'vertical moves' in history. Taylor suggests the transformative actions of Mandela and Tutu as examples of this. (Taylor 2011:350-51).

The participants in the focus group were reluctant to embrace a 'fixed code' view of knowledge insofar as it might suggest that universal truths about ministry could be ascertained through dispassionate reason. Firstly, the uniqueness of their contexts, the distinctiveness of congregations and the personality of ministers militated against the possibility of some external thinker figuring out what would be true for all of them. Secondly, the participants were all deeply invested in the dynamic communities they served. I cannot imagine that each of these communities is not a unique relational network with its own joys and sorrows, bearing a unique emotional payload, so any notion of establishing true knowledge of how to minister among them from a place that pursues *apatheia* rather than compassionate immersion has a hollow ring to it. It may well be considered a form of

'code fetishism' ('fetish' arising from the Latin *factitious* meaning 'artificial') and would certainly be an over-reach of dispassionate reason. Scharen points out that in Cartesian knowledge we have

> the eclipse of our own bodies — with our desires and emotions — as sources for wisdom about daily living (2016:149).

Taylor's idea that Christian ethics cannot be reduced to a code because it always places our knowledge in the dimensions of both right action and eschatology raises interesting questions for the participants. Though they spoke about a desire for CMD that was transformational and relational, it left open the question of how it might be informed by an eschatological vision. This merits further exploration. Taylor suggests that the outcome of 'code fetishism' is the creation of a 'civilised' or 'polite' order which is seen entirely in 'immanent' terms, shorn of its transcendent content which arises from its eschatology (Taylor 2011:352). So my concern is that the *phronesis* required for CMD dares to embrace the eschatological challenge as well as the quest for right actions; that it cultivates a way of ministry 'with-the-end-in sight', recognising that our present service to Christ and his church is done in the light of the reversals and dislocations of God's coming kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy.

4.4.3 Reflecting on the Focus Group: CMD as Discipline

Whilst the participants did not want to jump through hoops or find CMD equated with permission to practice, two members of the group highlighted the benefits of CMD being compulsory (albeit not tightly defined). Jack spoke on this:

> *I want to say something about jumping through hoops (and like you I had a previous career before I came into ministry and had to do continuing professional development). But I do think that there's a place for mandated CMD because it imposes a discipline.*

The word 'discipline' struck me as important here. His desire was not for control but discipline; not an externally imposed regulation but a rule he voluntary embraced for the enrichment of his ministry. He pointed out that working alone ministers can lack accountability and therefore may neglect their continuing development. A programme of CMD provides '*criteria…you can measure against'* and '*helps to keep us sharp*.' Similarly, Georgia spoke of the benefits of mandatory CPD when she worked in industry, emphasising that she had a large degree of freedom to choose what kind of CPD she undertook.

The concept of cultivating a discipline of spiritual practices has an important place in Christian spirituality and formation. As I noted in Chapter 2, Kathleen Cahalan has specifically explored the place of spiritual practices in the development of Christian practical wisdom (Bass et al 2016:275-322) and she will be the chief conversation partner as I discuss the significance of spiritual discipline in what follows.

As referenced earlier (page 21) Cahalan points out the significance of *sustaining the practice* in Cassian's understanding of spiritual discipline (Bass et al 2016:294), which is typical of most patterns of spiritual formation. This resonates with the remarks by Jack in the focus group about CMD as a 'discipline' and with Gary's gratitude that someone has '*made me be committed*' to CMD. They spoke positively about 'mandated' CMD imposing a discipline. They appeared to recognise that regular and consistent participation in activities that constitute CMD are essential if one is to be shaped in a positive developmental way by them. Whereas specific 'hints and helps' for ministry[54] may be acquired from sporadic encounters with books, conferences or conversations with experienced colleagues, faithful engagement with a process is required if Christian practical wisdom is to be the outcome. The readiness expressed by Jack and Georgia to accept compulsory CMD was not based on a sense that a denomination or network of churches has a duty to exercise such control but rather that practitioners of ministry who recognise they need encouragement to remain consistent in the regular practice of CMD benefit from an imposed discipline.

This raises a question of what category of activity CMD actually is. It is often viewed as a form of *continuing* education, picking up where initial ministerial education (typically supervised by a theological college) left off; or it is located in the wider classification of continuing professional development, comparable to lawyers keeping up to date with new legislation or doctors staying aware of the latest research on best practice in patient care. There are of course elements of both these in the continuing development of ministers – the extension of initial learning and ensuring that knowledge is contemporary. However, I have noted three things in this chapter which suggest these classifications may not be adequate for CMD: 1. Ministers describe their experience and hopes for CMD as a process that will result in transformation, discipleship and personal growth; 2. This aspiration is best understood as a desire to gain *phronesis* or practical wisdom; 3. Distinctively Christian practical wisdom (as Cahalan proposes) is dependent on rigorous spiritual practice, involving attention, prayer, scripture and purposeful consistency. As I reflect on this I have a growing conviction that CMD is best classified as a spiritual discipline. That is quite different from saying that classic spiritual disciplines are an important aspect of CMD, which they surely are. My contention is

[54] I am borrowing a phrase from Seward Hiltner's analysis of approaches to training for ministry (1958:49).

that the whole enterprise of CMD, in whatever form it takes, should be classified as a spiritual discipline, a distinctive obligation undertaken with consistency by those of us called to a life of ministry. Christian practical wisdom for ministry is borne of a spiritual attentiveness and commitment to those constituent parts of CMD that we recognise, such as reading, supervision, participating in group learning, reflexive writing and cultivating prayerfulness, but CMD is the journey into a *phronesis* for ministry that is more than the sum of its parts. 'Doing CMD' cannot be reduced to attending sufficient hours of training, demonstrating voracious reading or having a regular date with a spiritual director. It is the disciplined disposition to pursue Christian practical wisdom for ministry through attending to God; to that end any of the valuable developmental activities I have just referred to may play their part but CMD is better seen as the spiritual discipline rather than the separate practices.

4.4.4 Reflecting on the Focus Group: CMD as Unknowing and Participation

I am hearing the participants speak about CMD as the pursuit of Christian practical wisdom, or the *phronesis* of ministry, but I notice that they say very little about how encounter with God occurs in that process. Their use of words such as 'discipleship' and 'transformation' imply God's grace is operative in them, and Tom's sense of being 'read' by his congregation suggests that others discern spiritual work going on in him. However, I remain surprised by the little that is said about this. It may be that the vocabulary is lacking because CMD has been regarded as an educative process and (even theologically educated ministers) have not found language for expressing the work of the Spirit in this learning. Or it may be that the participants have thought more about the active qualities of gaining wisdom, such as the eight aspects of *prudentia* identified by Aquinas[55], without reflecting on them within the context of life in Christ.

I think it is important to explore this further, to consider what language may be helpful to express the merging of the divine with the human in the emergence of practical wisdom through CMD. To do this I will first turn to Cahalan's consideration of 'unknowing' and then move on to explore the idea of 'participation' as Fiddes understands its place in the Old Testament wisdom tradition.

There are four ways that insights from Cahalan's study of Gregory's *Life of Moses* shed light on the way we might speak about the encounter with God in the acquisition of *phronesis* for ministry. First, and simply, it serves as a reminder that finding language to capture a divine encounter is typically problematic. Whether it is felt as an experience of unknowing, which is inherently beyond

[55] See Chapter 2: memory, understanding, docility, shrewdness, reason, foresight, circumspection and caution.

description, or whether we are just nervous about the inadequacy or clumsiness of any words we might call upon to convey this, this is a fraught area. For that reason I should probably be kind to the participants who were not quick to speak about any divine encounter they knew, sought or anticipated as they pursued practical wisdom.

Second, Gregory identifies the contemplative path as the way to divine encounter. He clearly had a particular practice of contemplation which led him towards the reality of unknowing. Nevertheless it is helpful to note the emphasis on contemplation or attentiveness in its wider sense as a locus of revelation that has characterised practical theology in recent decades. In particular Graham, Walton and Ward have identified a theological method they term 'Theology by Heart' which

> looks to the self and the reflexive life as the primary space in which theological awareness is generated and nurtured (2019:22).[56]

Whatever the specific practices associated with CMD, it will naturally exist in the modes of attentiveness, contemplation and reflexivity if it is to give rise Christian practical wisdom.

Third, Gregory's recognition that after Sinai Moses returns to serve his people underscores the momentum of CMD. It is important to have an openness to divine encounter, expected or unexpected, in the formative work of CMD, but that is not the end in itself. An awareness of God at work or the acquisition of practical wisdom are not the ends of CMD. As Abraham was promised that he would be blessed in order to be a blessing, so the gift of practical wisdom through CMD is given to propel ministers into richer service.

Fourth, akin to the notion of 'unknowing' are practical theologian David Tracy's ideas of 'limit-questions' and 'limit situations'. These may be 'boundary' situations such as guilt, anxiety, illness or death, or 'ecstatic' experiences such as joy, love and nature. Tracy maintains these are all

> limit-situations…both positive and negative, wherein we both experience our own human limits (limit to) as our own as well as recognize, however haltingly, some disclosure of a limit-of our experience (1996:105).

Whereas Gregory identifies 'unknowing' as an experience that arises from the limits of language to describe the reality of the God we encounter, Tracy suggests that the acceptance of other limits in our experience can be revelatory; indeed 'all authentically religious experience and language'

[56] They trace this approach through the 'spiritual autobiographies' of Augustine's *Confession*s, the letters of Abelard and Eloise and the *Journals* of John Wesley; then to the focus on verbatim accounts in Boisen's Clinical Pastoral Education and the transformative possibilities identified by Ward through pastoral supervision; then in the genre of women's life-writing (exemplified by Wolfteich and Walton) and the spiritual blogging of Richard Rohr and Nadia Bolz-Weber.

displays an 'ineluctably limit-character' (1996:132). So if there is a way of thinking about 'unknowing' that is not just about an elevated state of spiritual contemplation that takes us beyond the limits of our descriptive powers, but is also about our more quotidian experience of the limits we encounter in life, this may help us recognise the possibilities of CMD as a spiritual practice. A 'helps and hints' approach necessarily focuses on what ministers *can* do or *could* do, and a 'training' approach generally implies the increasing of competence, capacity and confidence. However, regarding CMD as a spiritual discipline opens space for the acknowledgment of limits, not just as a self-care issue but as a potential locus for revelation and divine encounter.

I have found another helpful way of thinking about the experience of 'unknowing' in the work of Nicola Slee on the development of faith (Slee 2004). Slee is a feminist practical theologian whose work has challenged Fowler's classic six stage formulation of faith development (Fowler 1981).[57] Slee critiques Fowler's approach on the grounds that his sources are overwhelmingly male theorists whose models are androcentric; furthermore the empirical evidence shows his stage descriptions are biased against women and the ideal of faith in its most developed expression is typified by males who were dead before their time. Instead Slee observes from her qualitative research into the 'faithing' of women that this emerges through experience (not least experiences of alienation in various forms) and through relational and conversational ways of knowing. She notes a shared sense of the inadequacy of language to express their struggles and therefore the importance of engaging in imaginative ways of knowing. In contrast to Fowler's conceptualisation of sequential stages of development, Slee demonstrates how faith develops from experience, not guided by an inevitable hierarchy of stages but through the rich and complex interplay of alienations, relationality and imagination (Slee 2004). It seems to me that these insights shed some light on the conundrum of how 'unknowing' can inform the spirituality of practical wisdom in the context of CMD. It is important that CMD includes spaces where we can thoughtfully identify and face our *alienations*, not least those that arise from the practice of ministry, in faith that this may open the door to the

[57] Fowler's Stages of Faith Development are as follows. Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith - an episodic fantasy-filled construction of reality, uninhibited by logical thought and dominated by powerful images and feelings. Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith – where we take in stories that symbolise belonging to the community and tend to appropriate beliefs appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes, with symbols taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning. Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith, which is concerned with the approval of the peer group. Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith, where a person becomes able to choose the faith that is theirs, even if this means standing out from the group, and is capable for the first time of translating symbols into conceptual meaning. Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith – with an awakening to polar tensions in the self and to paradox, an epistemological humility in the face of intricacy and an appreciation of the richness of mystery. Stage 6: Universalising Faith – the experience of radical freedom where a person becomes devoted to overcoming division, oppression and violence and the process of de-centring the self achieves completion (Fowler 1981).

transforming work of the Spirit. *Relationality* must be recognised not only as a supportive experience but as a transforming dynamic (and I will explore the communal dimensions of CMD in detail in Chapter 5). And it is important that CMD does not assume that nothing matters unless it can be expressed in words but rather that shared and individual development activities intentionally engage the imagination.[58]

A further way of approaching the spiritual dimension of practical wisdom is framed by Fiddes (2013 and 2021). He identifies in the Hebrew wisdom tradition a practical 'wisdom of observation', which is evident for example in the insights of individual proverbs. He also sees a relational 'wisdom of participation', in which Wisdom is personified as an intelligent and enticing woman who invites the wise into a relationship with herself. This Wisdom keeps company with God and is 'portrayed as an extension of God's own personality' so 'participation in the life of wisdom is also participation in God'. This participation can be described as

> learning to be attuned to creation and to its creator, vibrating with its rhythms of life, living in sympathy with others. The wise live in a world where they are always receiving the offer to participate in God's own wisdom, seeing the world as God sees it (2021:256).

Fiddes emphasises that these two kinds of wisdom belong together, suggesting that together they represent a fusion of the Aristotelian ideas of *phronesis* and *sophia*. I have already discussed the meaning of *phronesis* as practical wisdom that enables virtuous action and the way Thomas Aquinas based his understanding of *prudentia* on this. For Aristotle s*ophia* is the ability to discern what is ultimately real and true (Nicomachean Ethics 2000:1141a.19-20). The counterpart of this in the Latin Christian tradition became *sapientia,* though it was less focused on Aristotelian contemplation of the timeless and unchanging and derived more specifically from the *sophia* of the New Testament where Christ is identified as the true 'wisdom of God' (eg 1 Corinthians 1.24, Colossians 2.2-3).[59] Fiddes notes that in recent theological writing there has been both an appeal to the renewal of *sapientia* and an increasing interest in *phronesis*. His argument is that both distinguishing and blending these two kinds of wisdom, which he characterises as the wisdom of participation and the wisdom of observation, is essential for theology (2021:258) and frames the way we see the world:

> …the viewing self finds itself being drawn into a communion of life with wisdom, and so shares in a divine movement of seeing (2013:214).

[58] In subsequent works, Slee considers the spirituality that arises from 'multiple overwhelmings' (2017) and from practising Sabbath (2019); both are areas which merit reflection by ministry practitioners.
[59] Gregory of Nyssa's approach to the monastic life and the practice of contemplation which gives rise of the experience of unknowing would be a typical example of the sapiential tradition in action.

This two-fold understanding of the biblical wisdom tradition also offers a way of understanding CMD as both know-how and encounter. The focus group sought to define CMD in two related dimensions. One dimension was the desire to be formed into people who are practically useful in ministry; Beth expressed this as seeking experiences of CMD

> *that shape a person who can sit in front of a church or sit in front of somebody else and bring wisdom and care and knowledge and personal connection*.

The other related dimension was the desire for what was generally referred to as 'transformation' or what Jack described as

> *making sure my own walk with God is close, that my discipleship is authentic discipleship*.

In the vocabulary of Fiddes, Beth is focusing on the wisdom of observation whereas Jack is thinking about the wisdom of participation. One approach to CMD would be to present it in two parts, the observational and the participatory. The former might emphasise the skills of ministry (where 'hints and helps' would be the equivalent of proverbs) whereas the latter might regard the cultivation of prayerfulness and spiritual attentiveness as the essence of CMD. However the usefulness of this simple taxonomy of wisdom is, as Fiddes asserts, that the wisdoms of observation and participation can be both distinguished and blended. CMD must be both *prudential* and *sapiential*. The practical wisdom that accrues from pursuing faithfulness in the life of ministry cannot be separated from the spiritual practices that animate and invigorate ministry.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have noted that the embodied, situated, relational and practical form of wisdom known historically as *phronesis* is well-suited to describe the kind of knowledge my participants hope to gain through CMD. They are wary of anything that looks like 'jumping through hoops', keen to retain agency rather than submitting to a bureaucratic process. They are not seeking universal truths for ministry but the kind of practical know-how which Scharen describes in contrast to Cartesian universal truths. Similarly they reflect Taylor's discomfort with attempts to decant knowledge into a fixed code. Although the participants expressed some ambivalence about CMD being mandatory, I have suggested that Cahalan's belief that spiritual discipline is a necessary component of the acquisition of Christian practical wisdom can help us to understand why an element of 'discipline' is important. Indeed I have suggested that CMD itself might be regarded as a spiritual discipline. Finally, I have noted the lack of language in the focus group conversation to describe the divine-human encounter in the acquisition of *phronesis* for ministry and considered the ideas of 'unknowing' and 'participation' as ways of expressing this.

I will draw on these discoveries later in my conclusions but the discussion of my research results will continue in the next chapter as I explore the importance of community in CMD.

Chapter 5

Bread, Coffee and a Scrum: The Desire for CMD to be a Communal Activity

5.1 The Context

As discussed in the account of my methodology, I invited participants to bring to our interview an object that in some way represents continuing ministry development (CMD) for them. I hoped this would get the conversation off to a good start. I saw it as an ice-breaker and an opportunity to be playful. I hoped it would stimulate creative thinking, activating imaginative parts of the brain that might be shut down if the interview came across as a binary search for rights and wrongs in CMD. I was genuinely surprised by the pleasure participants took in speaking about their objects. For some extensive forethought was evident; for others the object became a focus for improvisation as they experimented with ideas during the interview.

All the participants arrived knowing that I was interested in the story of their CMD experience. I would not be asking them to give marks out of ten for different courses or events but hoping to coax out of them the story of their own journey of development. The objects they brought along seemed to act as a prologue to their story, in some way introducing themselves and in most cases pointing to a key theme in their story.

Three people brought items to the interview which placed a high emphasis on the communal aspect of CMD, something which all participants in the research valued more than I had expected. I had anticipated that participants would present themselves as individual consumers of CMD workshops or voracious readers of literature on ministry, regarding CMD as something you do by yourself for yourself.

I realised that I was bringing a great deal of myself into this aspect of the research. So before I report on what they said, I am pausing to reflect on who I am as I listen to these voices and become aware of the assumptions I bring into the conversation.

Finding My Place

I tend to be solitary learner. In the sixth form my friends did not believe that I enjoyed spending time alone with books in the school library whilst they were kicking a ball around outside. I never could convey to them the elation of making discoveries in quiet isolation. My father had dropped out of university after one year and became a committed auto-didact for the next 50 years. Maybe there

was something hereditary in my approach. When I went to university the tutorial system pushed the right buttons for me: go away and read alone, write an essay, present it to the tutor, rinse and repeat.

Spirituality for me has always been a fundamentally solitary business too. When a youth leader invited the teenage me to enter 'a personal relationship with Christ' I imagined he meant 'a solitary relationship with Christ' and I said 'Yes.' I have grown to cherish the corporate life of worship and the adventure of engaging in wider society as a Christ-follower, but for me this has always felt like the outworking of an encounter with God in quiet prayer, reading and reflection. My heart is strangely warmed every time I hear the words of Jesus: 'When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.'

Through 25 years of local church ministry I regarded CMD as an extension of spiritual formation, distinctively oriented towards the habits and the practices of a minister. Perhaps inevitably, I embraced it as another solo practice. I tutored my soul in private, or with the periodic support of a spiritual director. I attended training sessions and conferences to listen to people I hoped were experts in matters I considered myself a novice. And I read about ministry. Though I often met with colleagues locally and regionally, I paid little attention to the possibility that our gatherings would be formative or developmental.

In retrospect I see that for a long time I undervalued the impact of sharing a development journey with colleagues, as travellers along the same road. So as I now recount the enthusiasm of the participants for the communal aspects of CMD, I hear this in distinct contrast to much of my own experience.

5.2 Peter – Breaking Bread

Peter was the only participant who forgot about the object. When I asked him what he had brought along to talk about there was a pause. I thought it was pregnant but as his cheeks coloured a little I realised it was awkward. I began mentally preparing for the next stage of the interview, until I half registered his apology and realised this was premature.

Peter's fluent spontaneity is a strength he deploys well as a minister who engages deeply with the community in the area of high deprivation where his church is based. In fact his 'Word and Spirit' theology tends to celebrate moments of unplanned inspiration. He began:

What's immediately come into my mind, and whether it's me or the Spirit I'm not sure, is a loaf of bread; and I can say a bit more of why that is. That just immediately comes to my mind as a reminder of a bigger narrative over the last few years. I think it's friendship in terms of my experience. My richest experience of growing and learning and developing with others has been, certainly the last few years, in a very informal setting.

My first (internal) reaction was that it would have been even better if he'd turned up with a loaf. But as he spoke, the way the idea of bread landed in our conversation became a shared experience of the unexpected. Neither of us saw it coming. Peter was not presenting something premeditated; he was sharing the moment of discovery with me. The image was a gift that he was about to unpack in my presence so I could share his delight.

I immediately assumed the bread was going to represent nourishment. I was wrong. I'm really not sure Peter knew what it represented at first but he began to improvise. The bread made him think of friendship, 'growing and learning and developing with others'.

…say a one to one with another minister or a soul friend. And breaking bread together, but I don't mean just literally, I mean a place of almost shared brokenness - that's been really important for me. The last two or three years as I felt quite weary. A shared brokenness and sense of vulnerability, so I think being able to be vulnerable with someone else is not easy. It's not a given in ministry; it's not sort of automatic.

The metaphor expanded. Learning and developing with friends was 'breaking bread together' but it was more than that. In his train of thought the broken bread grew to signify 'a place of shared brokenness' which opened up the possibility of 'being able to be vulnerable with someone else.'

I noticed the dissonance with my own rather solitary approach to CMD as Peter took this further, reflecting on the essentially corporate developmental journey of ministers in the first three (pre-accredited) years of practice.

The pre-accredited years were really helpful because you were on a journey with a group of people. Pitlochry [the annual residential event] and elsewhere, that was quite a formational time; you shared a room with others, you ate with others, you prayed and worshipped on that three year journey. It was really like you felt like you were sharing the journey. But post that it's a bit in the deep end really; there's nothing as prescribed.

I was gratified he was saying positive things about a programme I have been involved in leading (and I realised that courtesy may have partly motivated this) yet he was also suggesting that since then he had felt let down, he had been 'left in the deep end'. The desire for communal development was still

there but the structure was not. He explained the onus was on him to find community and I wondered whether this was a mark of a maturing ministry or a failure in the system to provide for his needs.

> *So the bread's a concrete example of how I think I've experienced CMD and in a rich way, but I've had to seek that out, if you know I mean. That's not happened every year. If you think I was accredited six years ago, something like that, then it's probably only in the last three years. And again that's mainly probably on me and not taking a lot of initiative, but in terms of finding those two or three shared tables where there's warm bread to share together. That's just taken time to find those places. They're quite rare.*

As this phase of our conversation came to a close the metaphor took another turn. The bread was now warm. Peter had found a further dimension of meaning. Sharing together in CMD was not a cold sandwich. I pictured the comfort of an oven-heated kitchen, I smelled the crust of a newly baked loaf and thought of friends round the table melting butter on warm bread. I wondered if perhaps CMD is bread that has been blessed and shared.

5.3 Victoria – Drinking Coffee

Victoria sneaked her object into the interview. I appreciated her relaxed vibe as she sipped her drink and told me she was just back from holiday. When I asked her what object she had brought along I discovered I had been looking at it already.

> *So I brought a cup of coffee. I've started thinking about this quite a lot, Martin, and I love a good image. I think, for me, there's kind of two aspects to this. First of all, you can have a good cup of coffee by yourself, but you can also have it with other people. I think a vital thing about CMD is it's something that you can do by yourself, but also there are times when it is very appropriate and good to be doing that as a journey with other people.*

Victoria had thought about this. She had considered how the structure of CMD works for her. There is the solitary and the communal; the mug at the desk and the meeting in Starbucks. This coffee image was blending Peter's focus on communal CMD and my former individualistic approach. Was this the totality of the image?

I noticed the smile as Victoria referred to her coffee cup. It told me she was pleased to have something to offer but I wondered if it was also a nod to the minor irreverence of bringing an item of

pleasure into an important interview. I took this to be an intentionally positive image. CMD can be a pleasure, savoured alone or tasted together. She expanded on its positive impact in her experience:

> *Also the other thing for me is that a mug of coffee represents refreshment, it represents refuelling and re-energizing. I think for me CMD is all of those things. It is a chance to be refreshed but it's also a chance to get the fuel and energy that we need for what is to come next as well. So that was my two bits: we can do it with other people or by ourselves, but also it's being… about refuelling, refreshing and re-energizing…*
>
> *That thought of re-energizing, that giving you that push for what is next as well, giving you the energy and also stimulating those new ideas. I think that without CMD we can get really stuck in a rut of just what has been before, not because it's the right thing, but just because it's the only thing that's in our minds, whereas for me CMD is about stimulating those new ideas and the new thought processes and patterns.*

Victoria finds a strong connection between CMD and her own performance in ministry. Her coffee cup suggests the refreshing value of taking a break from focused work and the re-energizing experience of a caffeine rush. It brings to mind New Testament concepts of being equipped for service and finding strength to persevere. Then she elaborates on being re-energized. It means *'stimulating those new ideas and thought processes and patterns'* which keep her from *getting 'stuck in a rut.'* CMD might be the caffeine that gets her mind buzzing. I know she serves a large city church where there are many intellectual and creative minds – a church that expects to be regularly moving forward with new ideas, approaches and programmes. I suspect I can see one reason why CMD as a way of generating new ideas is especially important.

It occurs to me that another aspect of coffee drinking is that it is typically habitual. I ask if that is in her mind.

> *I think for me CMD is a regular thing (that probably fits with the coffee as well). There are times when I linger over it, but there's times when it's just as a bit every day. So I'm a reader and probably a huge part of my CMD is reading and I'm of the opinion that we should be picking up books every day anyway, whether it's five minutes between meetings and just refreshing, giving yourself a new idea, or whether it's specific for something like preparing a sermon or going into meeting; wanting to just catch up on something or whether it's about taking time to linger over a new idea. So it can be going along to a conference or whatever, but having the kind of longer time with it as well. So I think for me CMD is not something that*

I would, say, necessarily pick up and then put down; I would say it's a pretty constant and just kind of there all the time.

This is the first time I've heard someone articulate such an immersive view of CMD: 'it's just kind of there all the time.' I don't think she is saying that *everything* is CMD but that every day includes some CMD. Reading is fundamental to her growth mindset and this is a habit that can be fitted into each day, even if it's only 'five minutes between meetings.' Other CMD habits, especially corporate ones, inevitably require more planning. Not all CMD can be daily.

5.4 Callum – Training for the Scrum

Of the participants who joined me to talk about CMD, Callum is the least experienced in ministry. He was inducted in a small town church early in the COVID pandemic. It was the first of a handful of Zoom inductions in our network of churches and at the time of our meeting he had conducted considerably more services online than with a congregation gathered in the church building. His experience of CMD mainly arose from the first 18 months of the pre-accredited programme for new ministers.

Callum had downloaded a photograph which he shared with me on screen. It was a group of rugby players training for the scrum.

In my understanding of CMD it's a training exercise. You're trying to develop yourself or to encourage the development of others. So this is a rugby training exercise and so there's an element of training and I think there's also a lot of technique in scrummaging. I'm not a forward and I never have played in a scrum but my understanding is that it's quite a technical thing and we have to train in order to develop technique. I think that CMD for ministers is also about trying to develop some of that or refine some of that technique.

Callum had clearly chosen an image that had positive associations for him. I'm not sure if he has been a rugby player himself but he is clearly a rugby enthusiast and holds professional players in high regard. His picture conveyed the message that he expects CMD to help him to play his best game, to excel in his calling, to be as good at ministry as the professionals are at rugby. This was the challenge that lay before him and one he presented as an attractive ambition.

He saw CMD as a way to '*train in order to develop technique*.' I think this is a reflection of his early stage in ministry. There are core competencies in the practical work of ministry which he needs to acquire during the pre-accredited years. He expects CMD to train him in these fundamental

'techniques' of ministry. Peter and Victoria, who are further on in their ministry journey, are now more interested (respectively) in CMD providing companionship amidst the vulnerability of ministry and re-energizing them for the work of ministry.

I was amazed to discover how strongly Callum valued the communal aspect of CMD, given that almost all his experience of CMD workshops, retreats and conferences had been online. The scrum image gave him language to express this.

> *And I think as well, a scrum is a lot about pushing in the same direction. And I think that when we come together for CMD events in particular we can encourage one another to do that and to possibly get back into alignment if our focus is maybe shifted in an unhealthy or an unhelpful way.*
>
> *And I think just finally that there's a lot of camaraderie in a scrum pack. I think this from watching Rugby and scrums packing down on TV and when you get a good scrum everyone jumps up and congratulates one another and there's lots of backslapping and things like that, and so I think coming together for CMD is also just a lot about encouragement, encouraging one another in what we're doing.*

Callum clearly has high expectations of his colleagues in ministry, the people who pack down in the scrum with him. Although CMD must for him involve experienced people training him in the techniques of ministry, it also entails strong mutual support by his peers.

5.5 The Thread of Communality in CMD

I found myself musing on the origin of Callum's intense desire for camaraderie to characterise CMD. Was it the experience of being the sole minister of a small church in a remote location? Was it a response to the enforced isolation of the pandemic? Was it because in his previous career as an engineer there had been a high level of collaboration and mutual support? Did it reflect a personality trait or perhaps a positive experience of playing in a sports team? It is a probably a mixture of several of these factors.

What Callum states forcibly in the strong image and language of the camaraderie of the scrum, Victoria and Peter express in a gentler way: the communal element of CMD is very valuable to them. Victoria could not imagine drinking every cup of coffee alone and Peter spoke winsomely of shared bread at the table. For both of them CMD needs to be both personal and interpersonal.

These three people are not simply seeking CMD events but CMD encounters. Their stated longing is not for more distinguished teachers or more dynamic training but to belong to a community of learners who grow together and by their presence and practice contribute to one another's development.

5.6 Discussion

As I discuss the narratives from Peter, Victoria and Callum, I will focus on community as a theme that connects their narratives. Whilst this does not encompass the totality of what they spoke about, as I have re-read and listened repeatedly to their stories, the hunger for community is undoubtedly an abiding theme. It is not just the context of their stories, inasmuch as some CMD happens in communal contexts; rather, participation in community is a dynamic aspect of CMD. This is among the most highly valued aspects of CMD for them which they find both desirable and fruitful in its own right. Community is not just a means to an end, it is integral to the web of being, doing and reflecting which appears to comprise CMD.

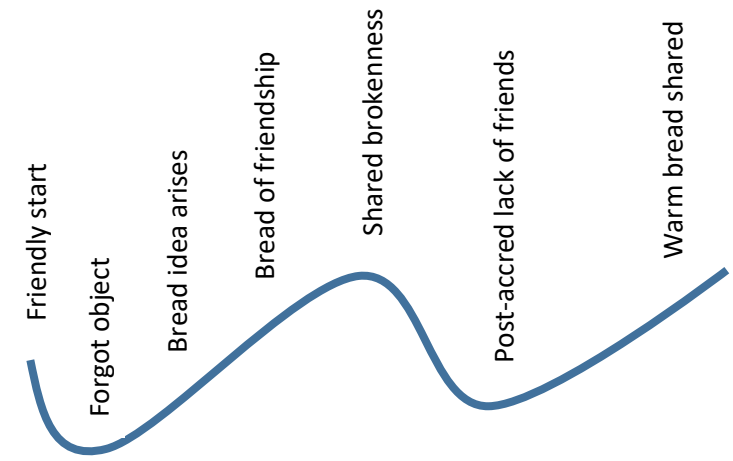
In what follows I will briefly consider the narrative shape of the contributions by these participants, then proceed to discuss their emphasis on communal aspects of CMD. I will do this first in the light of research on clergy loneliness and then with consideration to the relevance of communities of practice.

5.6.1 The Narrative Shapes of the Conversations about CMD as a Communal Activity

It is possible to discern a shape in each of the participants' stories. The content of the narrative, with its positive and negative dimensions and the tone in which particular moments are recounted, reveals a contour that emerges in the re-telling. Paying attention to this shape will again increase our attentiveness to the significant moments in the story.

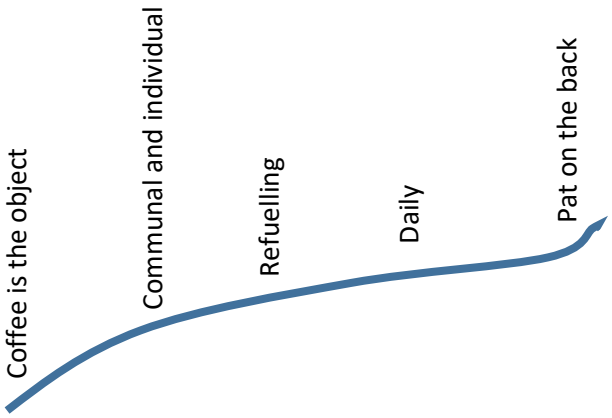
Peter's eager friendliness is somewhat deflated when he realises he has failed to bring an object with him. However, as the image of 'bread' occurs to him and he begins to explore that spontaneously his voice conveys a level of excitement which culminates in his discovery that this is not just the bread of friendship but of shared brokenness. His appreciation of his pre-accredited years of ministry lead him downhill to the disappointment of having lacked close friendships in ministry for the following three years until he took the initiative to find '*those two or three shared tables where there's warm bread to share together*.' The simple beauty of that final metaphor elevates his short narrative to a joyful conclusion.

Figure 2: The Shape of Peter's Narrative



Victoria's story began well and seemed to be on a general ascent throughout. Her sense of delight that she had brought along a meaningful object (her coffee), and the smile as she revealed it had been smuggled into the interview without me realising, gave her narrative an arresting start. She had clearly thought about its meanings and let one build on the next: CMD is communal and individual, CMD is refuelling, CMD is daily. As she ended saying '*it's just kind of there all the time'* I sensed she was giving herself a well-deserved pat on the back.

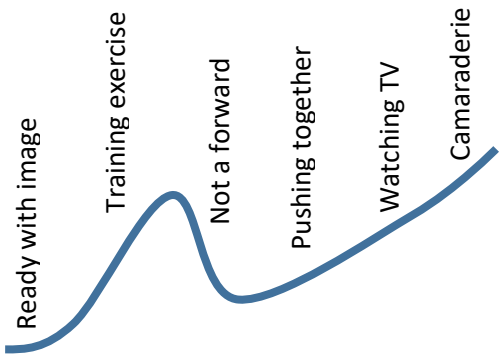
Figure 3: The Shape of Victoria's Narrative



Callum's narrative began strongly with the picture of rugby players training for a scrum. He joined the meeting ready to share this on screen and built on this positive opening with his exposition that for him CMD is like a shared training exercise. Then he hesitantly confessed, '*I'm not a forward and I*

have never played in a scrum'. It seemed to be a moment of self-doubt, apparently wondering if this image was legitimate given he did not have first-hand knowledge of the scrum. As a listener I felt he might pull back but (in the spirit of the scrum) he pushed forward, though noticeably moderating his language from speaking as though a participant to saying, '*my understanding is…*' The force of his speech was weakened a little by this and he found himself repeating the same point about refining technique. The point was good but the momentum of the account slowed a little. However, he picked up again when he moved on to his idea of '*pushing together'*, which he illustrated from his own experience of coming together for a CMD event. His short narrative ended with an engaging recollection of watching rugby on TV and likening the camaraderie and mutual encouragement he witnessed to CMD.

Figure 4: Shape of Callum's Narrative



5.6.2 Loneliness in Ministry

The participants express a desire for CMD to be a communal experience (and indeed suggest the possibility that certain communal experiences are in themselves CMD). One explanation of this might be that they see CMD as a remedy for the inherent loneliness of ministry.

It is a widely accepted assumption that ministry is a lonely calling. Barbara Blodgett, former Director of Supervised Ministries at Yale Divinity School, observes:

> Traditionally, professional ministry has been considered hard in at least three ways: it can be lonely, monumentally difficult, and prone to inauthenticity. (Blodgett 2011:72).[60]

Similarly Robert Reber, former Dean of Auburn Theological Seminary, in his extensive study of continuing ministry education takes it for granted that 'the Lone Ranger image continues to dominate the field of continuing education' (Reber and Roberts 2010:28).

Research in the UK has demonstrated that isolation is a particular challenge for ministers in rural locations (Rolph et al 2014) and this is intensified when ministers face the extra demands of serving multiple parishes (Francis and Brewster 2012). Isolation can also have an adverse impact on clergy health (Francis et al 2015). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that Anglican clergy, both female and male, have a clear preference for introversion over extraversion (Watt and Voas 2015) which may create a natural tendency towards isolation and loneliness.

However, it would be wrong to infer from this that most ministers have a problem with loneliness. Leadership in many spheres of life is in some respects lonely, but this is not necessarily problematic loneliness. A number of recent publications have recognised overcoming loneliness, or living successfully with a degree of loneliness, as an important aspect of leadership development (eg Johnson 2018, Jonsson 2021, Mettes 2021). Furthermore, a Barna Group report in 2017 which surveyed 525 US Protestant pastors found that when asked to rate their satisfaction level for 'having true friends', 34% rated this as 'excellent' and 33% as 'good' (Barna 2017). This suggests that loneliness, in the sense of isolation or friendlessness, does not seriously affect about two-thirds of pastors, at least in the USA. Nevertheless, the same report does show a significant correlation between dissatisfaction with friendships and being at a 'high burnout risk' or 'high spiritual risk'.[61]

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[60] She goes on to point out anecdotally that 'nearly every conference I attend or piece I read on the formation of ministers stresses our need somehow to change the culture of loneliness for clergy and other religious leaders' (2011:73).

[61] Only 12% of respondents who are deemed to be at 'high spiritual risk' rate their satisfaction with friendships as 'excellent' or 'good', as do only 22% of those at 'high burnout risk'. Barna measures burnout risk based on scores in the following criteria: Less confident in their calling today than when they began ministry; Rate mental and emotional health as average, below average or poor; Seldom or never energized by ministry work; Frequently feel inadequate for their calling or ministry; Frequently feel emotionally or mentally exhausted; Have suffered from depression sometime during their ministry; Not satisfied with their pastoral vocation; Not satisfied with ministry at their current church; Tenure at their current church has been a disappointment; Tenure at their current church has not increased their passion for ministry; Their primary day-to-day tasks do not fit their calling or gifts. Barna measures spiritual risk based on scores in the following criteria: Rate their spiritual well-being as average, below average of poor; Say it is very or somewhat difficult to invest in their own spiritual development; Receive spiritual support from peers or a mentor 'several times a year' or less; say tenure at their current church has not deepened their own relationship with Christ.

Therefore rather than assuming all ministers struggle with loneliness, it seems better to recognise that a significant minority of ministers experience problematic loneliness which may also contribute to other issues such as stress, burnout or illness. For such people one impact of communal CMD activities could be that they provide a context for building friendships and sharing some of the challenges of ministry with companions who understand their concerns. This, however, cannot be taken for granted. Whilst Roberts has argued that participation in clergy peer groups is associated with higher pastoral effectiveness and motivation in ministry (Reber and Roberts 2010), a study of the impact of clergy peer groups on psychological health (Miles and Proeschold-Bell 2013) found that generalisations could not be made about the psychological benefits of such groups. Focus group data revealed that whilst numerous pastors benefited from peer group participation,

> some pastors have neutral peer group experiences, whilst other pastors may continue peer group participation when it is mandated, and to negative effect (2013:215).

Quantitative data showed the profiles of peer group participants were associated with lower psychological distress, but this could not be treated as statistically significant due to selection bias - ie people who expect to benefit from peer groups tend to choose to join them (2013:218). Therefore the researchers conclude that clergy peer groups cannot be relied on consistently 'as a "one size fits all" solution to the mental health challenges of pastoral work' (2013:220).

A similar conclusion was reached in a study by Muskett and Village (2016) into the effect of action learning sets for clergy in the predominantly rural Diocese of Truro where clergy isolation was widely acknowledged, especially due to the physical distance between parishes (2016:225). The authors found that through meeting regularly in action learning sets,[62] participants 'valued opportunities for collegiality and networking' and thereby increased their social capital (2016:226). Some clergy chose not to take up this opportunity, chiefly due to individual differences (in churchmanship, geography or experience) but for the majority who participated interviews demonstrated that 'their sets comprised good companions' (2016:231).

As I reflect on the narratives of Peter, Victoria and Callum, the research I have discussed in this section suggests four things. First, I should be wary of assuming their desire for communal experiences of CMD arises from a problematic loneliness that is inherent in all ministers. It is clear that whilst some ministers do experience painful loneliness, it is careless to assume most ministers are lone rangers who live with a deficit of close friendships. Second, insofar as CMD may include a

[62] Over a period of approximately nine months, sets on a total of 10 occasions, each time typically following the popular format for meetings with rounds for catching up, agenda setting, progress reports and review.

predetermined curriculum,[63] discovering how to live well with the structural isolation that pastoral leadership often creates would be an important area to address. Third, communal CMD activities clearly have relational and psychological benefits for many participants but I must recognise that this impact is not universal and therefore I should not make a general assumption that they will have therapeutic value for people experiencing isolation or stress. And fourth, it is therefore important to consider the participants' desire for communal CMD other than through the tempting lens of loneliness. As I now seek to do this I will turn to the theory of communities of practice.

5.6.3 Communities of Practice

The participants suggested in a number of ways that their desire for CMD as a communal practice arose from a sense of belonging to a community who would naturally learn with one another and from one another. Victoria considers that '*it is very appropriate and good to be doing [CMD] as a journey with other people'*. She deploys the terminology of journeying not to reference a solo expedition of personal learning but to acknowledge that CMD involves a group of practitioners who are co-travellers. Similarly, Peter recalls his early positive experience of CMD:

> *The pre-accredited years were really helpful because you were on a journey with a group of people.*

In this context Peter's image of CMD as sharing bread around the table suggests travellers who have paused on the journey to eat together and discuss the highs and lows of their shared adventure.

This theme is picked up in a different but obviously related way by Callum, who regards CMD as '*pushing in the same direction*.' He is keenly aware that he is part of a community (or perhaps a 'pack' in his rugby metaphor) who share a common calling and can work together to aggregate the skills and wisdom of ministry to fulfil this. Callum sees this community not only as a place to 'encourage one another' but also

> *to possibly get back into alignment if our focus is maybe shifted in an unhealthy or an unhelpful way.*

In some way the community of ministers owns or embodies a set of standards for ministry with which Callum seeks to align his own ministry.

[63] The discussion in chapter 4 of the way *phronesis* arises clearly suggests that a major part of CMD must be led by contexts and therefore only a limited aspect of CMD is susceptible to squeezing into the mould of a fixed curriculum.

The language used by Victoria, Peter and Callum here expresses a number of the factors that constitute a 'community of practice' as defined by Etienne Wenger, so in the rest of this chapter I will consider how communities of practice may be a valuable way of interpreting their understanding and therefore how this concept may usefully contribute to an understanding of CMD.

I noted in Chapter 2 that Wenger identifies the three essential structural features of a community of practice as 'mutual engagement', 'a joint enterprise' and 'a shared repertoire.' The relevance of this to CMD is immediately apparent. The conversations with Peter, Victoria and Callum revealed not simply that they desired community but they already considered themselves to be 'on a journey' with a particular community. As Scottish Baptist ministers they recognise a joint enterprise (or *domain*) with colleagues in ministry; they share a commitment to faithful leadership of church communities around the country, with all the spiritual, social and practical issues that raises. Through their accreditation as ministers, their contact with colleagues in ministers' meetings of various kinds, and significantly through gatherings focused on CMD, they feel part of a *community* that owns this shared ambition for faithful ministry. And they possess a repertoire of *practices* that have emerged in this community over many years, such as appropriate ways to preach or respond to particular pastoral situations. It is possible for ministers to lose connection with this community, as Peter appeared to do between his pre-accredited years and finding a place more recently to 'share bread' with colleagues, but they all spoke as though they are now in some way participants in this community of practice.

One of the key issues of debate has been whether communities of practice should arise spontaneously or whether they can be formed by organisational leaders in an 'instrumental' fashion. It would be possible to envisage CMD as a process of setting up instrumental communities of practice with a view to improving the performance of ministers. However, given that there is already a shared domain, community and practice, it seems to me better to view the existing network of ministers as a community of practice in itself. The challenge for CMD therefore is to make this (existing) network as effective as possible and enable participants to play their most fruitful part in it.

Taking the theory of communities of practice as a framework for CMD opens up some further avenues for reflecting on the process of ministerial development. First, I have noted in the previous chapter the expectation of participants that CMD will be transformative as part of a developing life of Christian discipleship. Wenger maintains that in a community of practice identity is a negotiated experience whereby 'we define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation' (1998:145). Thus 'learning is a process of identity formation, that is, becoming a

different person, rather than primarily the acquisition of knowledge products' (Omidvar and Kislov 2014:267). This is clearly the kind of development that ministers are seeking, not an external knowledge of theory but an internalised knowledge of practice which arises from being personally shaped into the form of a disciple and a faithful minister. Wenger suggests three modes of belonging to a community enable this identity change to occur: *engagement* (doing things together), *imagination* (constructing an image of ourselves to orient ourselves and explore possibilities) and *alignment* (ensuring our local activities are consonant with the shared knowledge of the community) (2000, pp. 227–8). It is interesting that in his narrative Callum speaks of coming together for CMD as an opportunity to 'get back into alignment', apparently sensing this is a natural role of the community of practice of which he has become a de facto part through his accreditation as a minister.

Second, as I noted in Chapter 2, Bennett et al. have warned that communities of practice may 'lead to a kind of narrowing of horizons' (2018:88). Communities that thrive on affinity and common purpose may find it difficult to achieve a critical distance from the tacit practices. This is clearly a risk if CMD is viewed as the outworking of a community of practice; it could become a locus for the rehearsal of familiar nostrums rather than a context for innovation, growth and critical reflection on practice. Bennett et al. suggest that communities of practice need 'strategies of estrangement as much as orientation in the cultivation of critical reflexivity' (2018:88) and this highlights the need for CMD to be more than a 'support group' for ministers; its culture needs to be challenging as well as affirming, open to conflict as well as agreement.

Wenger-Trayner's more recent work on 'landscapes of practice' (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015) has shown a further way in which this 'narrowing of horizons' may be resisted. He observes that communities of practice exist within wider 'landscapes of practice' (Wenger et al. 2015b). Whilst each community of practice develops its own *competence*, practitioners in almost any field also require the *knowledgeability* (adequate but non-specialised knowledge) that enables them 'to relate to a multiplicity of practices across the landscape' and negotiate the boundaries between different spheres of expertise (2015b:13). One of the keys to a ministers' community of practice avoiding the pitfall of narrowness would be to embrace a breadth of thought and insight from practising ministry within a broad landscape of competences. I have shown at length elsewhere how ministers regularly negotiate boundaries with other domains of competence, such as education, third sector organisations, immigration, mental health, politics and music (Hodson 2020). Belonging to a community of practice with its own specialisms enables ministers to be confident in their own vocational identity as they traverse a landscape of practices in which they are not experts but in which their knowledge is challenged, enriched and deepened.

Third, the Wenger-Trayners' most recent work has turned to the role of 'systems conveners' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2021). These are people who, in the pursuit of making a difference, recognise that

> many challenges today require learning that brings people together across different practices, different institutions, different goals, different cultures, different loyalties. Systems conveners seek to enable conversations and learning across these boundaries (2021:21).

Systems conveners are especially necessary for addressing complex challenges, enabling innovation, dealing with conflict, engaging stakeholders, transforming practice and achieving community development (2021:23-25). These are often roles that ministers play, especially in the course of mission and community engagement. The role of systems convener can only be fulfilled by a person who has grasped the importance of social learning (as embodied by a learning community), so I am drawn to the belief that an approach to CMD based on a community of practice model would not only facilitate social learning but would also contribute to equipping ministers to be effective as systems conveners.

5.6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have paid particular attention to the emphasis the participants place on the communal aspects of CMD. I have explored the literature on clergy loneliness and, whilst acknowledging that problematic loneliness is an issue for some ministers, I maintain that the desire to gather in some way for CMD cannot simply be explained by the desire to seek company. The participants suggest they already consider themselves to some extent participants in a community of learners by virtue of being Scottish Baptist ministers. I have suggested that this can be understood by turning to the idea of a community of practice, characterised by the three essential components of a shared domain, a community and a joint practice. Rather than propose that CMD can be facilitated by the formation of communities of practice for ministers, I maintain that the ministers are already a community of practice and that fruitful CMD will arise from capitalising on this as a strategy for both the development of knowledge among ministers and their transformative alignment with the learning that the community experiences. I have also observed that the literature on landscapes of practice suggests that meaningful participation in a community of practice will equip a minister more successfully to navigate the boundaries of different competencies and at times to step up to the role of a systems convener.

Chapter 6

Development Dialogues: accountable relationships as an aspect of CMD

Learning Through Accountable Relationships

Committing to an accountable relationship, such as mentoring or supervision, is one of the practices that many Christian denominations identify as an important factor in ministry development. Frances Ward, with the insight of both an academic and Anglican priest, maintains that supervision is not just supportive but also developmental in ministry. She writes that 'supervision can sustain lifelong learning and that, therefore, it is primarily an *educational* process rather than a *therapeutic* one' (2005:8; her italics). The Church of Scotland is one example of a denomination that encourages ministers to receive pastoral supervision from accredited practitioners, commending it in these terms:

> Pastoral Supervision offers a regular, intentional and boundaried space in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more practitioners (supervisee) to look together at the supervisee's practice. It is a relationship characterized by trust, confidentiality, support and openness that offers you freedom and safety to explore issues arising in your work. (Church of Scotland 2022)

Similarly the Diocese of London, which requires all new incumbents to have a mentor, encourages an ongoing supervisory relationship beyond this:

> Individual supervision is a natural progression from mentoring for those who wish to undertake this. Ministers would arrange to meet with a Supervisor on a regular basis (perhaps quarterly) to discuss general issues arising out of ministry and to receive active listening and, where appropriate, advice. (Diocese of London, 2022)

The CMD guidance for Scottish Baptist Ministers suggests a range of intentional relationships, including mentoring and supervision, which increase a minister's potential to learn *through* the experience of ministry:

> Accountability: It is important to meet with at least one person who has the experience and wisdom to help us learn in and through our ministry experience. Such a person might be a ministry mentor, a peer mentor, a pastoral supervisor, a spiritual director or a soul

> friend. Some ministers might find accountability in a huddle led by an experienced colleague. (Baptist Union of Scotland 2020)

These Baptist guidelines, to which the participants in this project should have regard, commend the idea of a supervisory relationship but leave considerable freedom to choose how this is worked out. In this section I seek to listen carefully to how three ministers experience accountable relationships that are formative in their life and ministry.

6.1 Narratives of Accountable Relationships

I am interested to discover how ministers experience relationships in which they make themselves accountable to supervisors, mentors or others in order to further their own development. As noted above, there is a wide recognition that such connections are beneficial and formative, but I wondered how ministers describe these. What stories do they tell of the discovery, the content and the value of accountable relationships?

6.1.1 Naomi

As I greeted Naomi for our online conversation, I noticed the background to her picture was a holiday caravan. I remembered that she and her family had been living in temporary accommodation since she began as a pastor in a new church earlier that year. She apologised that her journals, which she had hoped to refer to, were in storage. I realised that she was taking the interview very seriously and as we went on, from time to time I saw she was glancing down at notes she had taken the trouble to prepare in advance.

Naomi told me the story of her journey into ministry. After university she had been an intern in her student church and then joined an apprentice pastor scheme. This had led to other ministry roles in that church – a context which she was clear had a very positive impact on her development:

> *There was a sense of kind of having peers, to explain… explore that sense of calling with. That… I think that was really important and has been important over the last 10 years for sure…*
>
> *I think it was a very prophetic culture, so there was a real sense of, are we really listening to what God is saying? Are we making space for that? Are we speaking out the things that we sense we hear for, you know, for each other, for the church, for the city? There was a sense of vision, like, that was beyond us so that, I mean, definitely stretched me, challenged me.*

You know… we were given opportunities far beyond what normally a 24, 25, 26 year old would receive.

It felt like Naomi had begun a new phase in her ministry as she moved away from that strongly nurturing church to her new pastorate. I asked her what had become the things that contributed to her continuing development at this stage. Her response was immediate, her confident reply revealing that this was not a difficult question to answer (and certainly not requiring her to consult her notes):

Errm… having a mentor has been really formational for me. I'm sure a lot of people say that in their interview, but having, you know, having someone to walk the long…the long road of obedience with… and that not just being about how, you know, how you're functioning as a leader, but how, you know, how you're doing as a wife, as a mother, walking through the ups and the downs of the rest of life. So that, I mean, that's really been [mentor's name] for me; and [mentor's name] is just a phenomenal friend and leader in my life. So I'm very grateful for her influence and… and prayerfulness. So yeah so… so yeah… definitely that.

Naomi went on to talk a little about the value of taking time to retreat, of spiritual disciplines and of a learning community. But what she had said about mentoring was so adamant, so enthusiastic, so heartfelt that I didn't want this to slip away. So I turned the conversation back to that. 'How have you found mentoring works, if you can articulate, I mean in terms of having an impact on you?' This was hardly the clearest question a researcher ever posed, but it elicited a surprisingly rich response, after quite a long thoughtful pause:

I guess, in a sense, [mentor's name] has accompanied me to the feet of Jesus and that's…that, for me, is like the visual kind of picture of what's happening there. It's like someone coming alongside you, and almost shepherding you back to the feet of Jesus when you get distracted or caught up in other things. And to me mentoring is… is kind of what you make of it really… like… it can be so many things… content… and I think it's as… as good as you make it really; you have to be intentional about that.

This mentoring sounded very much like spiritual accompaniment. Someone who had been a trusted mentor for many years, and in the past had taught Naomi some core competencies for ministry, now is acting as a shepherd to her soul. I recalled the fluid way in which the term 'mentor' is used and the breadth of more and less directive definitions it can bear. Naomi had just told me *'mentoring is…kind of what you make it really*'. For her it seemed to be an evolving experience that she had to reconfigure to meet her need; as she went on to say, '*I think it's as… as good as you make it really*.'

So I asked her, 'How do you make mentoring good in your experience?'

> *Uh huh, yeah well, I think you have to meet up regularly, you have to actually be honest; you could easily just make it into a chat but, you know, you know… how is it? Are you reading scripture together? Like, are you actually praying together and does the person feel permissioned and empowered to speak into your life and bring challenge? Are you inviting that?...Yeah, yeah all of those things, yeah.*

The diligent way Naomi had approached the research interview, with her pre-written notes to hand, seemed to reflect her desire to fulfil her calling with diligence. For her, a mentor needed to offer more than friendly, supportive conversation or practical advice. She was hungry for everything the mentor could contribute to her spiritual and vocational development. This required openness and vulnerability, a spiritual connection through prayer and sharing scripture, and an eagerness to be challenged. She had told me that you have to be 'intentional' about making a mentoring relationship good; she certainly knew what she intended to get from this one.

6.1.2 Robin

When Robin began to speak about his experience of a mentoring relationship, the contrast with Naomi (who I had spoken with the preceding day) was striking. Whereas she had clearly hungered for an intensity in that encounter, Robin seemed to be at pains to emphasise the casual informality with his soul friend.

Knowing that Robin had been a bivocational minister for around 12 years before becoming a full-time minister in the last six years, I wondered how this would impact his understanding of CMD. In his non-ministerial profession he would have been required to fulfil specific requirements for Continuing Professional Development each year, including a minimum number of hours of training courses. Would his expectations of CMD be shaped by this? It seemed not.

Early on in our conversation I asked how he would define CMD. He briefly mentioned '*reading books and commentaries*' along with '*fellowship and supervision or mentoring, things like that*', as though he wanted to show he knew the official answers. But he then became much more energised as he explained that he viewed CMD in a much more expansive way. For him it happens

> *as we go about our daily life, as we interact with people as we go through the experiences of life and reflect on those, learn from them, and allow those to be part of the transformation*

process as we reflect on who we are, how we've reacted, how we feel about things, who we desire to be as well, how we might be changed.

He seemed to be rejecting a predominantly structured approach to ministry development, which he appeared to see as limiting. He concluded: '*I would have a broad view and say that just about everything and anything could be used [as CMD] as long as it's fruitful and healthy and a good use of time*.' The stories he was eager to tell me were about the formative experience of spending time in South East Asia and then working as a volunteer with a City Mission alongside homeless people. Then he spoke of the way he had grown through difficult times in the life of the church:

I think there have been times in the local church in which we serve, and which we love… there've been times where there have been some difficult characters around, I suppose you could say…

Growth had come through '*reflecting on… difficult and pressurised situations'*; these were '*very formative times [although] nobody would wish those times upon anyone, really.*'

So when we came to the question of whether an accountable relationship contributed to his continuing development, he emphasised that there was such a relationship but it was not a structured practice:

Hmm, no I wouldn't say it was like that. It's more of a trusted senior friend. When we meet, we meet as friends and as colleagues, as fellow ministers, and we would naturally, just in terms of the conversation, ensure that we were, for want of a better phrase, 'checking in with each other.' And maybe also 'checking out' how we're getting on. And again, just making sure that things are on an even keel and that we're doing okay. So I'm very thankful, we would have a natural propensity towards good, constructive healthy conversations that keep us tending towards the right track, if you know what I mean, without actually being anything formal or structured and… or any name you could really put on it...

It struck me that others might just call this a friendship. In fact, perhaps that is what it is. But clearly for Robin this was a soul friend, or at least a *soulful* friendship, which he experienced as a formative force in his ministry. I still felt a need to double-check that there was not some structure or 'liturgy' to this meeting. I said, 'Just talk me through what, let's say, a typical pattern might be for one of these valuable conversations that you've had with a colleague.' He responded:

Well, I guess, since we're meeting as friends equally, you know, would be just catching up with each other and asking each other how we're getting on. Are we doing all right? And probably not be satisfied with the answer, 'Fine, thank you'. And probably just go from there

really. And maybe ask each other about our church situation or how are things going at home? And things like that. Are you really doing ok? Really, like a lot of conversations that would just start, you know, from a kind of social convention of how are you getting on and working its way forward from there, but bearing in mind there is, there is no, there is no real formality to it or any kind of overt or intentional structure in any way. Yeah it is really more of a conversation between friends.

Robin confirmed what I thought I had noticed. This is a '*conversation between friends*.' My instinct is to question whether this is sufficiently purposeful to be developmental. Having trained in pastoral supervision, I am inclined to expect someone to take responsibility for hosting and containing the space, and eliciting and focusing the conversation. Robin and his 'senior friend' seem to have sufficient wisdom and maturity to hold an enriching developmental conversation without an explicit framework.

6.1.3 Duncan

I still remember my late grandfather and the impact he had. Actually he passed away before I entered ministry, just like that, a year or so before. But some of his example though, and the words that he gave me, to 'keep sowing the seed', amongst other things - that spoke to me deeply.

When I asked Duncan how other people were part of his journey of ministry development, his first response was to share this story about his grandfather. It seemed important to him that from the outset he made space for the influence of others in his calling. He was very clear that CMD as a minister was much more of a whole-life experience than booking continual professional development (CPD) courses in his previous role:

I remember my banking days, it was this whole CPD stuff and you actively plan out and think, What do you want to do this year?…whereas for me CMD is just more a way of being, of living.

As our conversation continued, his receptivity to the formational impact of others became a theme. He told the story of a gathering of ministers with a well-respected colleague.

A few years back, a group of colleagues and I sat down with [name and former church of minister]. I mean, I don't know, [name] would have been in his 70s at that point in time - well into his 70s at that point in time. He'd just come along to share some of his experiences.

And a very simple thing: at the end of our time together he reached into his pocket and pulled out just little scraps of paper. And it was a verse he'd read that morning. So in his devotions he'd read a few chapters and a verse stood out for him. And his practice right through his ministry had been, when that happened to him, he would print that verse out and he would carry it with him, and he would hand it out to everybody he had interactions with in that day. I went away just blessed and encouraged by actually the verse he shared. But more importantly, I went away with that ...errm… idea and concept of actually, what an incredible thing to do as you go around on your visits, as you go to your meetings: just to leave a simple… simple verse for folks; not to expound it, not to try and explain it, just simply to say, 'Listen, I read this verse and I just want to leave it with you.' I have not managed to get into the practice of printing that out on a bit of paper yet, but I have got to the practice of, as I go through my day and see folks, just trying to remember to share a verse with them and just to encourage them about scripture.

I wondered why he told this story at such length. He was not simply saying he saw an idea and copied it; in fact, he did not copy it but adapted the principle to his own context, indicating a richer learning than direct emulation. He took time to describe the status and age of the speaker, suggesting that his receptivity to formational influence was increased by these factors. The content of the talk does not feature in the narrative. This central aspect of the encounter is edited out because the lasting meaningfulness for Duncan, the thing that has changed him, occurred in the finale when the slips of paper were brought out. This is so important that he describes it twice: firstly as it happened and again as he went away thinking '*what an incredible thing to do*.'

Duncan was very open about the impact of trusted people on his ministry. Here are two more stories he told to illustrate how his thinking and practice have changed through encounters with others. The first describes a sequence of meetings with colleagues.

As far as colleagues go… just to be challenged to think differently. I am... I used to be… probably still am, I'm very black and white. In lots of ways I've learned over the years that there is an awful lot of grey out there… and so to actually just sit in a minister's gathering once a month with colleagues and to talk and to share and just to be challenged that my little way of thinking is not necessarily the only way or that it needs to be expanded, and I think that has been a great challenge and encouragement to me, and at times a frustration err… because obviously sometimes you're going, 'That's just way out there, and I can't… I can't possibly go there.' But just to… I guess it's just that iron sharpening iron isn't it? And it's that being challenged to think differently, to think broader.

The second story illustrates how speaking with a deacon in the church led him to make a specific decision to take a broader view in his ministerial practice.

> *I guess it would be a couple of years ago, and thinking around marriage and…I kind of had parameters within which I would normally marry folks and… and some situations where just… I thought that I'd leave well to the side. And I remember getting into a tricky situation a couple years ago and then one of the deacons having a chat and he just encouraged me to think outside my narrow parameters and to see a wider picture there. Now I have not taken everything on board and I haven't fully widened it out, but I do now go in with a much wider view of… Let's have a wee chat here and see how I can bring the gospel into some of these situations where I might have struggled with before. And so particularly marrying a Christian and a non Christian - I would really have struggled with that, and still struggle with it. But now I'm much more open, instead of just saying 'No', and to sitting down and having a conversation. And then I actually found myself marrying a Christian and a non-Christian…*

Duncan had so much to say about the direct influence of respected colleagues and friends on his development that I suspected these experiences might be substitutes for the more recognisable forms of mentoring or supervision that I had expected to hear about. I asked if there was someone who contributed to his ministry in a role such as mentor or spiritual director or a pastoral supervisor.

> *I wouldn't use the terms mentor but somebody that feeds my soul, possibly, and challenges me and holds me accountable in some of those ways. So I think… I think in ministry terms it's quite interesting that I've been mentoring a young lad who came to our church. I encouraged him into ministry and helped him on his way, and he is now a minister. So I became his mentor during his pre-accredited years. And actually that relationship has continued, but not so much as… as mentor and mentee formally but actually both of us being mentor and mentee to each other, almost, that spiritual accountability.*

Duncan gave the impression that he would not have gone out to look for a mentor for himself but spoke positively about the current relationship he found himself in with his former mentee. It seemed this relationship had come about by happy accident, perhaps a serendipitous outcome of omitting to bring the previous mentoring relationship to a structured close. I was interested to discover the extent to which these meetings had a regular format. Were they structured?

> *You know, I think somewhere between unplanned, unstructured and inherited structure. So I guess whenever we met pre him going into ministry, I would always ask him how he was, what he was reading, (and end up sharing what I was reading as an encouragement to him*

in the midst) and how he was, what God was speaking to him about. And so I guess, even when we went into the mentor relationship that kind of inherited structure almost became part of what we did: 'And how is your devotional life? What was God speaking to you about specifically at this particular moment in time? And what challenges are you facing? How can we pray for each other? So I think that inherited structure's there and we don't have it planned out. And we don't sit there and say, 'Right, we're going to sit down and let's go through the agenda, A B C D,' but I think something of that practice just shapes our conversation in those moments.

Although Duncan was eloquent about the specific learning outcomes from the encounters he described earlier in our conversation, he did not find it necessary to tell me how these more structured meetings impacted him. He seemed to take it for granted that asking one another these searching questions was fundamentally beneficial; he did not need to provide me with proof that it worked.

6.2 Reflection on Developmental Dialogues

Naomi, Robin and Duncan each have invited people to partner with them as they seek to develop in their vocational identity. They respectively speak of 'mentor', 'senior friend' and 'somebody that feeds my soul' to describe a person with whom they meet regularly. I have chosen the phrase 'developmental dialogue' to describe these conversations because in each case there appears to be an understanding that growth arises from mutual participation.[64] None of these participants are waiting be instructed what to do by an expert; nor do any of them suggest any resentment of the time they invest in these partnerships.

The origin of these development dialogues is in the mentoring process required of early stage (pre-accredited) ministers. Naomi still meets with her original mentor 11 years later; Duncan has switched from mentoring a beginner to a mutual mentoring relationship with that same person; and Robin meets with a 'senior friend', deploying the vocabulary used in earlier times for a pre-accredited minister's mentor. None of them suggest they are doing this as part of a programme or scheme, but rather because they have found life and vitality in meeting with this person.

They share a belief that there is efficacy in what they are doing which can only be achieved through honesty, vulnerability and a readiness to engage with the other person. In Naomi's case, this means

[64] The term 'development dialogue' is derived from Garvey and Stokes (2022:23).

empowering the mentor in the context of reflection, prayer and reading scripture together, '*to speak into your life and bring challenge.*' For Robin, it means asking '*Are we doing all right?*' and not being satisfied with the answer, 'Fine, thank you.' For Duncan the partnership centres around asking each other searching questions about their spiritual journey.

I am left wondering to what extent these dialogues are (using the terminology of Frances Ward, mentioned above) *educational* rather than *therapeutic*. Naomi most clearly describes a relationship in which she expects to learn and be formed for ministry; she regards her own 'intentionality' as fundamental to this. It could be that Robin and Duncan have a more therapeutic relationship with their development partners, with a greater focus on checking in and checking up on one another – though their commitment to asking deeper questions about each other's spiritual wellbeing must inevitably take them into territory that is not just therapeutic but formative. In fact, their responses suggest they do not see a clear line between the therapeutic and educational and it may well be that as development partners meet, these dimensions will always bleed into one another.

6.3 Discussion

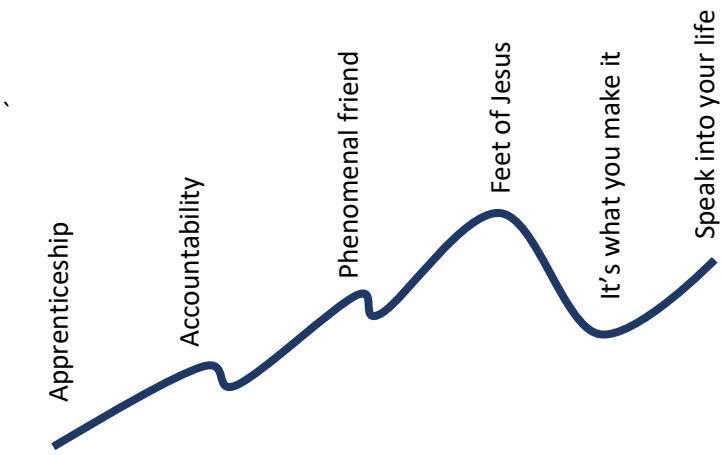
In the following section I will review the narrative arcs that emerged in my conversations with these participants. I will then discuss the narratives of Naomi, Robin and Duncan with particular reference to the concept of mentoring. I have chosen mentoring as the reference point for this discussion for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a term that each of these participants use as they narrate their experiences, albeit using the term with somewhat differing meanings as we shall see. Secondly, there is a wide body of literature on mentoring which offers typologies and frameworks for understanding purposeful developmental dialogues such as those the participants engage in. And thirdly, because all Scottish Baptist ministers are required to have a mentor during their pre-accredited years, and many continue these relationships when fully accredited, the language of mentoring is the most widely used terminology for accountable relationships with the community of Baptist ministers. I originally envisaged using the practice of pastoral supervision as the reference point for this discussion. Having trained as a pastoral supervisor myself and being conversant with some key texts in this area (in particular Paterson and Rose 2014 and Leach and Paterson 2015), I was enthusiastic to use this as a framework for discussing developmental dialogues. However, as I reflected on the participants' stories, I recognised that if I did this I would be imposing my interests on their stories rather than finding the most appropriate reference point to evaluate them as they are told to me.

6.4 The Narrative Shapes of the Conversations about Development Dialogues

As in previous chapters, I have considered the narrative arcs of the participants' contributions as part of my reflective response to them. Noticing focal points and turning points as well as rising and falling points in the drama, emotion or intensity of each narrative has enabled me to immerse myself deeply and attentively in these accounts.

Naomi's story begins with waves of rising intensity. She shares positive memories of her years as a ministry apprentice and recalls the high level of mutual accountability that energised that community. She then tells of her current mentor who is (note the strong language) '*a phenomenal friend and leader in my life*'. Not only this but, in the most powerful phrase Naomi coins, this mentor does no less than accompany her '*to the feet of Jesus'*. After this climactic descriptor, she takes a breath and allows herself a more general thought about mentoring: '*it's kind of what you make it*', but the intensity escalates again as she comments on the essential components of her mentoring relationship, culminating in giving the mentor permission '*to speak into your life*.' The almost unrelenting rising tone of the story is certainly indicative of Naomi's joy in this mentoring relationship and her high expectations of it.

Figure 5. The Shape of Naomi's Narrative



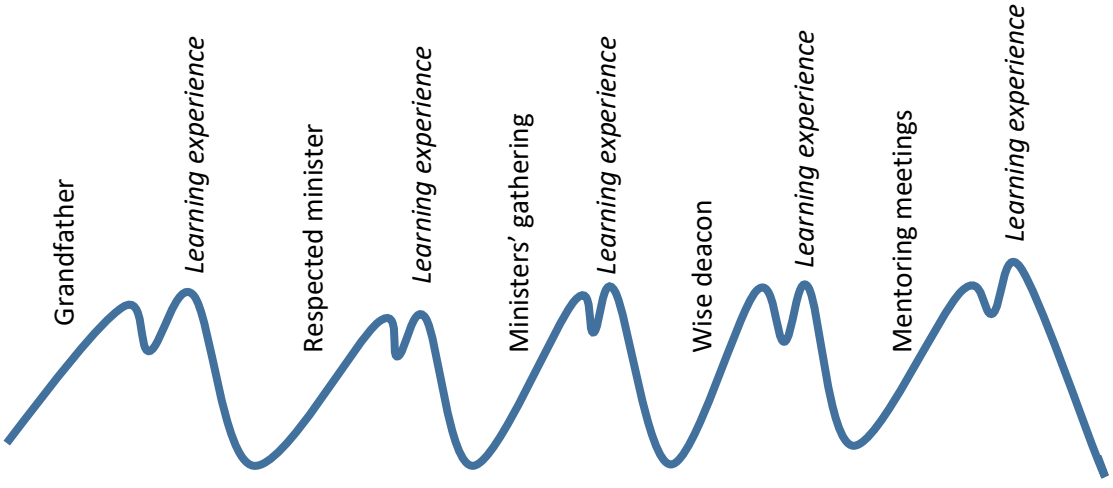
Robin's Narrative begins almost nervously with what I sensed were the 'official answers' he thought I wanted to hear. But then he leans back and smiles as he shares his big idea that everything can be CMD. His account loses pace a little with more lengthy descriptions of his experiences in South East Asia and with the city mission. There's a moment of sadness as he recalls the '*difficult characters*'

there have been in the local church and an almost tragic sense that knowing them became formative in an unwanted way. There is an uncertainty as he searches for a word to describe his 'senior friend' but then a growing confidence in his manner as he finds the language of '*checking in'* and '*checking out*'. By the end he has found a flow and seems to sense that though it may be '*the wrong answer*', his mentoring sessions have '*no intentional structure*.'

Figure 6: The Shape of Robin's Narrative

Duncan's narrative is shaped by the individual stories which he threads together. He eases himself into the role of story-teller and the conversation moves on from one episode to the next: his grandfather's advice, the respected minister whose idea he emulates, the ministers' gathering, the wise deacon and the mutual mentoring meetings with his former mentee. There is no significant increase in intensity at any point and the pace is quite steady, though each story has a point and ends well with a learning experience identified.

Figure 7: The Shape of Duncan's Narrative



6.5 The Participants' Experiences of Mentoring

Given the breadth of literature which celebrates the breadth and benefits of mentoring experiences (discussed in Chapter 2), I came to my research conversations with an expectation that the participants would be favourably disposed to the idea of mentoring in general and this was borne out by their remarks. However, as we shall now see, they experienced mentoring in significantly different ways.

6.5.1 Naomi: 'really formational'

Naomi tells an unreservedly positive story about her experience of being mentored. Her headline response to my question about what has contributed to her development at this stage of ministry is: '*having a mentor has been really formational for me.*' She goes on to add that her mentor is '*just a phenomenal friend and leader in my life.*' Each of the participants whose narratives I am considering in this chapter speak positively about their experience of being in an accountable relationship but Naomi is noticeably the most enthusiastic. I wonder why this is.

It may be because she is in quite an early stage of ministry (still completing the pre-accredited years at the time of our conversation) and values the support of a mentor especially highly as she finds her way into this role. This could reflect the 'managerial' approach to mentoring[65] which pays particular attention to the mentee as a 'person-in-role' and supports them in successfully fulfilling the expectations of their role. It is not an unrealistic expectation that an early-stage minister would seek guidance and reassurance in this respect and Naomi may be alluding to this when she says that one topic on the mentoring agenda is '*how you're functioning as a leader*.'

However, the story Naomi tells about mentoring does not focus on the specific requirements of her role but on her personal well-being and spiritual development. She is glad that mentoring is '*not just… about how, you know, how you're functioning as a leader*.' For her a managerial model would be inadequate. What matters for her is that it is also about '*how you're doing as a wife, as a mother, walking through the ups and the downs of the rest of life*.' In Western's terms she sees her mentor as a 'Soul Guide', helping her reflect on emotions, spiritual concerns, identity and relationships. This becomes even clearer in what is certainly the rhetorical climax of the narrative when she says of her mentor that she '*has accompanied me to the feet of Jesus*.' This profound metaphor is redolent of the deepest spiritual companionship; she is Martha coming to join Mary at the feet of Jesus.

[65] See discussion above of Western's four discourses of mentoring: Soul Guide, Psy Expert, Managerial and Network Coaching.

Furthermore, mentoring has restorative power because it means '*shepherding you back to the feet of Jesus when you get distracted or caught up in other things.*' In this metaphor, Naomi can be a lost sheep carried back to the fold by her mentor. This kind of mentoring creates a profoundly soulful space so it is not surprising that Naomi warns that '*you could easily just make it into a chat…*' which for her would be devoid of this spiritual richness. The indicators that the mentoring relationship is being conducted well are that some core spiritual practices are regular components of it:

> *Like, are you actually praying together and does the person feel permissioned and empowered to speak into your life and bring challenge?*

This experience of mentoring fits the 'soul guide' category, and it is worth noting the importance of the word 'guide' in Naomi's experience. Her mentor does not function as a non-directive conversation partner who enriches her thinking. She guides. She is '*a phenomenal friend and leader in my life*' who not only accompanies but shepherds her and whom she invites to bring challenge to her life. It seems she is seeking what Brueggemann above, summarising the Old Testament experience of mentoring, describes as 'an urging to stay faithful to YHWH.'

There may be other factors that cause Naomi to be so amenable to the mentoring experience. One factor might be age. Research has shown that Millennials[66] like Naomi have a strong preference for 'learning from colleagues…they respect' and 'want an atmosphere where supervisors and managers are constantly available for feedback' (Ng et al 2010:283). It may be that Naomi belongs to a generation that is inclined both to seek and to value the input and feedback of mentors more readily than previous generations. She certainly speaks with confidence about the mentoring process and making it work for her: 'mentoring is…kind of what you make it…as good as you make it really.' She does not present mentoring as something required of her but rather something she requires to live better and serve more faithfully.

I have also considered whether Naomi's positive response to mentoring reflects her position as one of a small minority of women who are Scottish Baptist ministers.[67] In a culture of such glaring under-representation it is easy to envisage the potential supportive impact of a wise and experienced female mentor. The *Flourishing in Ministry Project* by Notre Dame University identified a range of factors that promote healthy ministry, including the following:

[66] According to the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory, Millennials are people born between 1982 and 1996 who exhibit characteristics distinctive of that generation (see Strauss and Howe 1991).
[67] As of January 2023 there were 18 women who were accredited ministers in a total of 171 accredited ministers (excluding retired ministers). Only four of these women are, like Naomi, sole or senior pastors in a local church.

> What each person needs is an ideal possible self, an image of the kind of excellent pastor they might become that fits both their own personal characteristics and the unique call God has placed on their life. (Bloom 2013:31).

Newkirk and Cooper (2013) explored the impact of mentoring on African American women serving as ministers in Baptist churches in North America, recognising that their numbers are increasing but there are structural factors that impede their opportunities to obtain equal leadership positions with men. After interviewing and observing 10 African American female ministers who had all experienced formal or informal mentoring, they concluded that 'mentoring is vital for growth of women in ministry but it is not essential that mentoring be conducted in a formal setting.' They also observed that:

> In many instances mentoring allowed the mentee to see things within themselves that they would not ordinarily be able to visualize. Some mentees needed to be made aware of a positive attribute and skill that should be affirmed within. Others may have a negative limitation or obstacle, which will need to be changed, modified or removed (2013:337).

Similarly Cynthia Rigby, in an essay entitled 'Expanding the Perimeters of Feminist Mentoring', draws attention to the potential of mentoring to equip women not simply to work within inherited male systems but to reform and renew them:

> Feminist mentoring also acknowledges power differentials, but is less focused on helping individuals gain more power and influence in already established systems than in helping individuals negotiate, defy, and transform systems that depend on their being less than who they really are. (Thompson and Murchison eds. 2018:120).

I am tempted to read into Naomi's narrative that she values mentoring because it can empower a minority group. If I were to guess how she feels about mentoring I would be inclined to suggest this. However, as I reflect on her story I notice that she does not speak in these terms at any point. I am left wondering why this is. Possibly it is simply not an issue for her; or perhaps it is tacit in all that she says. Maybe I asked the wrong questions, or as a male minister in a position of authority among the churches perhaps the power dynamics were such that this was not an area she wanted to visit. Or perhaps the intense spirituality that permeates her story takes for granted the fact that justice, equality and flourishing for all are kingdom goals she is seeking with all the resources (including a mentor) that God provides. Whilst I do not have the data to resolve this question, reflecting on Naomi's experience has awakened me to the importance of appropriate mentoring for people in under-represented groups in ministry. This is something I will return to in my conclusions.

6.5.2 Robin: 'checking in and checking out'

The casual informality of Robin's approach to being mentored contrasts sharply with the purposeful intensity Naomi brings to the practice. Robin evidently values his meetings with a 'trusted senior friend' and considers them formative. Although he uses the term 'mentoring' early in our conversation when he is speaking generally about the practices of CMD, he conspicuously avoids it when recounting the experience of the regular developmental dialogue he engages in with this 'senior friend.' He emphasises that they meet 'as friends equally', apparently keen to rule out any mentor-mentee hierarchy or implied formality where one is the host and the other the guest. Likewise, he downplays the structure of the meetings, explaining that whatever happens will be the spontaneous outcome of 'asking each other how we're getting on.'

This highly informal approach to mentoring is consonant with the beginning of Robin's story in which he explains that he has learned to consider all the experiences of life as potentially developmental:

> *as we go about our daily life, as we interact with people as we go through the experiences of life and reflect on those, learn from them, and allow those to be part of the transformation process as we reflect on who we are, how we've reacted, how we feel about things, who we desire to be as well, how we might be changed.*

With such a strong conviction that an interaction with anyone can be formational or transformational it follows that the specific context of a mentoring relationship is not placed on an especially high pedestal by Robin. It is one of many, roughly equal, encounters which can stimulate growth. For Robin, the priesthood of all believers towers above any priestly role assigned to the mentor. In this respect Robin reflects Fenélon's account of life through *The Adventures of Telemachus*, mentioned above, where life's events and encounters are themselves potent with formative meanings, as distinct from the professional approach to mentoring which has subsequently emerged where the experience, expertise and relational skill of the mentor can be seen as the catalysts for development.

I have described this as a conviction on Robin's part but it is also possible to see it as a disposition of personality. Robin has a ready tendency to reflect on experience. He mentions the importance of reflection in the quotation above and as his story develops he points out that growth has come through 'reflecting on difficult and pressurised situations' which were 'very formative times'. For an experienced practitioner like Robin who has acquired skills of reflection it seems the mentoring experience feels less like an encounter with the oracle and more like an equal-but-different space in which to process some of his experiences.

In the terms of mentoring theory, Robin's experience does not reflect traditional dyadic mentoring influenced by adult development psychologist Daniel Levinson's classical model of mentoring, where

> 'the true mentor…serves as an analogue in adulthood of the 'good enough parent' for the child' (Levinson et al 1978:98).

Robin is not seeking a quasi-parental figure to support his development. His mentoring relationship could therefore be considered peer mentoring since clearly a peer-to-peer relationship is involved. Clawson was an early proponent of mutual mentoring by 'people of roughly the same age and experience…especially if the natural competitiveness of the bureaucratic pyramid is replaced with an encouraging teamwork' (Clawson 1996:11). However, peer mentoring has generally assumed that there is a more experienced partner in the relationship, even if they are in similar organisational positions. Typical examples would be of final year students in UK higher education peer mentoring more junior students, or mentoring of younger pupils by older pupils (Garvey and Stokes 2022:100-101).

Robin is emphatic that in his mentoring 'we are meeting as friends equally.' Therefore the model of co-mentoring is a better descriptor for his experience. Garvey and Stokes describe co-mentoring as

> a way of formalizing the mutuality within a mentoring relationship. It implies that both parties in the relationship are learning and that they are equal partners (Garvey and Stokes 2022:102).

The shift from dyadic mentoring to a greater mutuality is described by Kochan and Trimble in their study of their own mentoring relationship. They observe that

> boundaries and roles began to shift. Our relationship transcended the hierarchical mentor/mentee roles and entered into a co-mentoring relationship... acting like friends, sharing personal hopes and frustrations, and talking about family issues (2000:24).

Robin says that his mentoring meetings are 'really more of a conversation between friends.' It could be assumed that they are no more than 'conversations between friends' except that he gives a number of indications that a co-mentoring ethos lies beneath their interactions. His language of 'checking in with each other [and] checking out how we're getting on' implies a gently probing purposefulness. 'Checking in' is something you do when you are conscious of being on a journey. 'Checking out' someone implies you have a special reason for being interested in their life. Then he says they are 'just making sure that things are on an even keel.' Here again is a journeying (sailing) metaphor which he uses to suggest there is a balance they are seeking to maintain in their lives and ministries. If one of them is listing under the weight of responsibility or heeling in the high winds of

change, this will be recognised. He continues with yet another journeying metaphor as he speaks of their 'healthy conversations that keep us tending towards the right track.' This suggests an underlying attentiveness to their decision-making; he finds their conversations reinforce the values that enable wise choices when the path before them bifurcates. One further characteristic that differentiates this co-mentoring from simply a conversation between friends is the implicit permission that has been given to probe and challenge. When they ask each other 'how we're getting on' they will 'not be satisfied with the answer, "Fine thank you".' There is an expectation of honesty and the vulnerability that accompanies this.

Robin's narrative of co-mentoring, with its emphasis on friendship and expectation of (mutual) spiritual formation, is redolent of the concept of the 'soul friend'. This term suggests both a friend who is interested in the wellbeing of your soul and a friend with whom you connect at a profound soulful level. It seems that both these definitions are reflected in Robin's experience. The former meaning is at the heart of Anglican priest Kenneth Leech's classic work on spiritual direction, *Soul Friend* (1977). Tracing a detailed history of Christian spiritual care, Leech proposes a model for an expert spiritual director, well-versed in insights from both Christian history and modern psychology, who adopts the posture of a friend. Whist this model of soul friendship reflects the focus on spiritual care in Robin's co-mentoring, it does not capture the mutuality of that relationship; Leech envisages an asymmetric relationship in which the spiritual director brings specialist knowledge and skills into the friendship.

Somewhat more recently the Irish poet, author and priest John O'Donahue (1998) has drawn attention to a pattern of soul friendship which reflects the latter definition - a friend with whom you connect at a profound soulful level. He looks back to the idea of the *anam ċara* (literally 'soul friend') in the early Celtic church. It originally referred to a teacher, companion or spiritual guide whose friendship invited a deep openness. O'Donahue suggests:

> With the anam ċara you could share your innermost self, your mind and your heart. This friendship was an act of recognition and belonging (1998:12).

But the point of the *anam ċara* is not simply to offer a safe place for the sharing of vulnerability but rather for the deep friendship to be itself a spur to spiritual growth. The soul friendship is not just the context but in some mysterious way the means of spiritual illumination. As O'Donahue puts it:

> It is precisely in awakening and exploring this rich and opaque inner landscape that the anam ċara experience illuminates the mystery and kindness of the divine (1998:13).

Although Robin does not speak in the poetic language of O'Donahue or find roots for his co-mentoring practice in Christian history, it appears to me that the richness of his mentoring relationship can be interpreted as an experience of the *anam ċara*. The soulful connecting with a trusted friend who is equally committed to the discovery of 'the kindness of the divine' in the journey of daily life seems to be the origin of the value and transformative power of this co-mentoring.

6.5.3 Duncan: multiple resources

A distinguishing feature of Duncan's contribution to this research is that he identifies multiple development dialogue partners. When I asked how other people were part of his ministry development journey he told stories about several people: his late grandfather, a well-respected leader he met at a ministers' meeting, his current colleagues in the local ministers' fellowship group, a deacon in his church, and a former mentee with whom he now meets for 'spiritual accountability'. Each of them were (or had been) significant developmental influences on him. All except his grandfather seem to be people he had sought out in some way to guide or influence his ministry.

Whereas Naomi's mentor clearly fits Western's (2012) typology of 'Soul Guide' and Robin's developmental dialogue displays the characteristics of co-mentoring (Clawson 1996), Duncan's experience is best described by Western's (2012) category of 'network mentoring'. This is a model in which a learner may cultivate multiple supportive and developmental relationships to form 'a learning network' (Garvey and Alred 2001). The crucial point is that the learner manages this network (Garvey and Stokes 2022:178) by seeking out and making time for people whom they believe will contribute to their development. Unlike a community of practice, as discussed in chapter 5, the multiple participants do not necessarily have a relationship with one another; the network centres around the mentee.

Duncan has been effective in identifying a number of people who have been wise guides or people with whom he has engaged in developmental dialogue. Each of these relationships has proved purposeful insofar as his stories all have an ending in which the impact of each mentor is identifiable: eg he began a new practice, he gained a broader frame of reference, he responded to a situation in a new way or his thinking was sharpened. Although he has multiple mentor figures, they are each recognisable as special influencers in his life. Whereas Robin spoke about every encounter with another person being a potential development opportunity, Duncan's story is of a small trusted collection of voices who have challenged and guided him.

Duncan has skilfully found an appropriate number of insightful people with which to surround himself. It appears that finding an optimum range of mentors is one of the keys to successful network mentoring. A Korean study has demonstrated that the quality of relationships in a developmental network is an indicator of its success (measured in terms of career satisfaction) but having too wide a range of mentors or too frequent contact with them militates against positive outcomes (Chang et al. 2021). Duncan did not suggest he had any strategy in opening himself to multiple development partners (some simultaneous and some sequential) but he seems to have had an instinctive sense of what would work for him and where the most fruitful developmental opportunities lay.

A final noticeable feature of Duncan's narrative is the story he tells about imitation. He is clear that he does not approach mentoring uncritically; he has not always 'taken everything on board' and at times it has left him with 'a frustration.' Nevertheless his biggest story, told with style and evident joy, is of hearing how an influential minister would write down copies of a Bible verse that he had read that morning and distribute them to people he met during the day. The climax of the story is Duncan seeing this as 'an incredible thing' and deciding to emulate him (though ultimately in a slightly modified form, sharing the verses orally rather than writing them down). Discourse around mentoring tends to focus on asking the right questions, reflecting together on issues and ushering the mentee towards their own learning. Duncan's narrative is a reminder that one dimension of mentoring is simply setting an example that can be followed. This reflects the fundamental apprenticing principle, 'Just do what I do', which is expressed in distinctly Christian terms in the Apostle's Paul's invitation: 'Be imitators of me as I am of Christ' (1 Corinthians 11.1, NRSV). In chapter 4 I observed that the participants' definition of CMD was not focused on skills but on their own spiritual development and growth. I suspect this is because amidst all the listening, asking, teaching and preaching that comprise the pastoral vocation, ministers carry a strong awareness that if their lives do not display characteristics worth emulating then the rest is noise.

Chapter 7

Practices and Habits

In this chapter I am listening again to the stories that ministers tell about their experiences of CMD but this time paying particular attention to the practices and habits they cultivate. These activities are necessarily situated – they happen in identifiable places. My interest is not in the thinking processes of the ministers disassociated from their actions or locations; I am not asking how they think they should act or what they think CMD ought to be. I am trying to observe some of their embodied practices that disclose experiences of fruitful ministerial development. I am particularly interested in the things they do repeatedly and habitually which have a formative influence on their ministries.

As in previous chapters I will firstly recount the narratives shared with me by the participants. Gary talks about his experiences of regularly attending conferences; Beth describes her engagement in the digital space; Paul shares how he has discovered the continuing benefit of reflective writing and finally Lewis tells us about the value of daily dog walks. I will then discuss each of the participants' narratives in the light of the work of James K A Smith and Pierre Bourdieu on habits and practices which I discussed in Chapter 2.

7.1 Gary's Story – The Conference

When Gary introduced himself I noticed that place seemed important to him. He described his ministry initially in geographical terms, from training in Glasgow to a first pastorate in the south of England, then ministry in the north of England before returning to lead a church in Scotland a few years ago. He set up his story by explaining that he discovered his need for CMD the hard way:

> *Not coming from a stream that organises that for you, I had to basically leave BTI as it was [a Bible college in Glasgow], just launch into ministry and then realise that actually three or four years at theological college doesn't really prepare you for local church ministry at all.*

The remedy he found for this problem was the conference. He found ways of linking up with several networks that hosted gatherings of ministers. The story of his CMD journey turned out to be predominantly an account of different kinds of conferences he had attended. Here are three typical sections of his story.

i) I think, during my time in and around London, and although I may not have been a great fit necessarily theologically, I've benefited a lot from the Proclamation Trust, from ministers' events and conferences, particularly when it came to training and development for preaching and teaching…

ii) I think other big inputs into my life have been the Willow Creek Association. I had the opportunity … to actually go to Willow Creek on a number of occasions to the Leadership Summit, and was invited a number of years ago, along with 10 other ministers from the UK, to have a 10 day sort of focus time of training and development from the sort of main people in their staff team, which was a really wonderful experience…

iii) And thinking, more recently, the European Leadership Forum has been my week of… of sort of focused study and commitment to learning for the last few years, which is a group of about 100 men and women. We gather in Poland every year … mainly from Europe, but it actually gets finance mainly from America so some of the input is a bit iffy, but a lot of it is absolutely excellent and… and I've really benefited tremendously from that.

I wondered what it was about the conference experience that made it so precious, in some cases worth travelling considerable distances at his own expense to attend. Presumably the quality or relevance of the teaching content was valuable, but it struck me as curious that in two of these cases he specifically mentioned his reservations about the content: he recognised that he '*may not have been a great fit necessarily theologically'* at one and remarked that at another *'some of the input is a bit iffy.'* It seems there is something about the conference as a place to be which transcends the content of the programme. For Gary a level of disappointment was a price worth paying to spend time in the conference environment.

7.2 Beth's Story – The Digital Space

'I am a millennial and I'm not sorry for it.'

Beth announced this with a suppressed smile that seemed to amplify her suggestion that it would be absurd to apologise for when you were born. This statement was clearly intended to offer a lens through which to read her story. Trained as a teacher but soon recognising a different calling on her life, she had eight years' experience of ministry in two churches. As someone in her early 30s she was one of the youngest participants in this project and brought with her a strong awareness of a generational difference, perhaps distance, between herself and other colleagues in ministry.

Well-prepared for our conversation, she set out an agenda for our conversation. Her story was not going to be chronologically arranged but told under five headings.

> *I kind of broke my CMD down into five areas (the teacher in me likes to put things in boxes) and so I realised that the CMD that I found really helpful and that I've needed has been personal, generational, cultural, biblical and pastoral.*

As her narrative emerged, it became clear that she was very aware of being a digital native. It was no surprise to her that her CMD experience arose as much in the digital space as elsewhere.

The 'personal' component of her CMD story focused on her commitment to receiving counselling (a fact I knew she was very open about in wider conversation and on social media).

> *Part of my CMD has actually been working on how to establish and form a life of good habits and good personal care so that the ministry that comes out of me is coming from a good and healthy place. So I've been in counselling for the last… for three years… My counsellor is a Christian counsellor who's committed to helping me develop as a person and making sure that I'm in a good and healthy, safe place for my church.*

I realised that due to the recent pandemic lockdowns many, if not all, of the counselling sessions would have been online. I felt others may have drawn attention to this but it did not merit special comment by Beth.

Later she described what she saw as a distinctly generational approach to accessing developmental information and engaging in conversation about this.

> *On the biblical side of things, I've been doing a couple of online courses through the Bible Project, so I'm doing a certificate in the Hebrew Bible at the moment.*

For her the value of the digital space was not simply the convenience of access but the possibility of being part of a global community.

> *…this is partly generational… but I think podcasts and, kind of, conversational digital stuff are really helpful…Good ministry practice is good ministry practice, but there is stuff I have to think about as a single younger female that also comes under CMD… It is a challenge for me to find somebody who shares those particular needs in ministry and so being able to access people all across the world who are working out good practice for them in a similar situation has been important.*

Beth was also aware of the downside of this and did not seem inclined to laud the digital above the physical encounter. She recognised a creative interplay between the two, not least for enabling her to remain culturally rooted in her own context.

> *Culturally I found it helpful to have the Baptist Union network… I think it's very easy generationally for me to listen to a lot of American stuff and lose complete sight of what's actually happening in our own country. And so that's where the CMD from the Baptist Union of Scotland's been very helpful, to have those conversations of what God is doing in Scotland.*

Having listened to Beth, it was clear that significant parts of the CMD story she told were situated in the digital space. As she articulated specific benefits of this for her, I could see that she was not presenting her online activity as a journey of research into a specific 'other' zone but simply as an expression of her life which moved with ease in and out of digital spaces. When it came to CMD, these two locations did not seem to have a hierarchical relationship or stand in opposition to one another; rather they made an overlapping and complementary contribution to her continuing journey of development.

7.3 Paul's Story – Writing To Understand

Paul was a little late arriving for our conversation. He had let me know a couple of days before that he was visiting a bereaved family just before our meeting. I suggested a reschedule but he was adamant that our agreed appointment would work. He almost made it on time and, as if needing to prove he was making the most of our hour together, launched into his story with very little introduction. He wanted to tell me about three things: mentors, writing and connectedness. It was the second of these that really seemed to animate him.

Mentors were important to him and he was grateful to a variety of people who had helped him in this way during a few years in North America and then as a minister in a fairly remote part of Scotland.

> *I had a bunch of different mentors, eh? And those have been helpful partly for two reasons. One is sometimes, it's that phone call you need: how do I handle this situation? And then errm...and there's also just ongoing talking, if you like, you know?*

It was through mentors that he discovered the value of writing as a form of CMD.

> *I don't do lots of writing, but a couple of mentors have asked me to write things and that's been super helpful. I'm one of those people who reads lots…then I get lost in it, like, you*

know? And I get the sense of, what do I really think about anything? You know? And it's just not really helpful at times.

I wondered if his mentors had noticed something about his keen intellect that led them to encourage him to distil his learning through writing. Paul was certainly thankful to them for

…sort of helping me to tie down, if you like, this is…this is where I'm at on this issue, if you like; not that I'm excluding other views, but this is kind of where I'm at.

He spoke enthusiastically about one mentor who had asked him to write a paper about his own theology (I wondered which bit) and another who invited him to describe what it means to be a minister. He then seemed to worry that he was overstating the scope of this:

When I say 'paper' it wasn't much, it's just a page or two but…but it helped me nail down: Okay, this is what I'm trying to do, where I'm coming from - and open up discussion.

This qualification actually intensified the sense that his writing was very authentic CMD. It was not being worked up into a form for presentation elsewhere. He had simply been directed to the wisdom of sitting alone and letting his thoughts become crystallised and organised as he committed them to writing. As he continued I discovered that what had begun as assignments from his mentors had become an enriching habit.

Recently I've written just one page documents on what theological traditions I'm kind of in and also what spirituality streams. And mostly…and…and these things have just been super helpful, to stop me just being lost in the cloud of all sorts of things to think about and all sorts of things to do.

Many participants in this project have spoken positively about *meetings* with mentors, as sources of advice and encouragement. Paul uniquely has found his mentors urging him into a more solitary space. Their focus has not simply been on meeting with him but enabling him to meet with himself (and perhaps meet with God) through the focused craft of writing. Fulfilling this task alone has been for him a remedy for being '*lost in the cloud of all sorts of things.'*

7.4 Lewis' Story – Walking the Dog

Lewis arrived at our meeting with his 'happy crab', a bright orange and yellow wooden model which a friend had given him as a reminder of joyful times they had spent on the beach together. This cheerful crustacean was his response to my invitation to all participants to bring along an object that expressed something about their experience of CMD. Lewis explained that when it came to CMD he

was the crab crawling '*among the crevices and the darker places to find out what's going on.*' CMD was not something he wanted to make a big noise about:

> *I'm quite happy to be anonymous as well, and I know there are more illustrious fish in the sea and they do lots of things, but the crab does a bit of business, incognito quite often, and it likes to…to probe. It may not have always appeared happy, but actually is normally a happy crab.*

This fascinating introduction led into a story of how Lewis blended practice as an accredited counsellor with the role of a local church minister and how he likes to spend his time talking with atheists as well as believers. The duality of his role seemed to be a metaphor for his reluctance to fit neatly into any pre-conceived perception of who he was. He was the crab stepping sideways whilst the rest of us were walking forwards. I was not surprised that his definition of CMD was about his journey towards authenticity and integrity:

> *For me it's all about wanting to develop other people emotionally and spiritually; and for that to happen, I feel I need to develop emotionally and spiritually.*

When I asked him what habits he cultivates that contribute to his ministry development I was again disconcerted by his deviation from a predictable script:

> *They're very simple. I mean walking the dog is a big one for me*.

Other participants had tended to answer this question with accounts of devotional reading or attending ministry workshops. Lewis' first response was this simple nourishing practice. He went on to describe the familiar benefits of the dog-walk:

> *That is my big thinking time away from all the other things that press in. Time. Time away to think and reflect when you walk.*

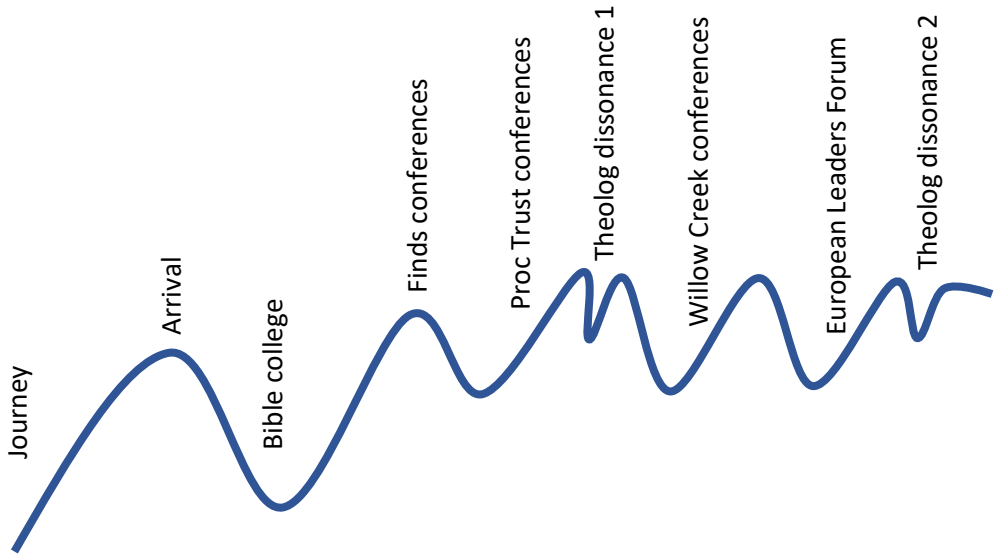
What fascinated me was that in his reckoning this counted as CMD. Given his stated definition of CMD (*I need to develop emotionally and spiritually*) it made sense. He was telling me that finding solitary space was a priority if he was to attend to his own development. This was the necessary counterpoint to the time spent in the counselling room or the pastoral visit, the grounding for the conversations with believers and atheists.

7.5 The Narrative Shapes of the Conversations about Practices

As in previous chapters, I have taken time to reflect on the shape of the narratives recounted by these participants. Whilst their stories are not crafted with a beginning, a middle and an end, neither are they a neutral kind of prose from which I can simply harvest quotations. The very act of re-telling their experiences as story creates a narrative with undulations of intensity, shifts in pace and varieties of tone. I have sought to be attentive to this in the accounts shared by Gary, Beth, Paul and Lewis in order to immerse myself as deeply as I can in what they have shared.

Gary sets the stage for his story with a concise history of his ministry journey which culminates in his arrival at his present location. His tone lowers as he expresses his disappointment at the inadequacy of his initial Bible college training but this turns out to be the crisis which prompted his discovery of the value of attending conferences. His three sub-stories about conferences each rise with their own energy, though the first and last are punctuated by a nervous blip when he alludes in passing to the slight theological dissonance he experiences.

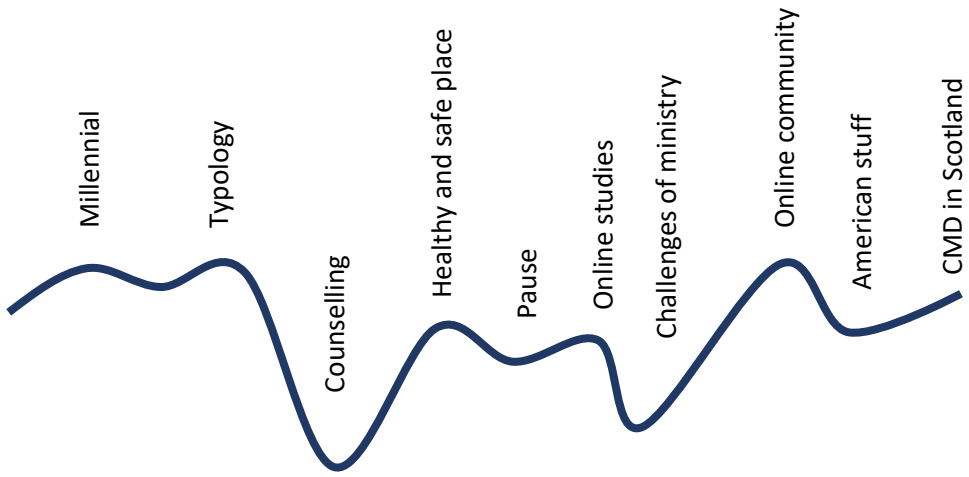
Figure 8: The Shape of Gary's Narrative



Beth begins with a strong declaration about being a millennial that comes across with the force of a challenge to the listener. This is followed by a clear and pre-planned account of her five-fold typology for CMD. The story is hers and she is in control. This makes it all the more powerful when she invites us to a moment of vulnerability as she speaks about receiving ongoing counselling. However, the counselling is presented as a positive route to ensuring she is in 'a good and healthy, safe place for my church.' There is a pause in the flow of the conversation before she then talks

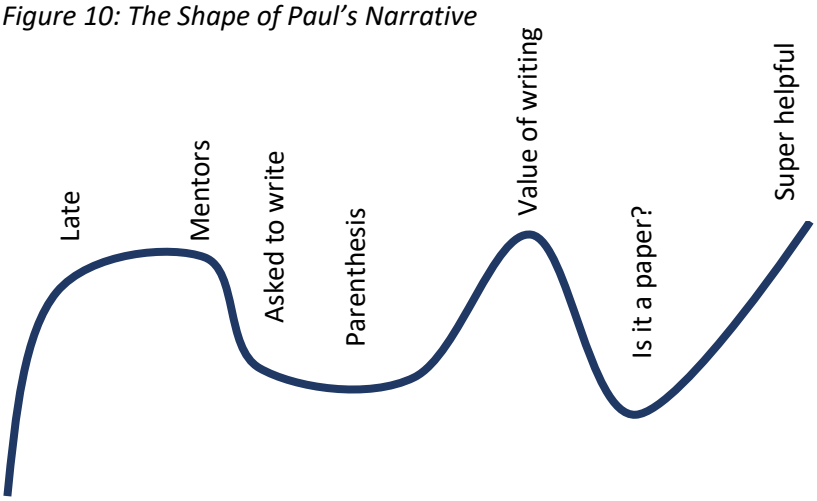
about her online studies and the value of digital communications. The conversation takes a more reflective turn again as she names the challenge of ministry as 'a single younger female' but this moves towards a positive resolution as she speaks of the support of her online community. In a further reflective turn she mentions her misgivings about listening to too much 'American stuff' but ends on an optimistic note as she affirms the value of CMD that originates in Scotland.

Figure 9: The Shape of Beth's Narrative



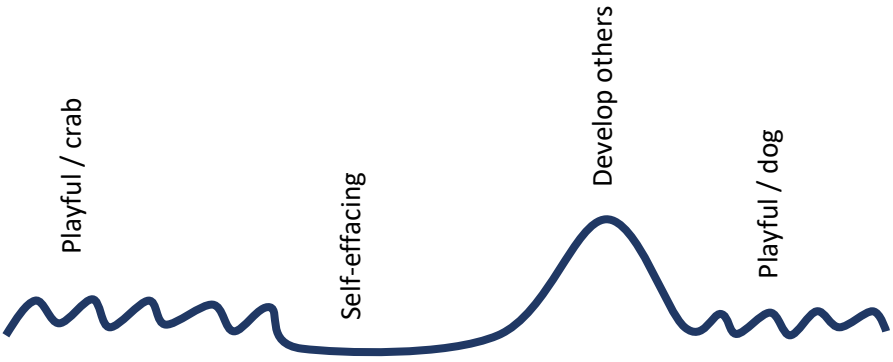
Paul launches into his story with an urgency prompted by his late arrival. He lights up with what looks like gratitude as he speaks of having had 'a bunch of different mentors.' He gives the impression that his story took an unexpected turn when two mentors asked him to write something. Seemingly sensitive to the listener's need for explanation, he parenthesises his tendency to read widely but not organise his thoughts. Then he rises to his key points about the value of reflective writing. The story sounds as though it might lose its impetus when he wonders if his work really deserved the title 'paper', but he avoids going down this rabbit-hole and builds the story to conclude with his conviction that this practice for him is 'super helpful.'

Figure 10: The Shape of Paul's Narrative



Lewis' narrative begins in a playful mode, introducing the comedy character of the 'happy crab'. The energy from this opening carries through his ensuing somewhat self-effacing remarks about preferring anonymity and not being among the illustrious fish, which otherwise might have moved the story into a more melancholic mode. Lewis cleverly uses the contrast of what he is *not* to set up a positive definition of the heart of his ministry: he wants 'to develop other people emotionally and spiritually'. This becomes the climactic section of his story. When I come to ask him about the developmental habits he cultivates, I feel he returns to the playful mode, knowing that 'walking the dog' is probably not an orthodox or anticipated answer.

Figure 11: The Shape of Lewis' Narrative



7.6 Discussion

As I have reflected on the stories told by Gary, Beth, Paul and Lewis, I have noticed that they each describe practices that have become habits for them. The end they have in mind is clearly to become more faithful ministers and to achieve this they have adopted specific habits that contribute to this. Each of them will of course have many formative habits but the ones they have chosen to speak about here will form the basis of this discussion: attending conferences (Gary), online networking (Beth), writing (Paul), and dog-walking (Lewis). They all speak of doing these things repeatedly and seem to recognise that it is the repetition of these practices that makes them contributory factors in their pursuit of faithful ministry.

It is also immediately apparent that the repeated practices described by the participants are bodily actions. These are the 'embodied rhythms, rituals, and routines' which Smith maintains give rise to a habitus (2013:4). Gary travels to particular places to attend conferences, where he encounters other practitioners of ministry. Beth seeks out online co-travellers in ministry; her habit is not just thinking about things but creating encounters which will be formative. Paul has discovered the value of

crystallising his understanding through the practice of writing; whether by means of pen and paper or keyboard and screen, it is an embodied activity. And Lewis walks with his dog. None of these are purely habits of the mind, intellectual challenges or thought experiments. They represent a kind of knowledge-in-the-hands which is forthcoming when bodily effort is made.

In Chapter 2 I discussed Smith's application of the concept of habitus to Christian formation in general and that now seems to me to be a helpful framework for considering the practices of continuing ministry development. It has already become apparent that for the participants CMD is not about the mental transfer of concepts. It is a journey of Christian formation (Chapter 4), travelled in community (Chapter 5) and explored in dialogue with key partners (Chapter 6). CMD is directed towards a telos which I have sometimes referred to as faithful ministry but which could accurately be described as the habitus of the faithful minister. Ministers carry a sense of what we could become, a way of being and doing that the greatest of our predecessors and the wisest of our contemporaries embody. This habitus is discovered, inhabited and indeed transformed through repeated participation in practices that tend towards this goal.

I noted earlier that Dykstra has described this as the formation of the 'pastoral imagination,' which is 'a way of seeing into and interpreting the world which shapes everything a pastor thinks and does' (2001:2). In his subsequent writing on pastoral imagination, Dykstra adds:

> It is always forged…in the midst of ministry itself, as pastors are shaped by time spent on the anvil of deep and sustained engagement in pastoral work. It is the actual practice of pastoral ministry…that gives rise to this particular and powerful imagination (2008:41-42).

Like Smith, building on Bourdieu's notion of habitus, Dykstra is drawing attention to the constructive nature of embodied practices which exercise both a formative and transformative power as we inhabit them. The participants in this project draw attention to some very specific practices which they describe as contributing to their continuing development in ministry, so I will now turn to examine each of these in more detail.

7.6.1 Reflecting on the Conference Habit – Gary

I have heard many people, not least ministers, speak about the special impact of a particular conference they have attended, often pointing to one particular keynote message that seemed to address their needs in a profound way. Gary's narrative is not simply about a one-off experience but about a habit of attending conferences. He speaks of a repeated practice of attending gatherings convened by certain organisations which forms a rhythm in his year; he says one of them 'has been

my week of… of sort of focused study and commitment to learning for the last few years…' Attendance at these events has become a structured practice and he has discovered the impact of participating in the same event year after year.

Gary speaks readily about his sense of the inadequacy of his initial ministerial education as preparation for ministry: 'three or four years at theological college doesn't really prepare you for local church ministry at all.' He did not seem to be criticising the training institution he had attended but rather was observing the gap between acquiring proficiency in the classic theological disciplines and entering into the habitus of ministry. Immersing himself in the conference experience was one of the important practices that had stimulated his pastoral imagination and enabled him to understand more fully what it meant for him to embody a pastoral vocation.

It is noticeable that Gary repeatedly draws attention to the communal dimension of his conference attendance. I have paid particular attention to CMD as a communal practice in chapter 5 but it is interesting that Gary does not tell his story as a lone minister attending an event for his individual fulfilment. He travels to Willow Creek in Chicago 'along with 10 other ministers from the UK' and when he attends the European Leadership Forum it is 'a group of about 100 men and women.' The formative impact is at least partly through what Smith describes above as a 'social ontology' (2013:149), defining who you are with reference to a group whose practices you share.

When I retold Gary's story above I commented that I was puzzled by his reservations about the content of the teaching programme, despite his overall enthusiasm for the conferences he describes. With regard to one he says he '*may not have been a great fit necessarily theologically'* and at another *'some of the input is a bit iffy.'* It may be enough to express my respect to him for participating in events which were not simply going to reinforce his presuppositions, but I felt he was not so much saying he had gone there to be challenged by alternate worldviews; rather his point was that these theological disconnects did not matter because the formation he experiences there comes in a different way. The value of the conference to Gary is not that it offers a simple Cartesian mind-to-mind transfer of ideas from speaker to listener; rather he recognises that participating in that temporary community contributes to his habituation as a faithful minister.

I find it difficult to avoid the parallel between Gary's conference attendance and the idea of pilgrimage. Travelling with others to a place of spiritual enrichment is a practice common to many of the world's religions. It has a particular history in the Old Testament tradition of attending the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles and in the Christian practice of making spiritual journeys to shrines and other locations of significant meaning. In their generative study of the

phenomenon of pilgrimage, anthropologists Turner and Turner identified three key stages of pilgrimage:

i. Separating from home at the outset of the journey
ii. A liminal stage characterised by freedom from social structure and a sense of bonding, or *communitas*, with fellow travellers, carried through the journey and the encounter with the sacred destination
iii. The homecoming, or aggregation, as pilgrims return to normal social structures (Turner and Turner 1978).

These three stages are apparent in Gary's narrative. Firstly, when he speaks about the Willow Creek conference he emphasises the importance of making the journey to a new place: 'I had the opportunity … to actually go to Willow Creek on a number of occasions.' I have underlined the phrase that intensifies the significance to him of travelling to this place. He does not elaborate on how this separation from home affects him, but it is clearly relevant to the impact the conference experience has upon him. Secondly the sense of *communitas* with fellow travellers seems to be important to Gary. I notice that he does not say anything about the *content* of the conferences in Chicago or Poland but his story includes the '10 other ministers from the UK' with whom he travelled to the USA and 'about 100 men and women' who 'gather in Poland every year.' This sense of bonding with fellow travellers is clearly a fundamental aspect of making the journey. Thirdly, although Gary does not describe the 'homecoming' as such, it is implicit in his account as he reflects as someone-now-back-home that it was 'a really wonderful experience.' Similarly as he speaks about the Proclamation Trust events he positions himself as someone who is now back home but has 'benefited a lot'; within the normal structures of his ministry life the conference has been formative in his 'development for preaching and teaching.'

So for Gary the repeated practice of attending conferences has contributed to his habituation as a minister. He sees it as compensating for some of the limitations of his initial ministry education by providing a situated learning context for him as a practitioner. Undoubtedly the communal dimension of this experience is important and the necessity of journeying to conferences creates a linkage with the much broader Christian experience of pilgrimage.

7.6.2 Reflecting on the Online Connecting Habit – Beth

Beth's opening announcement that she is 'a millennial and…not sorry for it' reveals her own perception that there are pretheoretical drivers that form who she is. She implies that there is an

inevitability about some of the ways she perceives the world or acts in it because of the specific experiences of her generation. (In particular, she goes on to demonstrate this through identifying herself as a digital native, as we shall discuss presently.) Beth's self-awareness of being a millennial reflects a structuralist worldview insofar as she locates herself in a cultural position which is defined by its relationship with the social system as a whole, and in particular the distinct social, political and economic experiences of people who were born in the approach to the third millennium CE. This is close to the objectivism which 'denies that we all inhabit culture and language over which we exert some creative leverage' (Graham 2002:101). As we have noted, Bourdieu sought to avoid this objectivism without lapsing into the subjectivism which considers all action to be the outcome of individual consciousness; his solution was the idea that an embodied tradition of 'structured, structuring dispositions' habituates a person into particular ways of being.

I find it interesting that whilst Beth describes her millennial-ness in an objective structuralist way, when she turns to her Christian discipleship and ministry vocation she identifies the shaping force of habitual actions and interactions. For her CMD is a transformative practice that is needed in five key areas: 'personal, generational, cultural, biblical and pastoral.' She specifically speaks of 'working on how to form a life of good habits…' So whilst there may be a given-ness about her millennial condition, when it comes to Christian, and specifically ministerial, development, she seeks a habitus which is entered through the formative power of practices, which in Smith's words, 'over time quietly and unconsciously prime and shape our desires and most fundamental longings' (Smith 2013:4).

Beth mentions several specific practices to which she is committed, chiefly counselling, study and listening to other wise voices in podcasts and conversations. As I have noted, a thread that connects these is that she turns to the digital space for her practices. This immediately raises the question of whether we are truly speaking about *embodied* practices if they take place online. Whilst our virtual presence through digital media has been regarded by some as essentially disembodied (eg Young 2012) other writers have considered virtual presence as an extension of our physicality (eg Kelly 2011). More recently there has been a recognition of the complex and interconnected relationship between the physical and virtual worlds, such that Willat and Flores can argue:

> …the experience of the virtual is inherently embodied and fully real. We understand corporeality and virtuality as entangled and multidimensional phenomena (2021:21).

So whilst virtual presence is not identical to co-located presence it is wrong to assume that virtual presence is necessarily disembodied, not least for the simple reason that anyone engaging in digital activity is doing so as an embodied person. Therefore I consider Beth's online practices as legitimate

expressions of the embodied habits which enable her to constitute the disposition to be a particular kind of minister.

For Beth the online space enables her to pursue CMD on a wide canvas. She has selected a course on the Hebrew Bible offered by the US-based 'Bible Project' (despite an ample supply of Old Testament scholars, scholarship and courses available in Scotland!). For her personal development and well-being she says that podcasts and 'conversational digital stuff' (which I think refers primarily to social media platforms) enable her to engage with people around the globe who share her experience as 'a single younger female' minister. I noted in chapter 6 that the Scottish Baptist network has only a small number of female ministers and this inevitably raises the challenge of how one finds guides, role models and examples who influence growth. Beth is addressing this by using digital means to access a far wider experience of the embodied traditions that constitute the habitus of a faithful minister who is a young, single woman.

So whereas Gary has made it his habit to travel to conferences to enrich his development as a minister in a wider communal context, Beth regularly visits and re-visits locations and contacts in the digital space which have formational value for her.

7.6.3 Reflecting on the Writing Habit – Paul

Paul told me the story of how he had discovered the practice of writing as a means of entering into a deeper and clearer understanding of faith and discipleship. Initially I only heard him talking about an intellectual process – how he was *thinking* about his convictions and getting his theological ducks in a row. Then it dawned on me that the essence of the story is that he was *writing*. He had discovered an embodied practice which was 'sort of helping me to tie down, if you like, this is…this is where I'm at on this issue.' It reminded me of Merleau-Ponty's definition of habit which I quoted above: 'knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made.'

Paul expresses his indebtedness to more than one of his mentors for asking him to crystallise his ideas in written form; he acknowledges 'that's been super helpful.' If he had just once been asked to write one thing by one mentor then this might count as no more than being assigned a task or set a challenge. However, what has occurred is that Paul has been introduced to a practice which has become a structuring habit in his life; it stops him 'just being lost in the cloud of all sorts of things to think about and all sorts of things to do.' His mentors have in fact introduced him to one of the longstanding structured and structuring practices of Christian discipleship.

Graham et al. have celebrated the way that 'theological awareness is generated and nurtured' through the practice of reflexive writing and have traced a tradition of such writing from Augustine through to the 21st century (2019:22-54). Walton has commended this practice to contemporary readers, offering tools and examples for people who are writing in order to

> foster perception and awareness of God in the midst of life…to orient their practice according to their beliefs and values – and also to communicate their convictions in ways that are rooted in and relevant to the context in which we live (Walton 2014:xi).

So Paul's discovery of the value of writing about his convictions can be understood as him entering into one of the longstanding embodied rhythms (Smith 2013:4) of the Christian tradition which shape our desires and constitute in us the habitus of disciple and minister.

It is noticeable that Paul was directly invited to participate in the practice of writing. As I have considered the participants' narratives I have noticed that many people seem to *discover* the developmental practices that they need or that work for them. It is almost as if they gravitate towards these things or intuitively sense that this is what they need. In this chapter, for example, we have seen how Gary came across the conferences that have proved valuable to him and Beth realised that she needed to make contact with other female ministers at her age and stage. Paul, however, was specifically asked by someone to do something and he makes it sound as though he would not have thought to start writing in this way unless invited to do so. This suggests it is not right to assume that the conventions of the habitus are invariably absorbed or intuited by those who move among the structures of a certain community. Whilst this evidently does happen, there is also a place for certain practices to be specifically commended as beneficial and formative. Although I have come into this research project with a suspicion of the idea of mandating specific CMD activities, Paul's experience shows that an entirely non-directive approach, simply trusting the self-directing intuitions of ministers, may result in us missing out on the benefits of practices that have proved formative throughout many generations.

Nevertheless, the wisdom of the mentors who asked Paul to start writing gave him the freedom to do it in his own way. He speaks almost apologetically about the length of his writing:

> *When I say 'paper' it wasn't much, it's just a page or two but…but it helped me nail down: Okay, this is what I'm trying to do…*

I wondered why he does this. It seems that he is comparing his paper to a standard he assumes we share, perhaps for an academic paper or a paper he might present to colleagues. He implies that his work is *less* than this. However, to me the genius of what he has done is to adopt, or create, a genre

that works for him. Habitus is not just the deposit of past knowledge and practice to be directly emulated but also the raw material for creative agency or 'regulated improvisations' (Bourdieu 1992:57). In a simple way Paul has been pointed to the inherited practice of reflexive writing but has discovered his own expression of this which fulfils his desire as a voracious reader to avoid 'being lost in the cloud of all sorts of things.' So as I consider the challenge of avoiding the twin dangers of narrowly mandated CMD and optimistically assuming every minister intuits what they need for their own development, I see a healthy pattern in Paul's experience of being pointed in a particular direction but with the freedom for regulated improvisation within that.

7.6.4 Reflecting on the Dog-Walking Habit - Lewis

When I asked Lewis what habits he cultivates that contribute to his ministry development I was slightly taken aback by his response: 'I mean walking the dog is a big one for me.'

Can walking the dog be CMD? I am nervous about extending the definition of CMD to become all-encompassing. If I define CMD as everything then it is also nothing – at least nothing discernible from the rest of reality. In my mind dog-walking is a mundane activity that does not exist within the suite of practices I envisage as developmental. I wonder if I am at risk of saying that every dog-walker is engaging in CMD. But I have invited the participants to tell their stories on their terms and committed myself to hearing their life experience rather than measuring their activities against a predetermined standard of CMD. So if Lewis says this is CMD then it merits my attention.

Dog-walking is certainly a habit. It is the kind of practice that forms a rhythm to life and is rarely neglected by dog-owners since dogs tend to consider it a non-negotiable aspect of the owner-dog contract. In this sense it is a structuring practice, with dog-walks typically occurring at regular times each day. However the question of whether dog walking has a positive impact on mental health is a contested area (Cui et al. 2019) so it would be unduly simplistic to say that this practice is self-evidently a way that a minister guards their mental wellbeing.

Listening more carefully to Lewis, I notice two things. Firstly, he presents himself as a non-conformist – the 'happy crab' who prefers to be hidden away in the crevices, probing and doing 'a bit of business' but very aware there are 'more illustrious fish in the sea.' I sense he is purposely avoiding any comparison of himself with those illustrious fish whom he imagines are experts in CMD. So he readily offers a counter-narrative: the simple practice of dog-walking enables him to develop in his own modest way. Secondly, however, he appears to discover why dog-walking is so important to him only as he describes it:

That is my big thinking time away from all the other things that press in. Time. Time away to think and reflect when you walk.

He repeats the word 'time' twice (as underlined), as though it is dawning on him that this is why dog-walking is so important. It provides time and space for thinking. And I think it is here that I discern the habituating practice. This daily routine, this structured aspect of his life, provides the time for structuring his thoughts as he thinks and reflects. Just as previous generations of thoughtful Christians have developed structures for reflection into their day, be it the monastic daily office or the evangelical quiet time, Lewis has found himself participating in this same tradition as he exercises his dog.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to pay attention to the embodied practices of ministers which they consider to have a formative impact on their ministry. I have not explored what they have been told, informed or indeed taught about ministry because my interest has not been in the mental transfer of ideas but the way ministers bodily participate in the dispositions which comprise the habitus of faithful ministry. A model of development which relies on the transfer of information from mind to mind may appear to be efficient but unfortunately is at risk of creating a chasm between knowledge and practice – in the language of Cameron et al (2010), a disconnect between espoused theology and operant theology. What I have observed in these participants is an immersion in transformative embodied practices, communally experienced, which have been gradually forming their orientation to the world as ministers. This may not appear efficient as it inevitably requires considerable time and determined persistence. However, its genius is that its outcome is discernible not by 'what I know' but 'who I am becoming.'

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In the light of the preceding research results and discussion I will now draw some conclusions about the nature of fruitful CMD. These conclusions arise from listening to the experiences of a group of Scottish Baptist ministers since the unique contribution of this research has been to bring the (largely occluded) voices of those who practise local church ministry into the conversation about the nature of CMD. This listening has included not only the initial focus group and subsequent interviews with ministers but an extensive process of re-listening, transcribing, re-reading and reflecting on the narratives they shared, followed by the reporting and discussion of the research found in chapters 4 to 7.

As I indicated in chapter 3 on Research Methodology, the conclusions of qualitative research such as this do not purport to be the sole truth about the matter but rather to disclose *truths* about being human – and in this case, about being ministers. Using narrative method, I have sought to hear, understand and respect the stories told by the participants and avoid imposing my own narratives on them, whilst nevertheless being sufficiently reflexive to recognise how I am part of the story and not just a witness to it.

The validity of narrative inquiry arises from ideas of believability, trustworthiness, persuasiveness and authenticity (Lewis 2017:10). Through my prolonged engagement with the narratives in this research I have become convinced that they meet these criteria and others who have read the narratives have echoed this. The stories are told in a straightforward and engaging manner; they are not laden with self-interest; they sometimes contain playfulness or reveal vulnerability; they correspond with what I previously knew about the participants and their context. This 'resonance' gives me the confidence to draw conclusions from the narratives I have heard. Furthermore, as I also noted in Chapter 3, Hendry (2007) has argued that narrative enquirers must shift their sense of trust from method to relationship. She maintains that narrative research is 'a faith act' which is about 'trusting in the stories and the storytellers (2007:494). Thus the reliability of research depends less on the demonstrable verification methods and more on the relationship between researcher and participant. The quality of relationship that has emerged and grown through the research encounters has strengthened my confidence in the conclusions that I now propose; the ministers I interviewed genuinely became 'participants' as they recognised and partnered in the quest to discover something new about CMD.

In this chapter I will therefore present some conclusions which arise from this research and which I consider to be truths about CMD as the participants experience it. I do not claim they are universal truths and it may not even be that they are the most important truths. But they are resonant, believable and meaningful truths which disclose new (and I believe fascinating and challenging) insights into ministers' experience of CMD.

The emergence of these conclusions inevitably begs the questions, 'So what?' Whilst there is inherent worth in gaining new knowledge, this project is Practical Theology and can rightly be expected to move beyond a thick description of current practice through reflection towards proposals for revised practice. I also owe it to the participants to give an account of what difference their participation in this project might make. Therefore after each of the conclusions I offer some recommendations for revised practice, suggesting how CMD might be conceived or practised differently in the light of this research. These recommendations are directed both at those who construct programmes of CMD for ministers and at ministers ourselves as we seek to conceive and practise fruitful CMD.

8.1 Conclusion 1: CMD is Discipleship

The participants readily and naturally chose terms such as 'discipleship', 'personal growth' and 'transformation' when they spoke about CMD. It appeared to be far more about who they were *becoming* than what they could *do*. Its primary reference for them was character rather than competence. I am not suggesting that they rejected the value of skills-based workshops or reflection on practice intended to give birth to richer practice, but rather that they saw the essence of CMD as nurturing their own spiritual growth and becoming increasingly attentive to the call of Christ to follow him.

I believe this attitude to CMD arises not simply from the urge to pursue personal piety (though this tends to be a strong impulse amongst those of us in the 'baptistic' regions of the church) but rather from a view of ministry that regards the minister as an *exemplary disciple*. This approach is articulated by Heywood who maintains that 'Ministry, which arises from discipleship, is itself an aspect of discipleship' (2021:25); likewise Wells observes, 'Those engaged in ministry never stop being disciples' (2017:15)[68].

[68] It should be noted that Wells nevertheless retains a clear distinction between discipleship and ministry. Whereas Heywood can say ministry is an 'aspect of discipleship', Wells asserts they are two different things which overlap (2017:14).

The participants are well-known and well-loved pastors in their local church communities who recognise that their actions speak louder than words. It seems to me that their natural disposition is to seek to embody exemplary discipleship, hoping (with all humility) they can say, 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (to borrow the Pauline language of 1 Corinthians 11.1 NRSV). CMD for them firstly means cultivating integrity before God and among the congregation.

This is at the heart of Jack's fundamental explanation of CMD:

> *…making sure that my own personal walk with God is close, that my discipleship is authentic discipleship, because then out of that authenticity I then feel that I can legitimately call other people into, you know, a discipleship relationship.*

Similarly Beth's remarks about the shaping impact of CMD point to this essential integrity when she asks:

> *…how does all of that shape a person who can sit in front of a church or sit in front of somebody else and bring wisdom and care and knowledge and personal connection in a way that…that is beneficial and good?*

And in a related way Tom expresses his awareness that his life is being read by the whole church community:

> *This is the hope, that insofar as I'm doing CMD then people in the congregation that I'm a part of know it - not because I've told them but, if I do not tell them, they can nonetheless read back to me, relate back to me…*

So my first conclusion is that CMD is primarily discipleship. It must be a means for a Christian minister, among the community of the church, to grow in Christ-likeness, to become more attentive to the work of the Spirit and to share in God's way of life. This is the primary equipping to remain a faithful minister, an exemplary disciple and a person who fulfils the specific responsibilities of ministry with holy integrity.

Recommendations 1

a. Recognise that cultivating integrity and authenticity as exemplary disciples of Christ is a primary reason for CMD. This precedes other entirely justified objectives, such as up-skilling and updating practice.
b. Regard CMD as a continuum of actions which begins with the regular (and sometimes routine) business of living as a disciple of Christ, seeking to love God and others with all our

heart. Then further along this continuum recognise activities that focus in a more specialised way on the work of ministry and particular aspects of that pastoral vocation.

c. Rather than viewing CMD as an advanced level activity, above and beyond the normal devotional, pastoral, liturgical and administrative activities of ministry, recognise that CMD begins among the quotidian rhythms of the life of discipleship and ministry. From this rootedness in practice and context it can then extend to the further acquisition of knowledge, skills and insight for the enrichment of ministerial practice.

8.2 Conclusion 2: CMD is Practical Wisdom

CMD is essentially a generative process in which practical wisdom is created. The participants did not narrate their stories as a quest to find a well of existing knowledge or to discover a fundamental code of ministry best-practice. Their goal was not to be recipients in the transfer of pre-existing knowledge about ministry competence but to craft *phronesis* from the raw materials of practice, scripture, reflection, listening to others, accountability and unknowing. CMD for them was 'embodied, situated, knowing-in-action' (Bass et al 2016:145-146).

This meant that they did not have an attend-to-receive approach to CMD, whereby they connected to experts for a download of knowledge, but saw themselves as the creators or co-creators of *phronesis*. Several of their observations point to this expectation:

> *We know what it's like to do the work ourselves.* (Beth)
>
> *I wonder whether the attendance at CMD [workshops] is the goal, or is it a part of the journey?* (Tom)
>
> *I've had to be intentional about the things that I've done.* (Gary)

In chapter 4 I referred to a remark by Bass in which she contrasts knowledge derived from a map with knowing gained through experience:

> Ideally, Christians blessed with practical wisdom know their way around the neighbourhood not by map but as resident walkers who rely on body knowledge and all their senses' (2016:9).

The participants were not looking for a map which would reveal a direct route to faithful ministry, based on the observations of others; rather, they recognised that the 'development' in Continuing Ministry *Development* is the outcome of their own immersion in the practice of ministry. Like

'resident walkers', through practice, observation, listening to other voices, reflection and repetition they expect to develop the embodied knowledge and know-how of faithful ministry.

Therefore my conclusion is that the nature of CMD is the acquisition of practical wisdom. CMD is not something that can be delivered through a programme. It arises from the blending and refining of a wide range of experiences and inputs, more and less structured, always tending towards the embodied and contextually situated work of ministry. CMD is a process of slow maturation giving rise to fruitfulness in due time.

When organisations such as denominations and networks of churches provide workshops, seminars, conferences or courses of study for ministers, or when they facilitate pastoral supervision, mentoring or spiritual accompaniment, these activities are not CMD. They have the potential to make a significant contribution to a minister's CMD, be it in the short term or the long term, but CMD is the practical wisdom acquired, embodied and practised by a minister. An organisation can offer resources and stimuli for CMD, it can create contexts for the ferment of ideas and a critical appraisal of practice, it can enable experienced ministers to share their own learning. All of these are potential additives to the life-mix which gives rise to a minister's practical wisdom.

Recommendations 2

a. Recognise the aim of CMD is praxis. See the task as continuing ministry *development* rather than continuing education. Development suggests growth, ongoing transformation, becoming a more faithful practitioner, whereas continuing ministry *education* can be construed as gaining the theoretical knowledge or principles which at some subsequent point are hoped to affect practice if they are applied effectively.
b. Centre CMD around activities that nurture *phronesis* rather than just knowledge transfer from expert to novice. In particular this might include solo reflective activities, such as reflective writing or journaling, and shared reflective processes such as action learning sets or group pastoral supervision.
c. Develop CMD programmes on the principle that current practitioners are the custodians of most of the practical wisdom. A key task of CMD is to tease this out, own this, deepen this and create an appetite for pursuing more of this.

8.3 Conclusion 3: CMD is a Spiritual Discipline

Practising spiritual disciplines is certainly an important aspect of CMD. They are fundamental to the journey of discipleship and the acquisition of Christian practical wisdom.[69] However, I have concluded that CMD itself should be regarded as a spiritual discipline. Cahalan has observed that Christian practical wisdom arises from how a person lives and prays and therefore 'there is a particular kind of knowing that arises within spiritual practice' (Bass et al 2016:279). The participants describe their experience and hopes for CMD as a process that will result in transformation, discipleship and personal growth; they acknowledge that know-how for ministry arises from persistently pursuing practices that are spiritually formative and transformative. This is an ambition considerably greater than, for example, seeking to improve specific professional skills, learning to cope better with the pressures of ministry or enhancing the possibilities of career development. It is more akin to people who have discerned an action of God calling them to ministry now recognising that fruitfulness in that ministry is not possible without a purposeful openness to the continuing work of God in them and through them. This is the territory of spiritual disciplines.

What sort of spiritual discipline is CMD? The first thing to say is that CMD is a blend of practices. The classic spiritual disciplines do not exist in isolation from one another but overlap in many ways to become a fusion of multiple practices. For example, the discipline of prayer may include solitude, scripture and meditation; the discipline of service may include fellowship, submission, confession and sacrifice. In a similar way, CMD is a synthesis of practices, including study, reflection, community and accountability along with the more familiar classic spiritual disciplines.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, spiritual disciplines have been recognised over the centuries as loci for encounter with God, conduits for the grace of God into human experience and means of surrendering to the mysterious transforming work of the Spirit of God. I noted earlier Cahalan's remark that:

[69] Foster (1980) suggests a threefold typology for the classic Christian spiritual disciplines: inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study), outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, and service), and corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration). Willard (1999) divides the disciplines into two classes: disciplines of abstinence (solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice) and disciplines of engagement (study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission). Hense (2014), using the heuristic that spirituality is 'following intuitions in the quest of fullness of life', offers an inventory of common practices in Christian spirituality: devotional, creative, reflective, physical, virtuous and guidance practices.

> there is a particular kind of knowing that arises within Christian spiritual practice, a knowing of God that emerges through the intentional, disciplined practice of attending to God… (2016:279).

By regarding CMD as a spiritual discipline itself I am foregrounding the work of God. I am proposing that CMD is not an act of self-improvement but a turning to means by which the power of God can shape ministers and therefore ministries. This view takes inspiration from the New Testament idea that 'we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works' (Ephesians 2.10 NIV)[70]. The emphasis is not on making ourselves fit for service but yielding ourselves to be gradually crafted by God for the holy and loving purposes of life and ministry. This moves the initiative for CMD from the minister, and indeed from the denomination or accrediting body which may expect CMD to occur, to God. CMD is a work of grace, a creative work of God through Christ which foreshadows the new creation. Here the insight of Fiddes which I noted in Chapter 4 is helpful, that biblical wisdom can be understood as both know-how and encounter, and that a distinctively Christian wisdom is received through a fusion of *sapientia* and *phronesis* which becomes a wisdom of both observation and participation (Fiddes 2021:258). Acquiring the practical wisdom for ministry does not simply come from observation (be it of our own practice through attentiveness and reflection or of the practice of others through mentoring or study) but it requires participation in Christ. Turning again to the New Testament, the Fourth Gospel articulates precisely the principle that fruitfulness is the outcome of participation in Christ (and indeed fruitlessness will be the result of neglecting this):

> Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5 NRSV).

Recommendations 3

a. Make the bold claim among ministers that CMD is a spiritual discipline. Elevate CMD from an occasional task by which we improve and enhance our ministry to a fundamental practice through which the transforming grace of God crafts and shapes our ministry.
b. Reframe the concept of CMD from being primarily analogous to 'self-development', 'lifelong learning' or 'professional development'. Instead place the focus on CMD as a discipline that opens us to divine disclosure, spiritual transformation and renewed response to the call of Christ.

[70] The word 'handiwork' translates the Greek ποίημα, literally 'what has been made' [by God]. I have referenced the NIV here since NRSV translates this somewhat blandly as 'what he has made us.' 'Handiwork' suggests creative artistry on the part of God, bringing about something new in the sense we might use the term 'poiesis'.

c. Hold CMD in an eschatological perspective where the primary question is not 'What works well now?' but 'How can the coming kingdom of God form and re-form ministry now?'

8.4 Conclusion 4: CMD is Essential

CMD is important enough to mandate. The participants were adamant in rejecting a model of compulsory CMD that felt like 'jumping through hoops' and one (Paul) drew on the story of his former employment to express his antipathy to linking evidence of continuing development to the right to practice. Nevertheless it became clear that these were criticisms of particular approaches to making CMD compulsory; in the former case the problem was that the purpose of CMD was not clear; in the latter case it seemed like a perverse incentive to link continuing development to potential loss of career. Others had stories which celebrated the fact that CMD was a requirement. 'I do think that there's a place for mandated CMD because it imposes a discipline,' said Jack. He reflected on the challenges of working alone as a minister and felt that mandated CMD 'gives you a set of…of things that you can measure against.' The benefit of this was clear to him: 'if that helps to keep us sharp, then I think that's…I think that's a good thing to do.' Likewise, Georgia recognised the positive value of mandatory CPD in her former career and was glad of similar expectations in ministry, as long as what was expected was not 'box-ticking.' And Gary expressed some regret that his earlier years of ministry had lacked a clear expectation that CMD is essential, remarking: 'Apart from my years in Scotland I've never had anyone who's made me be committed to ongoing personal development.'

It is important to interrogate the reasons why CMD should be treated as essential to the extent that denominations or accrediting bodies should make it compulsory. Ling warns that the recent requirement for ministry development has arisen partly in response to employment law (which has given rise to revised terms of service for ministers which include the provision of continuing development) and managerialism (where the focus is on optimising organisational performance) (Ling and Bentley 2012:178-179). I accept his caution and welcome his assertion that

> whilst these themes demand our attention I believe that they should not obscure the more fundamental reason for attending to ministry development, that is, as a response to God's ongoing call (2012:180).

The reason for mandating CMD is not to fulfil human resources best practice or to maximise organisational efficiency but because each minister has received a call from God which is nurtured through the spiritual practice of CMD. Cahalan, writing about spiritual practices, emphasises the

importance of 'sustaining the practice at all times' (2016:294). A practice only becomes a discipline when it is consistently undertaken. There are certain things that are generally required of ministers for our own flourishing and the well-being of those we serve. These may include the expectation of a weekly day-off or a standard of ethics for dealing with others and will certainly encompass a commitment to certain doctrinal convictions and personal practices such as devoting ourselves to prayer and reading scripture. In a similar way it is right that CMD should be a fixed expectation of ministers with some means for us to demonstrate that we are fulfilling this.

Recommendations 4

a. Denominations and accrediting bodies require all ministers to practise CMD.
b. The requirement for CMD is not articulated in terms of permission to practise but with a positive and broad explanation of why it is vital to fruitful ministry.
c. Systems for ensuring participation in CMD involve peer accountability as far as possible, seeking to celebrate the benefits of CMD rather than give the impression that CMD is a series of 'hoops to jump through'.

8.5 Conclusion 5: CMD is Communal

CMD cannot be reduced to an individual activity, be that a lone minister accomplishing all their CMD in isolation in a study or a minister who attends events as an individual consumer to get the 'input' from a speaker with no connection to other participants. This is not to deny that some aspects of CMD will involve solitary practices, such as study and reflection or listening to experienced practitioners, but to be fruitful the whole enterprise of CMD requires an awareness that one is part of a community. The participants often expressed the value they placed on the communal experience of CMD. Victoria summed this up in her remark that 'it is very important and good to be doing [CMD] as a journey with other people.' Peter, whose metaphor for CMD was gathering around tables to share bread with others, explained that the early years of CMD 'were really helpful because you were on a journey with other people.' Likewise, Calum's image of being in a rugby pack pushing in the same direction conveyed his sense of CMD as a team exercise.

In chapter 5 I argued that it is inadequate to interpret the ministers' desire for communal experiences of CMD as a response to problematic loneliness. The participants did not suggest this in their narratives and other research (eg Barna 2017) challenges a widely held assumption that most ministers find loneliness to be a problem. For those who do struggle with loneliness, communal CMD activities may well help to ameliorate this, though as I also noted in chapter 5, Miles and Proeschold-

Bell (2013) caution against over-estimating the power of gatherings such as clergy peer groups to be relied on as a 'one size fits all' solution to the mental health challenges of pastoral work.

The participants' emphasis on CMD as a communal activity arose from a sense of belonging to a community who would naturally learn with and from one another. Two of them used almost identical language about 'being on a journey with other people.' For me this has resonances with the disciples of Jesus, travelling on a journey with him, both learning *from* the rabbi and learning *with* one another, and finding that the learning intensifies as the journey together progresses. According to the Gospel of Mark, the call of Jesus to the twelve apostles is primarily into the community that surrounds him, where they will be equipped in order to be sent out on a shared mission:

> And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message (Mark 3:14 NRSV).

This kind of communality in learning is clearly valued by the participants whose narratives I have considered. It is plain that as ministers they have a 'joint enterprise' and a 'shared repertoire' so by adding 'mutual engagement' to this they can gain the benefits of social learning which arise from being a community of practice.[71] The three modes of belonging to a community of practice according to Wenger (2000:222-228) are all salient to the experience of ministers:

- Engagement: Simply doing things together, worshipping and praying together, listening to one another, sharing comparable experiences, reflecting on their successes and failures, hearing and reflecting on the experience and knowledge of more experienced ministers, sharing the challenges of starting out in ministry.
- Imagination: The process of identity formation which occurs through constructing an image of ourselves in the presence of peers and fellow practitioners, which enables us to orient ourselves to the current task and explore new possibilities. As we see how other people inhabit the role of minister and carry its responsibilities, we discover (by imitation or contrast) how we might inhabit the role of minister.
- Alignment: Ensuring our local activities are consonant with the shared knowledge of the community means that a community of practice becomes an informal and quasi-democratic regulator of practice. For example, through coming together ministers less inclined to invest in pastoral work are reminded that this is a normative aspect of local church ministry, or

[71] I am purposely using Wenger's language of communities of practice discussed at length in chapter 5 (Wenger 1991, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2015). I am not suggesting the participants actually used these terms but rather that this framework accurately and insightfully conveys their experience.

those tempted to skimp on preparation for preaching realise that the ministers form a community that serves churches by taking the work of preaching seriously; likewise, in this community it is normal to be accountable to a mentor, pastoral supervisor or spiritual director.

It is nevertheless important that this community of practice does not thrive on affinity to such an extent that it leads to a 'narrowing of horizons' (Bennett et al 2018:88). It is vital that those with authority in the community, especially people appointed by denominations and networks to facilitate and support CMD, resist the temptation to reduce the community of practice to a support group and instead ensure that new, alternative and outside voices are heard and that existing practice is challenged as well as reinforced.

Recommendations 5

a. Denominations and networks make it their assumption that ministers form a community of practice and base their expectations for CMD on this. They provide materials to explain to ministers what a community of practice is and that it is necessary to relate to this community in some way in order to fulfil the requirements for CMD.
b. Ministers recognise themselves as a community of practice. In smaller networks all the ministers will be able to identify with one community. In larger denominations it may be necessary to consider the ministers in a particular region, presbytery or diocese as separate communities of practice.[72]
c. Some ministers are appointed to facilitate and maintain communities of practice, enabling participation in the modes of engagement, imagination and alignment.

8.6 Conclusion 6: CMD is Dialogue

Each of the participants in some way spoke positively about the formative impact of participating in a development dialogue with another minister.[73] In Chapter 6 I reflected on the narratives of Naomi, Robin and Duncan who had very different experiences of development dialogues with colleagues yet who each cherished the insight and guidance these bring to their ministry. Naomi finds it 'really

[72] This corresponds with Goodliff's suggestion that communities of practice exist on different scales: 'the global community of those who practice ministry, within which there are tradition-based sub-communities (such as Baptist ministry); and within those sub-communities there are smaller-scale communities whose role it is to bring participants from the margins to the center…' (Goodliff 2017:46).
[73] As I noted earlier, the term 'development dialogue' is derived from Garvey and Stokes (2022:23). It is an umbrella term for the wide range of mentoring and coaching relationships that have been identified by researchers.

formational' to have someone to 'walk the long road of obedience with.' Robin celebrates the 'good, constructive, healthy conversations that would keep us tending towards the right track' which he enjoys with a soul friend. Through the 'spiritual accountability' that characterises his co-mentoring relationship, Duncan appreciates regular meetings with 'someone that feeds my soul.'

The participants make it clear that being committed to an ongoing development dialogue with a trusted colleague plays a significant role in a minister's continuing development. This is evident not only in the early years of ministry when a mentor may be formally assigned to a new minister but also in the years when greater experience of ministry has been gained. Such dialogue partners may offer insight and experience, challenge or comfort, a model to imitate, space to process ideas or simply 'an urging to stay faithful to YHWH'.[74] Therefore I conclude that being committed to a development dialogue with a colleague is a vital aspect of CMD.

This cannot be reduced to a one-size-fits-all approach. In Chapter 6 I have shown that even within the framework of development dialogues that can be broadly described as 'mentoring', there is a wide variance of approaches. Using typologies developed by Western as well as Garvey and Stokes, I noted that Naomi's experience of mentoring may be most closely aligned with the 'soul guide', Robin's with 'peer mentoring' and Duncan's with 'network mentoring', though all of them contain some aspects of the managerial approach focusing on the 'person-in-role' and also the 'soul friend' model described by both Leech and O'Donahue. My point is that engaging in a development dialogue *of some kind* is enriching the development of these ministers. In fact they have each found their way to different development partners and different approaches to mentoring which they now consider to be fruitful. It would not have been helpful to impose on them a specific development partner or a narrowly defined approach to mentoring. They have flourished in an environment where development dialogues have been encouraged but where they have had the space to form relationships that are helpful to them and had freedom to let these relationships develop in new ways over the years.

It is also important to recognise the special value of development dialogues for ministers who are from under-represented groups. I noted this above in particular with regard to Naomi, one of only 18 women among 171 accredited Scottish Baptist ministers, who has benefited immensely from the mentoring of a woman who is a richly gifted and experienced minister. It is vital that special attention is paid to connecting ministers from under-represented groups with appropriate mentors

[74] Brueggemann's summary of Old Testament mentoring, which I quoted in Chapter 6 (from his essay in Thompson and Murchison 2018).

and development partners if they are to flourish in the full potential of their calling. This is expressed in the words I quoted from the *Flourishing In Ministry* Report from the University of Notre Dame:

> What each person needs is an ideal possible self, an image of the kind of excellent pastor they might become that fits both their own personal characteristics and the unique call God has place on their life (Bloom 2013:31).

Whilst I am wary of an implication in this quotation that there may be a universal definition of an 'excellent pastor', the idea of having a mentor who is recognisably *like you* and thriving in their own unique expression of ministry is surely a good thing. The 'ideal self' is not a model to impersonate but a demonstration that someone like you can grow, flourish, struggle and hope in their calling. The mentor embodies this and their availability, insight and support help you to recognise what that might mean for you.

Recommendations 6

a. Development dialogues, such as mentoring, are encouraged for all ministers.
b. Training is offered to ministers in a broad range of models for mentoring to help them construct the kind of development dialogue most appropriate to their needs.
c. It is recognised that beginners may need more directive mentoring relationships whereas more experienced ministers may find greater benefit in mutual mentoring, network mentoring or soul friendship.
d. Ministers are allowed maximum agency to establish development dialogues that work best for them.
e. Special care is taken to help ministers from under-represented groups enter development dialogues with people who might enable them to see what they could become.
f. Development dialogues are periodically reviewed by the participants and change from time to time, so that ministers do not feel stuck in badly matched or unfruitful relationships.

8.7 Conclusion 7: CMD is Habits

When I asked the participants to describe their experiences of fruitful CMD they all spoke about practices they undertake repeatedly. In the course of ministry they have acquired habits that are formative, developmental and apparently enjoyable. I realise that no one responded by telling me about a special moment, such as an outstanding lecture, a uniquely inspiring retreat or an especially relevant workshop. They described habits of gathering, pausing, studying, listening, reflecting and writing. CMD cannot be reduced to events or special moments, though it may encompass these. The

nature of CMD is that it is *continuing* development and such continuing transformation is generated through persistence in habits rather than sporadic bursts of energy or enthusiasm.

In Chapter 7 I reflected more deeply on the practices Gary, Beth, Paul and Lewis have cultivated, noting the different habits they turn to for CMD, including attending conferences, online study and networking, theological and reflective writing, and dog-walking. It is clear that they see these in an Aristotelian sense as dispositions that incline them towards a certain end; in their cases the end is to serve as faithful pastors. As Beth puts it, she is 'working on how to form a life of good habits.' From this I draw the simple conclusion that CMD should not be regarded as a series of tasks or duties, nor a programme to which a person signs up. It is a commitment to the telos of faithful ministry and therefore the cultivation of the habits that will incline a minister to that end.

I have accepted Smith's contention that habits are not simply an intellectual accomplishment but, in Merleau-Ponty's words, habit 'is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made' (Smith 2013:57-58). It is important to recognise the embodied nature of the habits of CMD. The travelling, gathering, participating, speaking, listening, writing and walking described by the participants are not incidental to some imagined deeper intellectual content of CMD; they are an essential dimension of the habits that are being practised. In fact, it turns out to be more natural for the participants to explain their habits in terms of these fundamental embodied aspects rather than attempting to crystallise in words the specific developmental content that arises from them. This is another reason why I maintain that it is better to define CMD as a collection of formative habits rather than a set of required tasks.

Furthermore, arising from my discussion of Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', I conclude that CMD habits are the key to meaningful incorporation into the life of ministry and the community of ministers. Habitus, a kind of embodied tradition which can be understood as 'a system of structured, structuring dispositions', arises from participating in the practices of a community to the extent that its embodied history becomes internalised in us. Just as Smith develops this idea to propose that participating in the rhythms, rituals and routines of Christian worship habituates in us the life of discipleship, so I propose that participating in the habits and practices of CMD habituates in us the life of ministry and forms our orientation to the world as Christian ministers.

Viewing CMD as habits rather than tasks or duties also recognises the unique space habits create for unpredicted and unexpected development. Bourdieu maintains that habitus is not just the deposit of past knowledge and practice which we learn to emulate but rather a space for creative agency and 'regulated improvisations' (1992:57). Paul's experience (described in Chapter 7) of being encouraged to write reflectively about his own theology demonstrates this. He was encouraged by a mentor to

practice the structured disposition of writing to clarify some of his thinking but was not instructed to do this according to a specific pattern. So he experimented with the idea, found it fruitful and began to repeat it so that it has become a habit. Within the general structure of spiritual writing, he has felt free to experiment and improvise in order to find a form that works for him, which turned out to be the short position paper. I suspect that as he continues the habit of writing he will find other forms at different times that are equally fruitful in his development journey. The genius of embracing habits is that they become a framework for faithful persistence and creative exploration. Both are essential for fruitful CMD.

Encouraging ministers to embrace CMD as a series of habits also avoids the perils of being over-prescriptive or under-prescriptive. It would be over-prescriptive to suggest that all ministers should read the same books, conduct mentoring sessions in an identical pattern and participate in the same retreats. Such an approach would be blind to the uniqueness of contexts, experiences and aspirations. It would also be rather irritating. Conversely, it would be under-prescriptive to say simply that every minister should do some kind of CMD according to how they feel. This approach would ignore the understanding of fruitful CMD that has accrued through communal experience and research; it would lack any meaningful sense of support and it would offer no clear incentive to participate. Presenting CMD as a series of habits, however, offers ministers a set of tried-and-tested practices which they can make their own. Habits can be oriented according to their preferences or needs or passions; they can follow familiar pathways or they can be spaces for improvisation; they can be faithfully pursued over many years, yet evolve along the way. Just as the habits of prayer, engaging with scripture and serving the poor are embraced by most followers of Jesus but are expressed in innumerable ways, so CMD habits such as study, gathered learning, development dialogues can be practised by all but expressed in widely varying ways.

Furthermore, we generally value being nudged towards a habit (as Gary found regarding attending conferences and Paul found regarding spiritual writing) though we might be less receptive to being obliged to undertake a specific task. So I propose that the best tone for presenting CMD as essential is to offer it as a series of essential habits. This creates ample opportunity for every minister to shape their experience of CMD to fit their context, experience and enthusiasms whilst participating in a recognised collection of core habits which have proven to be fruitful. A nudge towards good habits is far easier to receive than a requirement to fulfil certain tasks.

This finally raises the question of what specific habits should constitute CMD. In the light of the main themes that have emerged in this research I propose the following are the core CMD habits:

a. Nurturing Discipleship. This includes the classic spiritual practices or disciplines which have been recognised across the centuries to nourish the spiritual life (and listed in Chapter 8 note 2), including prayer, engaging with scripture (for soul nourishment, not only for teaching others), study, spiritual reading, service, fasting, silence and retreat. In order to avoid this becoming a cumbersome to-do list, it is important to recognise that different practices may become more important in different seasons of life and ministry whilst others may recede. The core need is always to be cultivating *some* habits that nurture discipleship.

b. Gathering Together. The habit of gathering with other ministers could be practised through participating in shared learning activities, such as workshops, seminars, learning communities or conferences. It could take place through networks of mutual support such as ministers' fellowship groups or peer support groups. Some expressions of this habit may mean simply sharing meals with colleagues or taking a walk together. The research has shown that mutual connection among ministers is a vital aspect of CMD.

c. Development Dialogue. This means each minister cultivating the habit of meeting regularly with a trusted person who is competent to support their development. This may be a mentor of some kind or a pastoral supervisor; or it may be best described as spiritual accompaniment or soul friendship. Whatever form it takes, the relationship will foster values such as honest conversation, open questioning, discernment, encouragement and accountability.

d. Reflexive Practice. This habit of reflecting on one's own practice as a minister may be stimulated by any of the above habits but reflexive practice is a distinct habit that enables ministers, amongst other things, to contemplate and better understand our roles and identities: who we are and who we are becoming, how we affect the world around us, how our weaknesses and strengths shape our thoughts and actions, and ultimately how God's Spirit is at work in us and through us.

Recommendations: 7

a. Define CMD as a series of habits, distinct from a series of tasks to fulfil or a programme to join.
b. Explain the importance of habits in the formation of the dispositions of a faithful minister.

c. Value the embodied nature of CMD habits, avoiding reducing CMD to the intellectual transfer of knowledge.
d. Recognise that CMD habits are not only beneficial for personal development but a way of belonging to the community of ministers.
e. Encourage creativity and diversity rather than uniformity in the way the habits are practised.
f. Focus on nudging rather than demanding participation in these habits.

Chapter 9

Epilogue

In this final section I reflect on the process of undertaking this research, paying attention to some areas of particular joy and also acknowledging aspects that did not work as well as I had hoped. I then consider how this work might be disseminated in order to make an impact on practice and I highlight some areas for potential future research.

9.1 Reflecting on the Research Project

I set out to enable the voices of ministers to be heard in the conversation about CMD and I believe I have achieved this reasonably well. I was pleased to discover that the colleagues with whom I spoke in this research were eager to share their experiences and able to do so with not only clarity but enthusiasm. As I listened for their *particular* experiences of CMD I became freshly aware of the *general* value of continuing development as a stimulating, refreshing and formative aspect of ministry. It became apparent that the lived experience of ministers is an essential resource for the study of CMD and the development of programmes and structures for CMD.

It was gratifying to discover that participants found the focus group and research interviews to be a positive experience. In almost every case these meetings ended with the participants remarking that they had found the process enjoyable, supportive or enriching in itself. My experience aligns with Eileen Campbell-Reed's reflections on the Learning Pastoral Imagination project:

> We quickly discovered that our research method of making space for stories and conversation turned out to be its own kind of good pastoral practice. Participants in our study not only helped us learn; they also felt supported by the research process (2021:19)

It was with a little trepidation that I embraced a constructivist methodology, predicting that whilst I would not unearth *the truth* about CMD I would be able to conclude by articulating *some truths*. I wondered if I would simply collect disconnected fragments that lacked sufficient resonance to offer as meaningful and insightful discoveries. However, I'm confident that the conclusions I have drawn represent aspects of the true experience of the participants and have sufficient clarity to contribute meaningfully to the understanding of CMD.

I remain aware of some of the weaknesses of this research. In particular, I am conscious that I discovered more about the general practices that ministers regard as fruitful CMD than the particular content of these. I heard about attendance at training courses and conferences but not

about the subjects that were addressed and whether these were beneficial. I heard about devotion to prayer and the scriptures, but I did not learn much about the kind of prayer or the scripture reading methods that the participants value. I see this as largely an outcome of the use of narrative inquiry as my method. I set out to hear the participants' stories on their own terms. If I had used follow-up questions to elicit what I wanted to hear about matters such as these I would have been appropriating rather than respecting their stories. Alternatively this lack of detail may have occurred because the participants wished to treat their personal spiritual practices with a level of privacy. Either way, I feel the project would have been richer if I had heard more about this.

Also, I was disappointed that the written contributions in the data collection proved to be less helpful. The people who provided written protocols followed my instructions diligently, but by issuing a strict word limit I seriously hindered their ability to write in a narrative way. This was a mistake that could perhaps have been avoided if I had included a trial phase in which I had tested the protocol method before the main data collection took place.

9.2 Dissemination and Impact

The immediate impact of this work will be in the community of Baptist ministers to which I belong in Scotland. During this project I moved from my role as Ministry Development Coordinator to a leadership position in the Baptist Union of Scotland. However, as is obvious from this research, I remain deeply concerned for the continuing development of ministers and I have been fortunate to appoint a very experienced and gifted colleague to continue developing our CMD programme. The outcomes of this research will fuel our thinking about CMD and the way we revise our practices. This will have an impact on around 150 active accredited ministers.

Colleagues in other networks of which I am part have shown an interest in my research, including the Scottish Church Leaders Forum, the Scottish Baptist College and the Baptist Union of Great Britain. I anticipate that I will have opportunities to present to them and engage with them about the content of this research. I have recently been invited to join the Theological Education Commission of the European Baptist Federation due to my particular interest in CMD, and I anticipate that this will provide opportunities for disseminating this research among ministers in Europe and the Middle East.

In order to share this work more widely in the academic community I plan to write articles based on this work and seek publication in journals such as *Practical Theology*, *The International Journal of Practical Theology* and *Theology and Ministry.* I also envisage producing a more popular account of

the research, designed to help ministers from a wide variety of contexts to reflect on their own practices for continuing development.

9.3 Potential Areas for Future Study

I noted in Chapter 2 that this research in part responds to the outstanding question raised in the Learning Pastoral Imagination report:

> 'Are there ways to name more carefully how faith leaders learn and grow over time?' (Scharen and Campbell 2016:51).

I believe this project has offered a valuable response to that question. However, as this work has developed I have envisaged possible areas of research which would make further contributions to knowledge and have the potential to transform practice in ministry. These would include:

a. How can CMD support under-represented groups in ministry? I noted in Chapter 4 the small proportion of women ministers in Scottish Baptist churches and wondered how important mentoring is for minority groups. Further research could explore the extent to which CMD may reinforce majority assumptions and how CMD could be a resource for nurturing and elevating minority groups within the ministry community.
b. This research has focused on the experiences of ministers as they have pursued CMD in their own ways across the duration of their ministries, looking at what they have done of their own volition to pursue development. A companion project could explore what kind of *support* ministers seek in CMD. What expectations do they have of denominational leaders? What resources would they like to see provided to enrich their development?
c. This research has noted that the Ministerial Development Review is a key part of the CMD structure for many denominations. It would be helpful to know what effect these reviews have on ministers. Future research could profitably explore the extent to which they motivate CMD and what constitutes best practice in a review.

9.4 This Research as CMD

This project has been *about* CMD but it has also turned out to *be* CMD for me. I have been enriched by the breadth of literature it has led me to and stretched by the discipline required to complete it. I have learned new ways of being attentive as I have listened to the participants and reflected on their words. Perhaps more significantly and unexpectedly, the research has drawn me more deeply into

the community of ministers I serve and left me humbled by the diligent attention I see my colleagues paying to vocational faithfulness. Their stories have been a gift to me and their example has been life-giving.

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