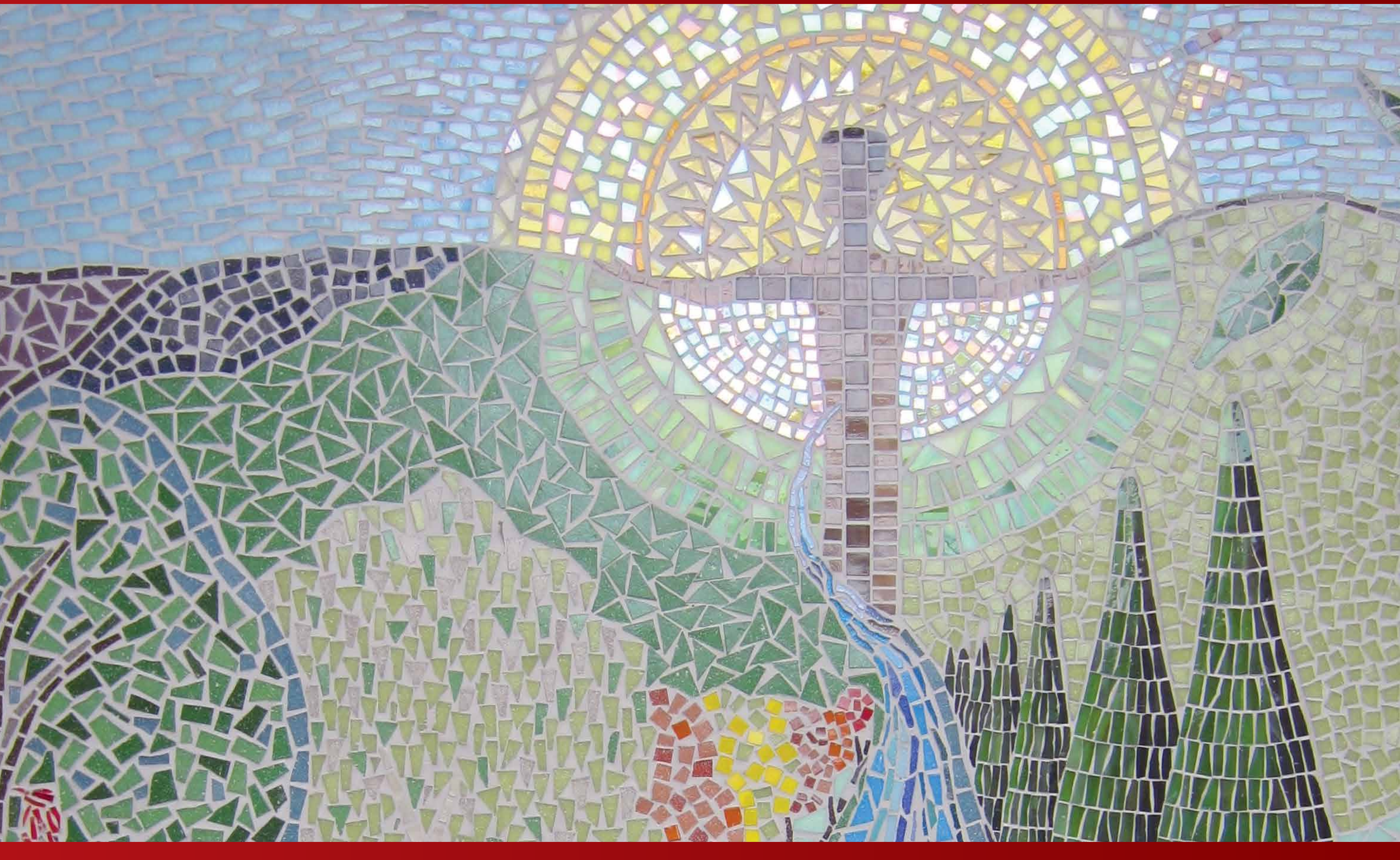
TACKLING POVERTY TOGETHER
CHURCH URBAN FUND

Theos

GOOD NEIGHBOURS:

HOW CHURCHES HELP COMMUNITIES FLOURISH

Paul Bickley



JUNE 2014

ABOUT CHURCH URBAN FUND

Church Urban Fund exists to inform, inspire, resource and support churches as they work to tackle poverty and build strong, flourishing communities. Set up by the Church of England, we do this primarily through the parish system which offers unparalleled access to England's most deprived and marginalised communities.

At the heart of our work is a network of partnerships with individual dioceses called the Together Network. Through this network we aim to enhance, multiply and transform the Church's engagement with poverty at a local and national level by growing church-based social action, increasing the capacity of churches to take action and building partnership working.

We also run a research programme that aims to inform the Church and others about poverty-related issues in England and to share best practice responses to those issues. Previous reports include *Money Speaks Louder than Words: credit unions and the role of churches in tackling financial exclusion* (2014) and *Hungry for More: how churches can address the root causes of food poverty* (2013).

For more details on our work, please visit: ***www.cuf.org.uk***

ABOUT THEOS

Theos is a Christian think tank which engages in the battle of ideas from an open, orthodox, non-denominational Christian position. It was launched in November 2006 with the support of Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Cormac Murphy O'Connor, then Archbishop of Westminster.

Our objective is to show Christianity has a serious and important contribution to make to public life in the UK today. We conduct research, publish essays and reports and hold public lectures and debates on the role of religion, in general, and Christianity, specifically, in public life. We also provide research consultancy services to organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Previous reports include *"Doing God": A Future for Faith in the Public Square, Free to Believe? Religious Freedom in a Liberal Society and Multiculturalism: A Christian Retrieval.* We have hosted lectures from, among others, Mark Thompson (former Director General of the BBC), Jonathan Sacks (the Chief Rabbi) and John Micklethwait (editor of the Economist), as well as running debates on the future of the welfare state, on international development and on Darwinism, in venues like Westminster Abbey, the RSA and the Commonwealth Club.

For more details visit: ***www.theosthinktank.co.uk***

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Paul Bickley, June 2014

FOREWORD

The blessing of our communities. The love of God and the love of neighbour. These are challenges that God has set before us as Christians and, together, as the Church. This is our calling.

The consequences of this calling, among other things, involve sharing Jesus Christ's concern for the poor and the marginalised, and building communities where we recognise our responsibility to one another. We recognise that whether we are poor or rich, we all have the same dignity before God. It means that we have responsibilities to act, to do what we can to make a difference, to work for our neighbour's flourishing, to bring justice.

This report from Church Urban Fund and Theos demonstrates the scale and nature of that love for neighbour in practical action. It shows that relationships are at the heart of every community, and that churches are at the heart of local communities. Painting a rich and detailed picture of local activity, this report shows how local churches are actively seeking the blessing of those around them and creating spaces where relationships of mutual care and support can flourish.

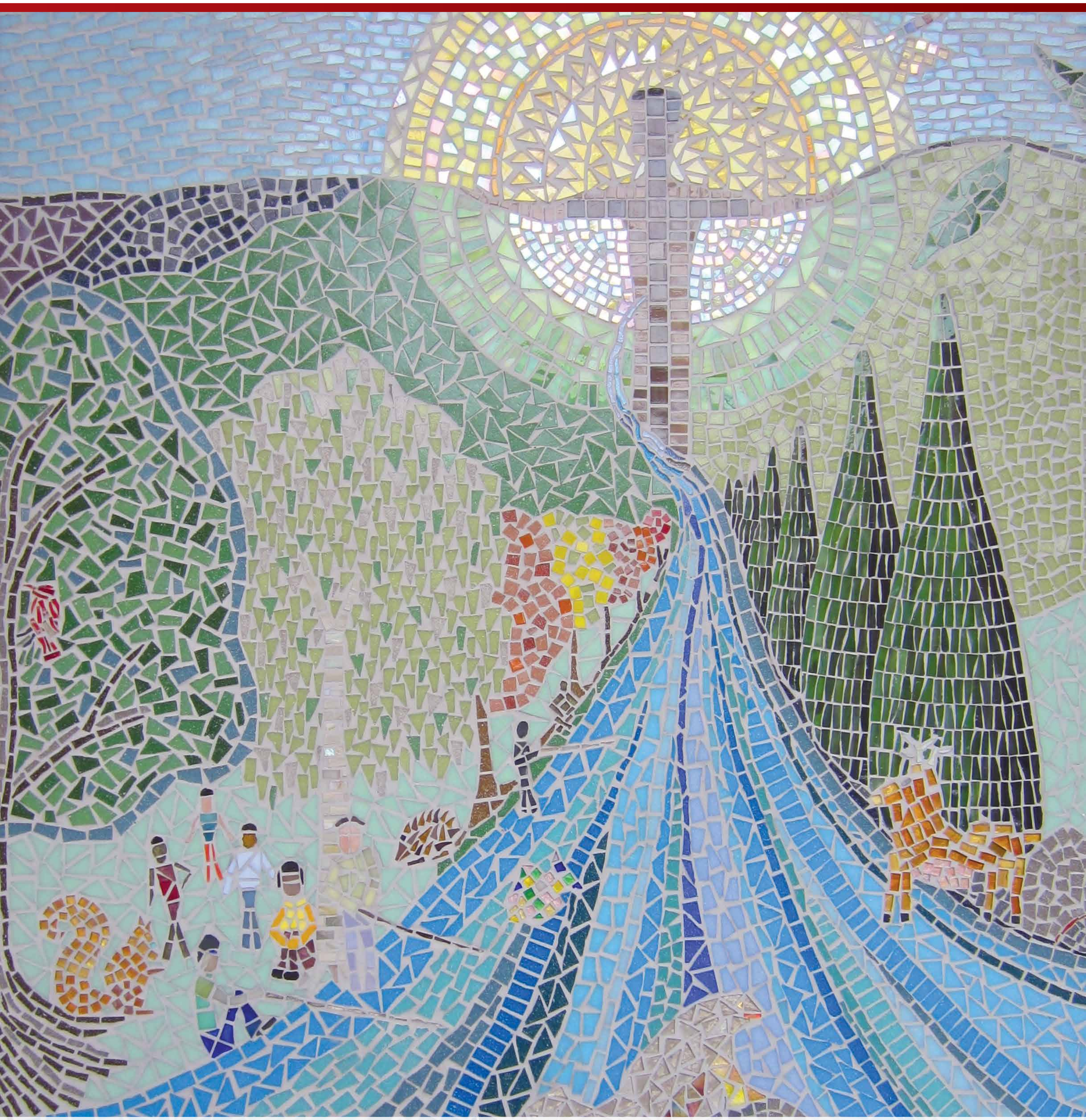
It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone that the Church is part of the solution for building community blessing at local level. The common good of the community and justice are absolutely central to what it means to be a Christian. They flow from the love of Jesus on the Cross, offering salvation, enabling justice and human freedom.

Loving God and loving our neighbour go together like the warp and the weft of a piece of fabric. They hold each other in place and together can be strong, and beautiful, and adaptable, for any number of uses. But each without the other would be disconnected strands. When we weave them together in our life as people of God, we open up a range of possibilities that can make a real difference. Possibilities that can transform lives and transform communities.

My challenge to the Church, and to Church Urban Fund, is to keep on responding to the challenge that God has been giving us, his people, for thousands of years: seek the blessing of your community.[1]

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Andrew Dunsmore/Picture Partnership/Lambeth Palace



“The image that has been created is symbolic of what we want to be as a parish church, a place where life and goodness flows out into all parts of North Ormesby, creating a community where everyone is able to grow and flourish.” Rev. Dominic Black of Holy Trinity, Middlesbrough

The mosaic was designed by a local artist and co-produced by members of the community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this research, we set out to understand the impact of local churches in deprived communities in England. We first sought to explore *what* churches do, but we also wanted to understand *how* and *why* they do it.

This is a 'critical appreciation' of what churches offer their communities – it argues that church-based activities offer both breadth of national reach and depth. They reach large numbers of people nationally, but in a uniquely relational way.

We found that churches are engaged in a wide variety of projects aimed at providing essential material and emotional support to local people – this has been well established by previous studies. We also found, however, that churches promote and embody 'neighbourliness' – building, and helping people build, relationships of mutual support. In this way, they are more than just providers of various community projects and social action initiatives, since strong relationships and social networks can help communities become more resilient in the face of social and economic challenges.

Churches are aware, particularly in areas of high religious and ethnic diversity, of being only one of a variety of religious and non-religious community groups and statutory agencies with whom they should and would work. Yet the community engagement of churches grows from nothing other than Christian commitments and practices, and a desire to "seek the welfare of the city".

For the main part, members of churches did not speak about being motivated by a set of abstract Christian principles. Rather, they were shaped by being part of a worshipping community of a particular kind and in a particular context that was responding to their communities in particular ways. This could be described as 'incarnational' ministry, meaning that churches are not just there *for* local residents but also *with* local residents for the long term.

CHURCHES HAVE A SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL FOOTPRINT

The Church in England reaches approximately 10 million people each year through its community activities, even *excluding* 'familiar' church activities – Sunday services, Christmas, Easter, Harvest, baptisms, weddings, and funerals.[2]

These activities include foodbanks, community events such as lunch clubs or cafés, healthy living activities such as community nursing, exercise classes and healthy eating courses, relationship support, financial education and advice, access to computers/ the internet, and providing opportunities for volunteering.

Among the most frequently used community services were children and youth services, cultural events, and activities for older people. However, churches had also provided support for asylum seekers, for people with addictions, counselling and 'street pastoring'. The activities and community services were more likely to have been used by younger people (18-44) than older ones.

IN DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES, THE CHURCHES PROVIDED VALUABLE SOCIAL GLUE

These quantitative research findings supplemented 12 detailed, qualitative case studies of Church of England churches located in areas of high deprivation. In each of these, there was strong evidence that the church really was the glue of its local community. We discerned two 'layers' of activity.

First, churches ran a range of community projects, often developed as a bespoke response to a particular local need: these included a children's clothing exchange, English language courses, foodbanks, homelessness activities, debt counselling and access to credit unions, lunch clubs for older people, a wide variety of youth and children's work and work with schools, and employment support.

Second, our case study churches would not just provide services but also build platforms for neighbourliness, relationships and social connection. For many of the areas in which these churches serve, material deprivation is only one result of a series of social processes which have also created greater social isolation. Churches themselves emphasise the importance of relationships of service, generosity and love to their own members, but they also saw these as constituting the flourishing of the wider community. They would look to build their own relationships with individuals and institutions in the wider community, pursuing common goals, and provide platforms for people to connect with others. Though less 'tangible', we suggest that understanding how churches sit at the centre of and foster networks of mutual generosity is vital to understanding their impact and potential.

THESE CHURCHES WORKED DIFFERENTLY THAN MANY OTHER ORGANISATIONS

In contrast to other institutions, our case study churches were a stable institutional presence yet also human, relational, personal and locally 'owned'. This meant that they were able to marshal human, financial and physical resources at some scale, without becoming bureaucratic or disengaged from the local community.

Interviewees benefiting from the church-based projects suggested that they operated differently than those of other providers. They said that they were more empathetic and personalised than state-based services, which could be highly conditional. Projects were shaped in response to particular local needs and usually funded without statutory support. Activity followed need rather than funding or broader statutory priorities.

The case study churches offered leadership, and were trusted by local elected representatives and community partners, often serving as trusted brokers within the community. That leadership was described as open and accessible by interviewees. Churches also sought to build agency within their communities, using their networks to help others secure their own goals. They sustained public space – churches, community buildings, gardens and green spaces – that were open, hospitable and, as far as possible, free from social and economic pressures.

COMMUNITY-FACING CHURCH WORK EMBODIES DEEP CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

What churches offer and do in their communities cannot be divided from what churches are, or neatly organised into categories of public/community-focused/secular and private/internally-focused/spiritual.

Churches are institutions which work for the common good, not because they adhere to any universal ethical principles or even any set of 'values', but because they embody a theologically determined way of life. While not always explicit, underlying theological assumptions could be inferred from the kinds of things the churches did and the ways in which they described them.

Thus, churches were marked by an emphasis on people as relational (people could not thrive outside of caring and secure relationships), hospitality (constantly emphasising the welcome of the other in community buildings, in church services or relationships), hopefulness and incarnation (an ongoing presence in communities spanning generations, even when circumstances were not auspicious).

Case study churches were clear that activity which might be perceived as aggressively proselytising might alienate those they were trying to help. Interviewees thought that authentic Christian engagement in contexts of deprivation included a response to physical and material as well as spiritual needs. The case study churches tended to be growing in size, and also increasingly reflecting the demographic make-up of their local area, but the process was an organic one, and churches were clear that relationships with residents – often vulnerable – should be characterised by hospitality and care rather than a desire to convert. They cared far more about being faithful and engaged churches than they did about being big churches.

CONCLUSIONS

There is both opportunity and motive for churches to take on a greater social welfare role, and a strong base on which to build. Not only did the case study churches engage in a wide range of community-focused activities, but their emphasis on relationships of mutual care and neighbourliness offers a further dimension.

Churches are alive to what is often a hidden dimension of deprivation, which is a dearth of social connections – relationships – that make life both possible and meaningful. The social impact of churches cannot be reduced to providing services, however well-conceived or delivered. Their commitment to strong and caring networks of mutual support within cohesive communities provides the backdrop and horizon for all of that activity.

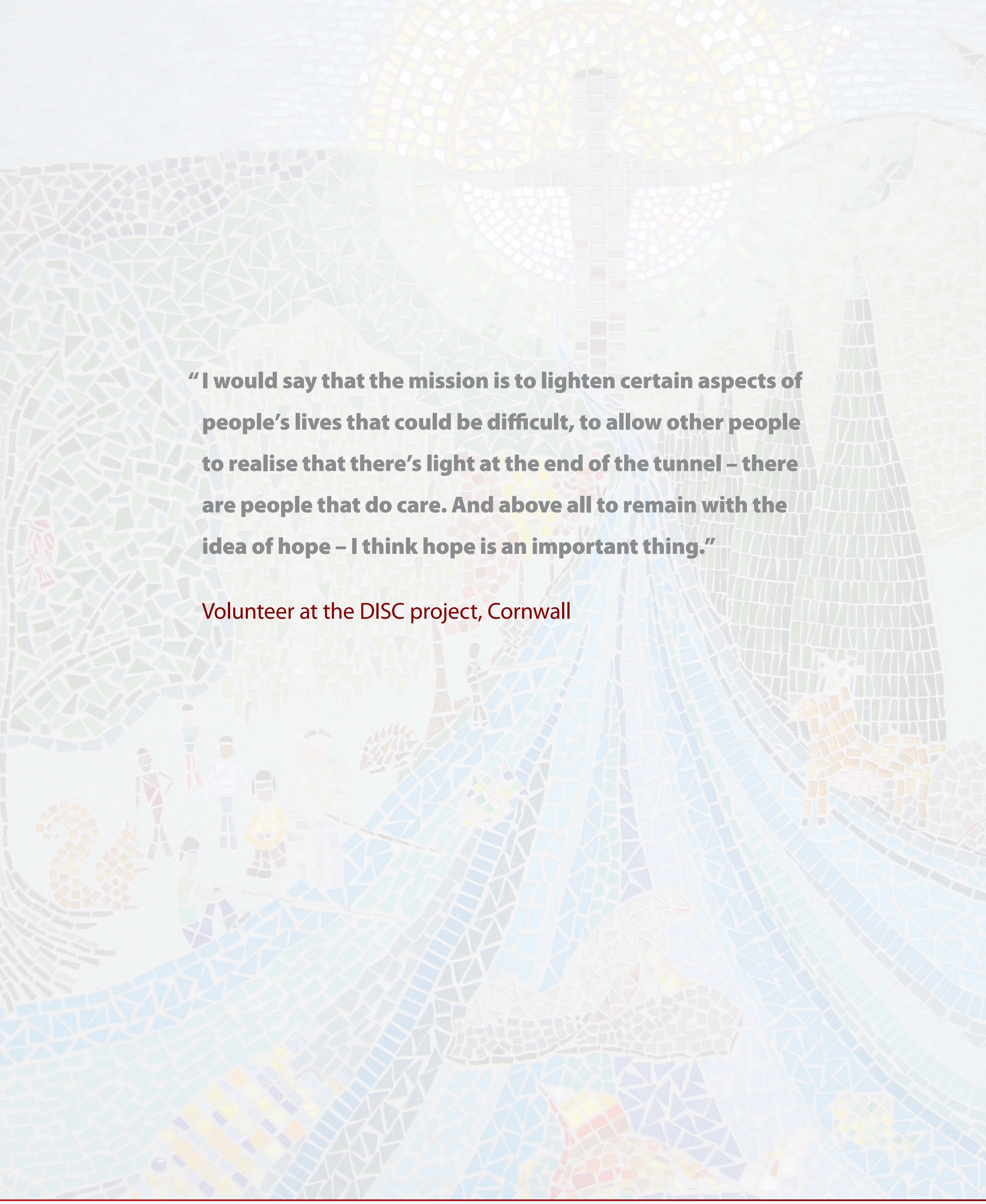
Given pressure on public finances and the ongoing difficulty of achieving increased prosperity in many urban centres outside of London and the South East, what tools are available to help communities, families and individuals thrive? Alongside measures which will continue to improve economic opportunity, the work of these churches indicates that building and enhancing neighbourliness and social connection could be one. Although this research has only looked at a relatively small collection of churches, the polling commissioned to accompany this research suggests that the local churches could provide the means to embed this approach in communities throughout England.

These findings have implications for churches, local statutory agencies, and national government. Firstly, churches and church-based agencies are right to point to, and celebrate, the work of local churches – certainly our case study churches were having a significant impact on their neighbourhoods. To follow their lead, other churches should understand and consider that one of the most valuable things they can do is promote neighbourliness. They should also consider the importance of creative local and regional collaborations with other parishes, churches and agencies. Effecting even modest change in neighbourhoods is hard enough, but effecting change across cities and regions is only possible through greater collaboration.

Secondly, local agencies should have greater confidence in churches as potential partners. Churches have assets and people, and the experience of the case study churches shows that they are also locally trusted and sensitive to local need. Churches do not merely support their members, but offer care for all those in their communities and are cautious to avoid alienating people with language or activities that could be perceived as coercive. In fact, people that benefit from church run projects often compare them favourably with other providers.

Thirdly, for the duration of the next parliament, national government and policy makers will be grappling with the question of how to support and sustain deprived communities in what is likely to be a period of ongoing economic challenge. Alternative approaches will have to focus not simply on physical regeneration but also on 'social' regeneration – the quality and quantity of relationships and social networks in areas of high deprivation, and the extent to which these can help communities remain resilient. Taking account of the presence and work of churches could make the difference between public initiatives in this field faltering or prospering.

North Liverpool foodbank
EMERGENCY FOOD FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN CRISIS
1 in 5 people live below the poverty line in the UK. People in Liverpool are going hungry today
We provide 3 days nutritionally balanced emergency food to local people in crisis
All clients are referred
Welcome
Andrew's
unity Networ
FIRE EXIT
Everyone



> **"I would say that the mission is to lighten certain aspects of people's lives that could be difficult, to allow other people to realise that there's light at the end of the tunnel – there are people that do care. And above all to remain with the idea of hope – I think hope is an important thing."**
>
> Volunteer at the DISC project, Cornwall

0. INTRODUCTION

0.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

There are two powerful yet contradictory stories currently being told about the church in England.

The first is that the church – in particular the Church of England – faces something like its own death within a couple of generations. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey 2013, 48% of people overall said they had no religion, a proportion which increased steadily with each generation cohort (standing at 60% for those born in the 1980s against 25% for those born in the 1920s). The Church of England was still the single biggest denominational/faith category in 2012 but, at 20%, it was much reduced from the 40% recorded when the question was first put in 1983.[3] Spiritual beliefs are at best loosening and at worst evaporating. In terms of social values, the general public (and even lay members) are radically out of sympathy with the official positions and public pronouncements of religious hierarchies. People are deserting religious institutions in droves, and they're taking their time and money with them.

The second account is, therefore, all the more surprising. It suggests that churches are uniquely well placed to meet social welfare needs in an age of austerity. They are exceptionally stable institutions, which combine human and financial resources with a Christian impulse to care for the most vulnerable. Their social reach may have diminished as the welfare state grew but now, as the state is obliged to pare back all essential services, churches are ready to re-emerge not just to provide for spiritual needs but also the material well-being of communities, particularly the very deprived.[4] Alongside other parts of the third sector, they stand ready to participate in a reformation of flexibility and diversification of services in the new age of the localism.

Both stories require further interrogation and, in different ways, might be accused of paying insufficient attention to what is happening 'on the ground'. The first fails to acknowledge that, as an institution, the Church of England retains a national reach unparalleled by other institutions of civil society. The second assumes that the churches and other faith based organisations can simply move in and take over spaces that state and other institutions have vacated, without acknowledging the massive, and unlikely, internal reform that would be required to achieve such a goal. For instance, the 2008 Von Hügel Institute report *Moral, But No Compass* observed that the Church of England, which is constituted by almost 13,000 legally independent parishes, can't be easily incorporated into policy or commissioning structures.[5] While some religious groups may enthusiastically embrace and engage in the reform of public and welfare services, others will be unwilling to subsist on what, rightly or wrongly, they see as the crumbs from the table of fundamentally unjust political decisions. Indeed – as we saw in our case studies – many are conflicted, arguing that the individuals and institutions owed their neighbours a duty of friendship and care which could not be abdicated to the state or its agencies – but they were also acutely aware of how national policy changes could affect the wellbeing of their communities.

0.2 THE CHURCH'S CHANGING SOCIAL FOOTPRINT

That said, the role of faith-based organisations in social welfare and community cohesion initiatives is now receiving greater attention and some support.

In 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government channelled £5 million to the Near Neighbours programme, which offers small grants to fund projects which would "encourage stronger civil society in areas that are multi-religious and multi-ethnic by creating association, friendship and neighbourliness… [Near Neighbours] intends to bring together people of different faiths and of no faith to transform local communities for the better".[6] Applications and grants for the Near Neighbours programme were made through the Church of England infrastructure. This was seen by many academics and commentators as a retrograde step which ignored religious diversity and excluded minority communities. Nevertheless, the programme has been evaluated positively and the Department for Communities and Local Government has committed to fund a second round of the programme.

This and other examples – while by no means insubstantial commitments – are a relative sideshow in the context of the billions of pounds of income that the charitable sector as a whole garners from statutory sources, demonstrating that in spite of the institutional significance of churches in general and the Church of England in particular, they are yet to be seen as an avenue through which to pursue social change. Near Neighbours focuses small grants on a small number of areas and a particular type of (interfaith) activity. Meanwhile, the work of the 13,000 Church of England parishes – whatever it may be – remains 'below the radar'. Work dispersed across 13,000 relatively small and legally separate entities will automatically seem thinly spread. Paradoxically, what is (theoretically at least) best about what churches offer – their proximity to and rootedness in communities – is what tends to 'hide' them from a national perspective.[7]

Meanwhile, churches have, anecdotally at least become more important in the fabric of social welfare provision. Tightening budgets have restricted both local government and those parts of the third sector that were most reliant on statutory funding. It's ironic that – perhaps as a result of faith-based organisations' unwillingness or inability to draw as deeply on public funds as the rest of the third sector and because, being communities of faith, they have a life before and after their charitable activity – churches have not been so badly affected as statutory funding sources have dried up.[8] There are concerns that austerity has had a hollowing effect on civil society as well as state and, in some communities at least, the local church could be 'the last man standing'.

Polling commissioned as part of this research illustrates the point: community provided (i.e., non-statutory) services are a significant part of the majority of people's lives, with 48% of England's adult population saying they or a member of their immediate family have accessed services in the last 12 months. Of these, over half identify these services as being provided by churches or church-based agencies. In other words, 10 million people in England would say that within the last year they or a member of their immediate family have accessed services provided by a church or a church-based organisation, even leaving aside acts of worship, weddings, baptisms and funerals.

However, there is little awareness of the nature, range, sophistication, quality, or otherwise, of what churches are doing in local communities. At the level of the 'average' local church, the majority of the activity will take place entirely outside the purview of the state, and will remain disconnected from third sector conversations around commissioning infrastructure and policy. There is a need to do more to document and understand the role churches in general – and the Church of England in particular – should play in this rapidly changing context. For politicians and policy makers as well as for faith leaders, the fact that faith-based organisations 'do a lot' is not in itself sufficient to identify the right frameworks for engagement, which is a matter for informed judgement and wise discernment.

0.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In 2013, Church Urban Fund commissioned Theos to carry out research into the life and work of churches in areas of high deprivation. It would explore what ordinary churches actually do for their communities.

Numerous reports have sought to highlight, measure and map the contribution of churches and other faith-based social action, exploring the extent of their social engagement, their significant sources of volunteering, and if a monetary value could be attached to this. This research is different in kind – it focuses not on the scale, but on the nature of what churches are doing. We look to be attentive not to national constitutional or political factors and debates, but rather to the local, particular, lived reality of life in the parishes of the Church of England.

This is a 'critical appreciation' of what churches offer their communities. It's often said that churches, alongside other forms of local association, are a kind of glue that holds deprived communities together. In simple terms, we have set out to discover and describe what it is that makes churches 'sticky' – what is it that they offer to the common good.

The research would first of all consider *what* flourishing churches offer their communities. Recent political debates have highlighted the growth in food provision/foodbanks, often operated at the local level by churches, such that there could be a perception that this is 'what they do'. But churches are developing a range of responses to this and other social needs, incorporating efforts to tackle the root causes of worklessness or poverty. We wanted to understand the range of what local churches offer, as well as areas of particular focus.

The research would also explore *how* community-facing activity worked. The language of 'faith-based organisations' or 'the third sector' can sometimes be homogenising, giving the impression that, whatever it is that faith groups do, it is basically all the same. All these communities, as well as the many thousands that bear no religious identity, can contribute to the common good, but they do so in ways which are unique to them. Are there distinctive risks and opportunities, ways of working or forms of community engagement which belong particularly to local churches in the Church of England? Is there anything special about local churches – if so, what?

Finally, we wanted to understand something of what drives and shapes religious public involvement? What is specific to religious life that causes churches to get involved? This is one of the imponderables in the literature around religion and social capital (for instance, in *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell cautiously suggest that it is religions' network for morally freighted connections which make the difference when it comes to higher levels of neighbourliness and civic engagement).[9] While we are aware of the difficulties in answering the question conclusively, we wanted to pay closer attention to what people said about how they were motivated.

In particular, the worshipping life of religious institutions is not counted as a relevant part of their offer. The 'sacred' is not considered public, and is therefore irrelevant. What is seen as significant are community projects, volunteering, the availability of buildings and financial resources. It's acknowledged that groups may have a religious 'motivation' or 'ethos', but this can be perceived to be separate from what the institution in question really offers. Does this fit what churches are doing?

0.4 RESEARCH METHODS

In line with the objectives of this research, we wanted to revisit the lived reality of ordinary churches. The research is built around twelve case studies of Church of England congregations.

These case study churches were identified with the assistance of Church Urban Fund, with the primary criteria that they served an area of relative deprivation in a creative and substantial way. As we will see, this did not necessarily mean that they were running large or well-resourced community projects.

In this and other respects, it's important to bear in mind that they are not necessarily intended to be representative of Church of England congregations as a whole, though we looked for a reasonable geographical spread and for case studies in urban, suburban and rural contexts. Several of the case studies were in areas which registered in the top few percent of areas in the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation.[10] We sought to include rural and semi-rural case studies which were not so obviously deprived 'on paper', but suffered from problems associated more with access to services and higher living costs than income deprivation.[11] Finally, we sought to reflect all the main traditions of churchmanship in the Church of England. Two of the case study churches were 'Local Ecumenical Partnerships' – formal partnerships with churches of another denomination, one United Reformed Church (Hodge Hill) and one Methodist (Woodhouse Close Church).

We approached the case studies in two sections. In the first six, we gathered as much available information as possible. After reflecting on and analysing these first six, we identified what we thought were key common themes which we would look to explore in greater depth and detail in the second six case studies. In chronological order of case study, the case study churches are listed below.

- Holy Trinity, North Ormesby
- St Stephen's, West Bowling
- Hodge Hill Church
- Camborne Church
- St Peter's, Bethnal Green
- St Peter's, Kineton
- Woodhouse Close Church
- Christ Church Norris Green
- Parish of Louth
- St Thomas', Blackpool
- St John the Evangelist, Brixton
- Church of the Good Shepherd, Farnborough

For each case study, we interrogated publicly available data sets in order to build a broad statistical picture of the area. Where appropriate and available, we also asked for background materials from the church in question, such as annual reports and parish statistics.

We arranged a 3-4 day research visit, during which we conducted 'semi-structured', recorded interviews with candidates ranging from clergy, staff and key members of volunteers through to those who had in some way either benefited from or contributed to the life of the church without necessarily identifying themselves as part of it. We described these last as a 'fringe', notwithstanding the unhelpful implication that being a fully paid up member is normative. Many interviewees, particularly in the latter category, but also some project staff, did not self-identity as Christian, but were of no faith or a different faith.

Additionally, we spoke to community partners – other statutory and voluntary agencies in the area – about their partnerships with the case study churches, with a view to understanding their perceptions of the reach, strengths and limitations of the work of the churches. We also attended/observed acts of worship, staff or leadership meetings and community events and sessions, ranging from youth clubs to lunch clubs to foodbanks and credit unions, and much more besides.

Overall, we carried out and analysed 165 interviews and attended and observed 58 sessions over a 12 month period. These visits helped us develop twelve rough and ready ethnographies, the results of which are presented below.

0.5 REPORT OVERVIEW

This report is split into four main sections. The first will offer an overview of what the 12 case study churches were actually doing in terms of projects and activities – the 'what' of the offer of local Anglican parishes. The second and third sections will move on to reflect on the evidence for the distinctiveness of the work of these churches, exploring how and why they operate in the way that they do, and what therefore are the distinctive opportunities and challenges in the present context. Material from the case studies will be presented throughout the report, but we also include a short summary for each individual case study.

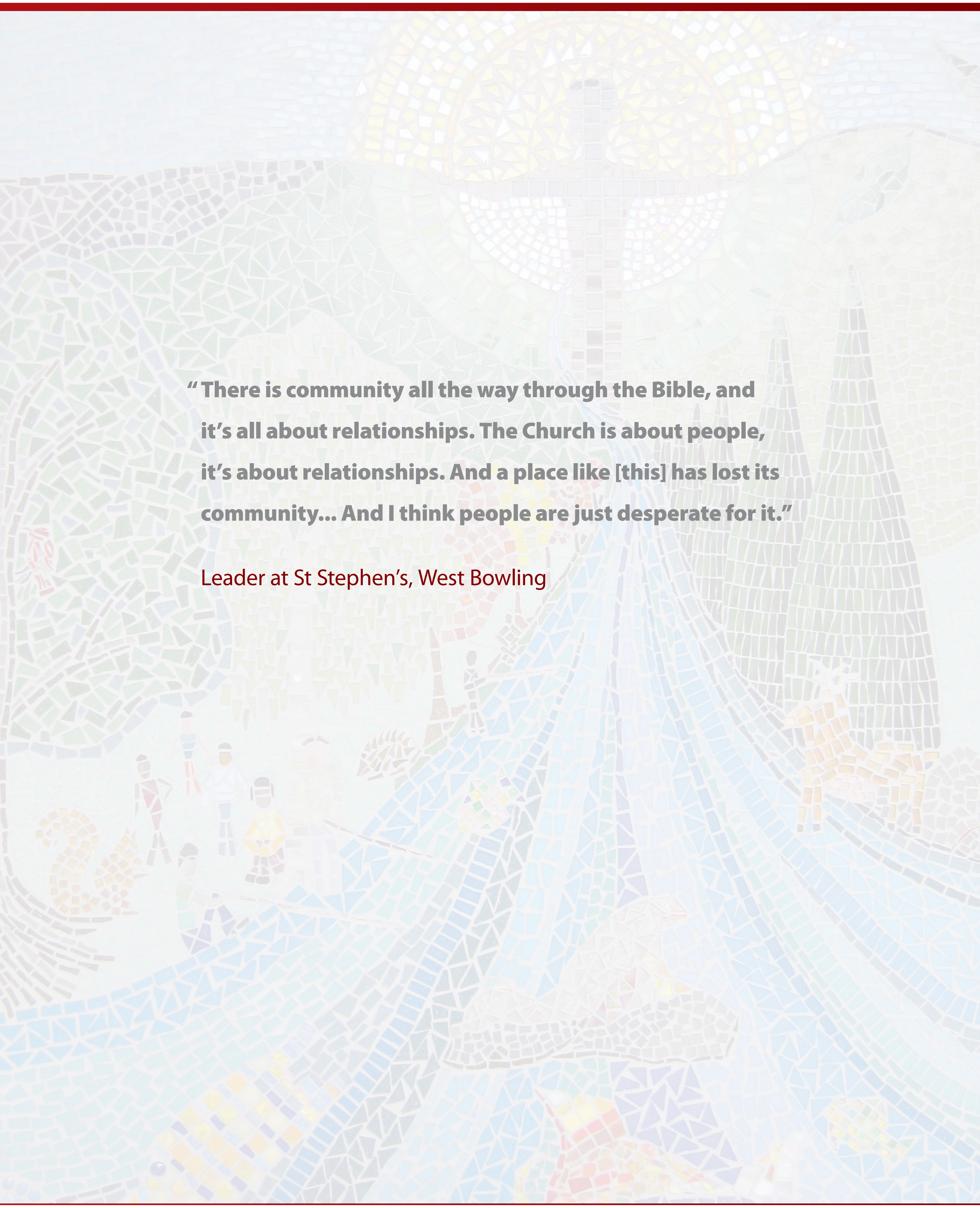
Chapter 1 of this research report considers the range of activity undertaken by the churches in our case studies. It identifies a number of strands of activities, observing that some are shared by almost all of the case study churches while others are organic responses to local need.

Chapter 2 asks what puts churches in a strong position when it comes to identifying and serving the needs of the community. This section will be of particular use to anyone who wants to explore what is distinctive in what churches offer their community.

Chapter 3 explores the motivation of church members and how this changes the nature of the church's impact. Are churches, for instance, secretly motivated by a desire to convert 'service users', or extend their influence or profile in some other way?

Between each main section, we include case study profiles of the twelve churches, identifying the key themes, challenges and opportunities that arose in each context. These short summaries can't hope to do justice to the complexity of each parish, but they are sufficient to give a flavour of each study.

In conclusion, we will reflect on the opportunities and challenges facing these congregations and the implications for policy makers at a national or local level.



> "There is community all the way through the Bible, and it's all about relationships. The Church is about people, it's about relationships. And a place like [this] has lost its community... And I think people are just desperate for it."
>
> Leader at St Stephen's, West Bowling

1. WHAT CHURCHES DO

What was surprising about our twelve churches is not that they were highly focused on engaging with and meeting the needs of their local community, but the sheer range and diversity of the ways in which they did so.

The rise of foodbanks has been a hotly debated political issue, so much so that the impression might be given that foodbanks are what churches spend their time doing. This is not the case – meeting basic material needs was important, but considerable energy was being spent in providing a range of activities and services: education and employment, life-skills, supporting schools and providing children and youth activities were all particularly significant.

The heightened political debate about the wellbeing of deprived communities had sharpened awareness of need – some interviewees would certainly have said that the needs themselves had been exacerbated – but most of this community-facing work would have been happening anyway. Few projects were direct responses to cuts in statutory services - though they may have been intended to supplement services that were perceived to be poor - rather than to needs, problems or opportunities which would have affected particular areas or particular groups in any case.

Below we describe these different aspects of the churches' work in greater depth.

1.1. MEETING BASIC MATERIAL NEEDS

In the wake of recent debates around welfare changes, and suggestions that the benefits safety net has disappeared, greater attention had been paid to the ways in which communities are ensuring that basic material needs are met. St Stephen's, West Bowling was running a winter shelter in partnership with the local mosque, the church providing the accommodation, the mosque providing the food).

The DISC (Drop in and Share Café) in Camborne had begun when a church member discovered homeless men warming themselves with the hand dryers of a public toilet on Christmas Day, but had developed into a daily centre for the homeless, people with drug/alcohol issues, ex-offenders, people with mental health issues, and travellers. The DISC project provided hot food, access to showers and internet services, and access to specialist input and advice.[12]

All the churches we visited were involved in food provision – from relatively informal and *ad hoc* gifts, through partnerships with other churches around formal foodbanks, to providing leadership in the development of regional operations. School holidays were seen as points of particular need, when families whose children would usually benefit from free school meals met a gap. St Thomas' Church, Blackpool, for instance, supported 20 families with Christmas hampers, in which they also included warm clothes and gifts.

Interviewees tended to be equivocal about foodbanks. On the one hand, they were seen as an essential response to basic needs, a very tangible and easy way for church members to serve their community, even if just by donation, and an activity in which churches and other groups could easily work with each other. Foodbanks or pantries are also seen as a useful way of making contact with people who might benefit from other programmes, activities or services.

On the other hand, leaders and volunteers were aware that they needed to help people address their longer-term underlying problems. Church leaders in particular tended to be wary of a full-scale diversion into meeting short-term needs, whether for food or something else. Some explicitly spoke of them as having a limited lifespan, and regretted the way that unexpectedly high and growing levels of need had seen that lifespan extended.

Alongside these were a range of *ad hoc* responses to specific local circumstances. In one case study, a church community worker said that material poverty was both "very real and very visible" and something to which the church could not fail to respond:

> This last winter, we noticed that there were lots of children going to school with really inadequate footwear and winter coats. It was one day the children came over to church and I was peeling off little canvas shoes that were sopping wet – freezing cold feet. This was in the middle of winter. The school said it was a real issue. We put an appeal out to some of the more affluent churches for shoes and coats.

Church leaders, project workers and volunteers spoke about a range of factors contributing to material need: a lack of employment, a low-pay, no-pay cycle of temporary, minimum wage work, and high-skilled, well-paid jobs in heavy industry being largely replaced by zero-hour contract retail positions. There is no doubt that interviewees sometimes discussed material poverty in relationship to perceived problems with welfare services – some were critical of specific policies, such as ending the spare room subsidy or introducing the bedroom tax. None of them, however, saw 'the problem' as a negligent state but, rather, the collapse of local economies and the failure of collective national and local responses. Welfare cuts were just the icing on an already grim economic cake.

In a theme which would be repeated in a range of contexts, the empathetic and relational approach of churches was favourably contrasted with the highly contractual/conditional approach of universal state services. This is ironic, given that one of the fears around faith-based community projects is that they come 'with strings attached'. One foodbank client spoke of the moment when, after a series of benefit delays affecting her and her partner, she had lost her temper in a job centre and was barred from the centre for 12 months. The couple came to the church centre to access the internet, get a hot meal and some food to take home, and had built a good relationship with the staff. "The church doesn't judge. You don't have to qualify."

1.2. EMPLOYMENT

Around half of the case study churches were actively supporting people in their search for work. At its most basic level, this meant providing internet access for job seekers. As Universal Credit is rolled out, internet access will also become essential for accessing benefits. This was particularly important in areas where there were few other opportunities for access or where, for instance, libraries had been closed.

Other instances of provision in this field were more sophisticated. There were examples of small social enterprises - a bike restoration project, or church members thinking about how to turn an existing small IT business towards social outcomes.

Again, church job clubs were contrasted favourably with state services. A coordinator of a job clubs in Blackpool said that those who had lost work later in life were particularly underprepared, and found themselves competing in a very different jobs market to the one which they had left perhaps decades before. One former client in just such a situation found that the church's job club offered empathy, understanding and support, whereas other services were based around disciplining job seekers. Again, it was significant that churches were free to operate differently: Hodge Hill Church in Birmingham adopted an 'asset-based' approach in their Open Door job club as well as other aspects of their work. Each 'client' is treated not just as a bundle of needs, but as someone with a range of skills and abilities that could contribute to the good of the neighbourhood. They had, for instance, developed a TimeBank on the Firs and Bromford estates.

1.3. LIFE SKILLS

As part of a holistic approach to meeting the needs of local residents, our case study churches were often drawn into providing basic 'life skills' training.

More typical were financial education programmes, like CAP money courses and debt advice centres. One interviewee – a board member of a local Credit Union – hinted that the significance of credit unions lay not just in the financial services themselves. Risk, regulation and IT limitations make it difficult to provide services to economically vulnerable customers. Rather, "I would say 50% of the time with the volunteers that operate here, a lot of the work is like social or financial therapy… trying to understand people's financial position, how they got into the position that they're in and helping them in the nicest possible way".

Similarly, several churches maintained relationships with social housing providers around tenancy sustainment. Support workers and churches or foodbanks tended to be working with a similar client group and, in several case studies, were beginning to collaborate more coherently, often around the needs of individual residents. What social housing providers and churches were doing bore some similarities – both were offering intensive, personalised support to individuals with sometimes complex needs.

One, in a largely rural setting, had mobilised 40 volunteers to assist a local social landlord with garden clearing, initiating a mutually beneficial relationship. For instance, they used the church's popular coffee mornings for a housing surgery. One housing officer said, "… some of our more vulnerable residents tend to attend the coffee morning, we sort of use that as a stepping block to make a connection with our own residents. Periodically, we will go in and do a housing surgery in the coffee morning… it's somewhere that they go that is familiar and secure with them… It's a really good tool for us".

1.4. CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

Work with children and young people was a significant part of the activity of local churches. For simplicity, this could be separated into two parts. First, the work rooted in local schools and; second, self-initiated youth and children's work.

Work with schools

Our case study churches had strong and supportive relationships with local schools. More interesting was the fact that churches were as likely to be working as closely and enthusiastically with community schools as they were with Church of England schools. Whether of religious character or not, they were perceived as institutions with a similar set of concerns – not just the effective education, but also the welfare of children and the good of the community as a whole. Schools were places where the particular vulnerabilities of an area break the surface, be that poverty, domestic violence or gangs. One vicar described the local school as her most important field of activity.

Sometimes, ministers simply made themselves available in an *ad hoc* way for the pastoral support of students or staff. During an interview, one member of clergy, who had himself previously been a teacher in an area of high deprivation, specifically mentioned the importance of giving support to senior staff through what were all too frequent and traumatic child protection cases.

> One of the church schools I serve started back after the summer holidays just a few days ago… that first day the head teacher had six new serious child protection cases to deal with, one a case of serious sexual abuse. I only get involved in the case conference if I'm already involved with the families, but I'm there to provide the staff with pastoral and spiritual support.

One head teacher, in another case study, valued the way that the local minister, unlike his predecessor, had not asked to become a governor at the school but had made himself available for the pastoral support of students and staff.

> He came to see me and said, "Before you even ask, I don't want to be a governor of the school". The role he really wanted was to be a chaplain to the school – not as a title, it doesn't appear in the prospectus – but to be there, should we need that support. That really appealed to me… In fact, he was incredibly supportive to me [during a time of personal grief]… he just came in and had a chat, but it meant a lot to me.

These relationships were the basis of more concrete activity, though this was often low key. With Church of England schools, priests would be actively involved in planning assemblies and other parts of the curriculum. Even in community schools, churches were a resource for helping teachers with religious education and PSHE; though one priest had said he did not want to be 'wheeled in' for RE during significant Christian festivals, but rather had expressed a desire to support the school in its wider curriculum. Holy Trinity in North Ormesby was using 'Godly Play' - a multi-sensory approach to religious education based in the Montessori tradition, for which a large room in the church was specifically reserved - to support religious education in the local community school. The session leader suggested that there was evidence that the programme had broadly benefitted learning and behaviour.

Diversity in schools was perceived as a positive thing, rather than an aberration from the norm of a Christian mono-culture. In Hodge Hill in particular, however, there was a sense that diversity at the least offered the potential for friction, and that neighbourliness needed to be actively fostered (see 1.4 below). As part of the Near Neighbours programme, Hodge Hill Church ran popular bread making classes for parents, the point of which was to create space where parents from different communities could spend time with each other.

Youth and children's work

Beyond work with schools, case study churches ran extensive children and youth work. St Thomas', Blackpool reported over 100 children and youths participating in midweek programmes. Two churches - Holy Trinity, North Ormesby and Christ Church, Norris Green - had established separate charities, either partly or wholly devoted to children and young people, employing children or family workers. Trustees and management were largely drawn from the church. These ran extensive weekly programmes, with several after-school or evening clubs, as well as holiday clubs – Christ Church, Norris Green catered for up to 90 children per day for a three week period - and day trips. Others – St Stephen's, West Bowling and Hodge Hill Church - had established close collaborations with separate youthwork organisations, or had dedicated members of staff working with the young people inside and outside of the churches, as St Peter's, Bethnal Green and St Peter's, Kineton had in the past. Work varied in scale, sophistication and draw, but even those with relatively little formal activity held groups for parents/carers and toddlers. This was all aside from what is usually seen as the bread and butter of Anglican youth and children's work – Sunday schools, uniformed organisations and 'Messy Church' initiatives.

In some respects, however, the most interesting case study was one that had no youth worker and little in the way of formal youth work. While most of our case study churches happily catered for young children, secondary school age children and above were notable mainly by their absence. At St John the Evangelist in Brixton, the Sunday morning service had a far higher than usual proportion of young people present and participating. In a community which was marked by fear and suspicion of young people, the minister had rejected the usual practice of separating young people from the wider congregation for their own services and activities. Indeed, once every month, young people were asked to lead the service. Interviewees suggested that this was a tangible expression of the value and respect they had for young people.

At St Thomas', Blackpool, youth work embodied a similar value, incorporating young people in the process of developing and leading youth work. Drawing young people into full participation in the worshipping life of the church is not primarily a way of keeping them in the pews, thereby ensuring that membership was reflective of the area's age profile. Rather, it was a conscious act of formation, acknowledging the necessity, capacity, and expectation that young people were the future of both the church and the wider community. It was, therefore, also a 'public' act, responding to the local politics of generational relations which conceived young people as part of the problem.[13]

1.5. NEIGHBOURLINESS

Above, we have picked out some dominant strands of church-based community action – both our case study churches and other faith communities could offer a range of further examples. For instance, the Church of the Good Shepherd in Farnborough offered English classes to Nepalese migrants, in the process persuading many elderly Nepalese migrants with no education that they were capable of learning – a more extreme example of what it is to offer 'life skills. If this were the general shape of what churches were doing, we might politely celebrate their activity, but little more.

However, as case studies progressed, it emerged that the value of these community-facing projects didn't just reside in the tangible activity or outcomes, but in the way they were both expressions of, and platforms for, neighbourliness. Though less tangible, this was as important a part of what our case study churches offered their communities. The category emerged as a fruitful one which is simultaneously both theologically resonant[14] and evocative of recent work highlighting the value of social networks in deprived communities.[15]

In our case study contexts, various factors pushed against the possibility of maintaining a cohesive community. In Middlesbrough, one of the results of the collapse in the local economy was that cheap housing stock had been bought by absentee landlords for cheap buy-to-let, resulting in considerable churn in unsustainable or troubled tenancies. East and South London are both experiencing the reverse – a perceptible gentrification. East Birmingham and Bradford had, of course, experienced seismic demographic change and a considerable level of white flight. Farnborough had seen a sizeable influx of Nepalese following changes to residency rules for members of the Ghurkha regiments, and cultural tensions here were exacerbated by the fact that many indigenous residents in the parish believed, often wrongly, that Nepalese immigrants leapfrogged them in the housing queue.

In each context, belonging and trust in the community had been eroded. Interviewees would reminisce about how the area had been, often speaking about a lost sense of community or neighbourliness. Many places of association – local pubs, for instance – had closed or civil society itself, including churches and religious groups, had suffered a degree of atrophy. Yet, as commentators have argued, there is evidence that "local social networks are an important ingredient underpinning local wellbeing and resilience. The release of the first analysis of the ONS's wellbeing data has confirmed this, stating that 'the amount and quality of social connections with people around us are an essential part of our wellbeing'".[16]

Our case study churches spent a lot of time and energy on public gathering and hospitality – community cafés, lunches and the like. Hardly any of this activity conformed to the popular stereotypes of self-interested, bring-and-buy sales in aid of the church roof. Rather, the leadership of the case study churches thought that flourishing relationships would be a major component of a flourishing community. This was an explicit focus of activity. For example, St Peter's, Bethnal Green's mission statement was "worshipping God, changing the world and making friends".

As we will see below, this work was not necessarily a strategic intervention on the part of churches – they were following the ordinary logic of their own beliefs and practices. But when churches encouraged neighbourliness, it had the potential to deliver 'hard' outcomes in the context of real social problems. For example, in delivering English classes, run by a bilingual former missionary, to a small but nonetheless substantial contingent of the rapidly growing Nepalese community in the area, the Church of the Good Shepherd in Farnborough was not only equipping many new residents with important life skills, but chipping away at the community tensions that arose when the implications of a policy of large scale immigration were not fully thought through.

The Trinity Centre in North Ormesby was advantageously located on a square that still hosts a market every Tuesday, and opens the 'Cloister Café', for four hours every week. The café attracts a lively trade from the busy market immediately outside but, on the basis of our conversations with residents, it seemed also to provide a useful and regular meeting point for the wider community. That the general public felt comfortable in the Centre had been noted by other local agencies, such as neighbourhood police officers, who had started to use the café as a community surgery. One interviewee, a community partner, mentioned that previous attempts at holding surgeries elsewhere had failed – he put this down to a mistrust of authority. When the church invited the neighbourhood policing team into the Cloister Café, relationships between residents and local police improved, as did reporting. One interviewee attributed a 60% drop in anti-social behaviour in a year to a growth in trust between residents and police, which was catalysed by the church's invitation to the police to attend the café.

As we have already observed, it was notable that in several of the churches - St Peter's, Kineton and Parish of Louth - community or statutory agencies used community cafés and the like to connect with clients and service users but, when they did this, churches weren't developing or delivering 'projects'. These spaces and events weren't 'for' anything, other than 'for' people. Their usefulness was an unintended consequence of the church's attention to neighbourliness. Churches were looking to bring people together because that was an intrinsically good thing, not because they thought it would correct this or that social problem.

Key to the above example was the creative use of an advantageously placed building. It's already well appreciated that a church's physical assets and buildings are an essential part of its offer to a community. Conversely, buildings can drain resources and draw attention away from positive engagement with the wider community – see further discussion below. The priest of St Stephen's, West Bowling, an area of ethnic diversity, spoke of how a decision to be generous with physical spaces had helped them as an institution to connect to different communities.

> A lot of it has come through making our facilities available. We have a hall and we let groups use it for different things… – ok, we need to do that from a material point of view but actually it builds relationships… We have wedding groups, we have celebrations of people finishing reading the Qur'an, we have birthday parties for children and adults, we have African groups using it for worship and for prayer meetings, we have pigeon fanciers who use it, we have youth groups, sports clubs, ladies' groups, men's groups, snooker groups. It's not just a practical thing, it's also saying we want you to celebrate life and what is part of who you are and your identity.

Other interviewees had mentioned the grassed area around the church in West Bowling, the biggest green space in the area and a place where children would naturally come to play. In the past, children would have been chased away by the vicar if they were caught playing football against the church wall. Now the church had installed a football pitch in the church grounds, as well as installing exercise equipment in the churchyard at the request of the community.

Buildings made neighbourliness easier, but they were not essential. Hodge Hill Church had demolished a church/community space suffering from various maintenance problems, subsequently co-locating with the local URC church. Interviewees from the church regretted losing the building and the kind of mission that it enabled. They still had an aspiration to be a "hub of community", but didn't have the buildings that would facilitate that in a conventional way. This meant looking for ways to be "present in different neighbourhoods and different parts of neighbourhoods in different ways" and "inhabit space that doesn't belong to us", as the minister put it. This meant working with a local school to host Hodge Hill Community festival, running a pop-up café – Hodge Hill Cuppa – at school gates and bus stops, staging a community passion play (more of which below), running bread making classes for parents in a local school, and holding services in a sheltered housing complex. Church buildings provided a useful venue or hub for neighbourliness, but even small congregations without significant community buildings were thinking along the same lines.

In that vein, it's worth mentioning that both of our London congregations were heavily involved in their respective chapters of London Citizens – Hodge Hill Church was supporting the development of Birmingham Citizens – where the habits of neighbourliness took on a more public/political edge. As Luke Bretherton puts it, a community organising constitutes a "civic form of neighbour love".[17] This felt like a natural extension of a particular mentality that was prevalent in the case study churches – recognition of ethnic and religious pluralism, and a strong aspiration to pursue the common good, a healthy sense of the limitations of the state and, indeed, the church. It was seen as proper and necessary that there should be partnership where possible.

Given the contexts in which most of these churches worked, it's perhaps inevitable that all the above leaves our case study churches looking worthy but very solemn. This doesn't do them justice. Neighbourliness was often a by-product of people doing things together with no intended outcome but fun: music groups, choirs, theatre groups, film nights, sporting events, gardening clubs, day trips. Though the churches existed in contexts of high deprivation, their focus was people, not deprivation.

Thus far, then, we have explored the 'what' of church-based community projects and social action. Our first main observation is that they are not limited to short-term ameliorative responses to poverty and deprivation, although these should not be disregarded, but included more sophisticated responses to local problems. The second, and potentially more important observation, is that there is a second strand to our case study churches' work – we have called this neighbourliness. This speaks into a conversation about 'what is to be done' in deprived communities in an era when large-scale state-funded regeneration initiatives are no longer feasible or likely.

CASE STUDIES 1–4

HOLY TRINITY, NORTH ORMESBY

North Ormesby was built in the 1850s and 1860s to house workers for the docks, shipyards and ironworks developing along the River Tees. At its peak, it had roughly 20,000 residents. After slum clearances in the 1960s, the settlement was reduced to around 4,500 residents. In spite of its historic manufacturing base, only 6.4% of those in employment are within the manufacturing sector, and 12.7% of people in the immediate area, compared to 4.4% of people in England as a whole, were classed as being "economically active: unemployed", hinting at the low-pay, no-pay cycle that some interviewees mentioned. The overall Index of Multiple Deprivation rank of the immediate local super output area is 338/32482 (where 1 is the most deprived).

The church's development in some ways mirrored the settlement. A congregation started meeting in the school hall in 1858, and a large Victorian church subsequently built in several stages. This "Victorian barn", as one interviewee called it, burnt down in 1977 and was replaced by a smaller church. The church buildings are advantageously placed on the market square, where there's still a weekly market every Tuesday. The congregation is small but growing and, more importantly, is more a reflection of the local area than it had been in the past – younger and more diverse.

In 2003, with the church hall reaching the end of its useful life, the parish decided to build a new multi-purpose community centre. The church successfully raised £830,000 from public, corporate, church and local charitable sources. The Trinity Centre has a 200 seat hall, kitchen facilities, offices and meeting rooms which are available for commercial hire, thus subsidising community outreach. A local councillor identified the activity around the Trinity Centre as a factor in the improved environment – Tees Valley housing invested £5 million in new social housing on a site immediately adjacent to the Trinity Centre.

The centre is in daily use: there's a thriving Cloister Café on market days, the Trinity Youth and Children's Project run popular after-school clubs there, there are craft groups, carpet bowls, tea dances, groups for people with severe physical disabilities, a Mums' Choirs and more. A plethora of other community groups use the building. For example, it's the main performance space for the North Ormesby Minstrels. The centre has a monthly footfall of over 4,000 people.

Between the church building and the Centre sits the Cloister Garden, an enclosed urban garden in what was the nave of the original church. Like the Centre, it is open to the public throughout the day. The garden contains a mosaic depicting Ezekiel's vision of water flowing east from the temple in Jerusalem down into the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. In the biblical image, the water causes the salt water of the Dead Sea to become fresh. It's a source of life for animals to flourish and fruit trees to grow – "Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail".[18] Speaking to the Middlesbrough Gazette, the vicar, Rev Dominic Black, said, "The image that has been created is symbolic of what we want to be as a parish church, a place where life and goodness flows out into all parts of North Ormesby, creating a community where everyone is able to grow and flourish."

This mosaic captures much of what was going on in North Ormesby, and not just from a theological perspective. With the help of a local artist, and a lottery grant, the wider community had 'co-produced' the piece. Local school children had designed what the fish might look like, and residents had been invited in on market days to add tiles. The mosaic is not only symbolic of the church's self-understanding, but also of how they worked – identifying opportunities, drawing in resources, but then working with others towards a flourishing community.

CASE STUDIES 1–4

ST STEPHEN'S, WEST BOWLING

West Bowling sits just south of Bradford city centre. It suffers from high levels of poverty and deprivation, particularly around income and living environment. The church is in the 654th most deprived local output area in the country. It is also ethnically and religious diverse, and becoming all the more so: in 2001, 40% of residents in the Little Horton ward were Asian, increasing to 58% in 2011.

In the early 2000s, St Stephen's, West Bowling was on the verge of closure. A vicar had left, and a number of the congregation had left with him, leaving six elderly members. The bishop had walked round the area, praying and asking members of the community if the church should have a vicar. The answer – even from members of other faith communities – was an unequivocal yes. The present vicar – Jimmy Hinton – was appointed.

The church has slowly grown since his arrival. The church reflects the community and has an inclusive and 'messy' feel – interviewees spoke of it as family. Practically, St Stephen's is part of a scheme to shelter and feed homeless people in the winter months, and they have worked with the local Masjid. St Stephen's provides accommodation in the church hall, the Masjid provides the food. The church has partnered with Bradford Trident to develop and implement the largely successful 'no drugs in BD5 campaign'. They also work with a local youth charity to provide detached youth work, have become a centre for the local credit union and host a CAP Job Club. The church has recently established a charity – Shine – for which Sarah Hinton is a project worker, with the intention of building on the church's growing reputation as a community hub.

West Bowling is now a predominantly Asian area, but with significant other minorities alongside the white British residents. In their neighbourhood assessment, Bradford Council highlights concerns over ethnic tensions between the Asian population and incoming eastern European and Roma migrants, drawn to the area by cheap rents in the private sector. It was significant, then, that the church was highly regarded by different parts of the community and that it is one of two of our case studies hosting a Near Neighbours worker. The church was also using limited resources – the church building, church hall and grounds – to bring different parts of the community together.

The churchyard was one of the only green spaces in the area. Interviewees recalled being chased away by clergy when caught playing football there. The church had now installed a football pitch and exercise machines. They were using unused pieces of land to grow vegetables and plants that can be used for dyes for the textiles group. The church hall was used by a constant stream of other community groups.

St Stephen's faces significant challenges. The church building suffers from dry rot. While numbers have grown, newer people are largely unwaged and so unable to give much to the church and, all the while, the area is becoming more deprived, rather than less. It was for this reason that its presence mattered all the more. The minister and his wife spoke of their desire to be an incarnational model of Christian ministry, committing to the church and the community for a long period. A community partner put it like this: "with them, it's not just talk. They really do walk the talk".

CASE STUDIES 1–4

HODGE HILL CHURCH

Hodge Hill Church is a recently formed Local Ecumenical Partnership - Hodge Hill United Reformed Church with St Philip and St James, Hodge Hill - serving a parish in the East Birmingham industrial corridor. This parish can be split into three parts: Hodge Hill - detached and semi-detached housing from the 1930s, Buckland End - an older population with more bungalows/sheltered housing, and the Firs and Bromford - two estates experiencing a high degree of material deprivation.

The area as a whole is experiencing significant demographic shifts with the Pakistani population moving out from inner-city Birmingham, and indeed a degree of white flight, with residents moving into suburban/rural areas beyond the M42. In the 2001 census, 82% of residents in the Hodge Hill ward reported as white British; in the 2011 census, this had halved to 42%.

The story looming behind this church was its loss of a major church building/community centre. This was St Philip and St James, Hodge Hill – those church members originating in that congregation still called themselves ‘PJs’. The building suffered from design flaws, which resulted initially in significant energy/money being directed towards its maintenance, and, finally, its demolition as nobody would insure it. The previous minister also left at this time, leading to a sense of dislocation amongst the congregation, described by the current minister as a sense of exile, and indeed frustration amongst the wider community. However, it opened a space where the mission of the church might be re-evaluated.

Upon his arrival, the new Anglican minister Al Barrett encouraged the church to engage in a community consultation/learning process - Know Your Church, Know Your Neighbourhood[19] – during which the church researched and reflected on the community and its needs, but also its gifts and potential. This resulted in the church hosting an award ceremony for local residents to recognise ‘Hodge Hill Unsung Heroes’. The awards were not just a way of ‘getting out into the community’, but rather an exercise in gratitude and thankfulness – recognizing the gifts and the generosity of those in the community – and reminding people that the Hodge Hill was more than just a place ‘with issues’.

This process of listening and reflection resulted in a new vision - Growing Loving Community (by which they didn’t just mean the community of Hodge Hill Church, but the community of Hodge Hill in general). With the old multi-purpose community centre/church building having been in the more affluent end of the parish, the work of the church refocused on the Firs and Bromford housing estates and was shaped by asset-based community development.[20] This attitude now infuses much of what the church does, and frames the way in which the minister and congregation act in partnership and relationship with others, regardless of their faith position. Indeed, the line between the activity of the church and the activity of the residents was consciously blurred – most notably in the Community Passion Play.[21] The church was still ‘exiled’ in the sense of not owning its own space on the estate, but it was actively “seeking the welfare” of the place in which it found itself.

The church is engaged in all sorts of practical caring initiatives – job clubs, foodbanks and so on. Again, the area had been identified for a Big Local grant, and members of the church are heavily involved in the consultation process to identify local priorities. But much of the church’s work now centres around creating association between disparate communities, with the Near Neighbours worker running successful bread making sessions in local schools, or simply between neighbours, as in the Hodge Hill Cuppa.

CASE STUDIES 1–4

CAMBORNE PARISH CHURCH

The Camborne-Redruth urban area has a population of around 40,000, making it the largest conurbation in Cornwall. Camborne itself sits on the western edge of this conurbation.

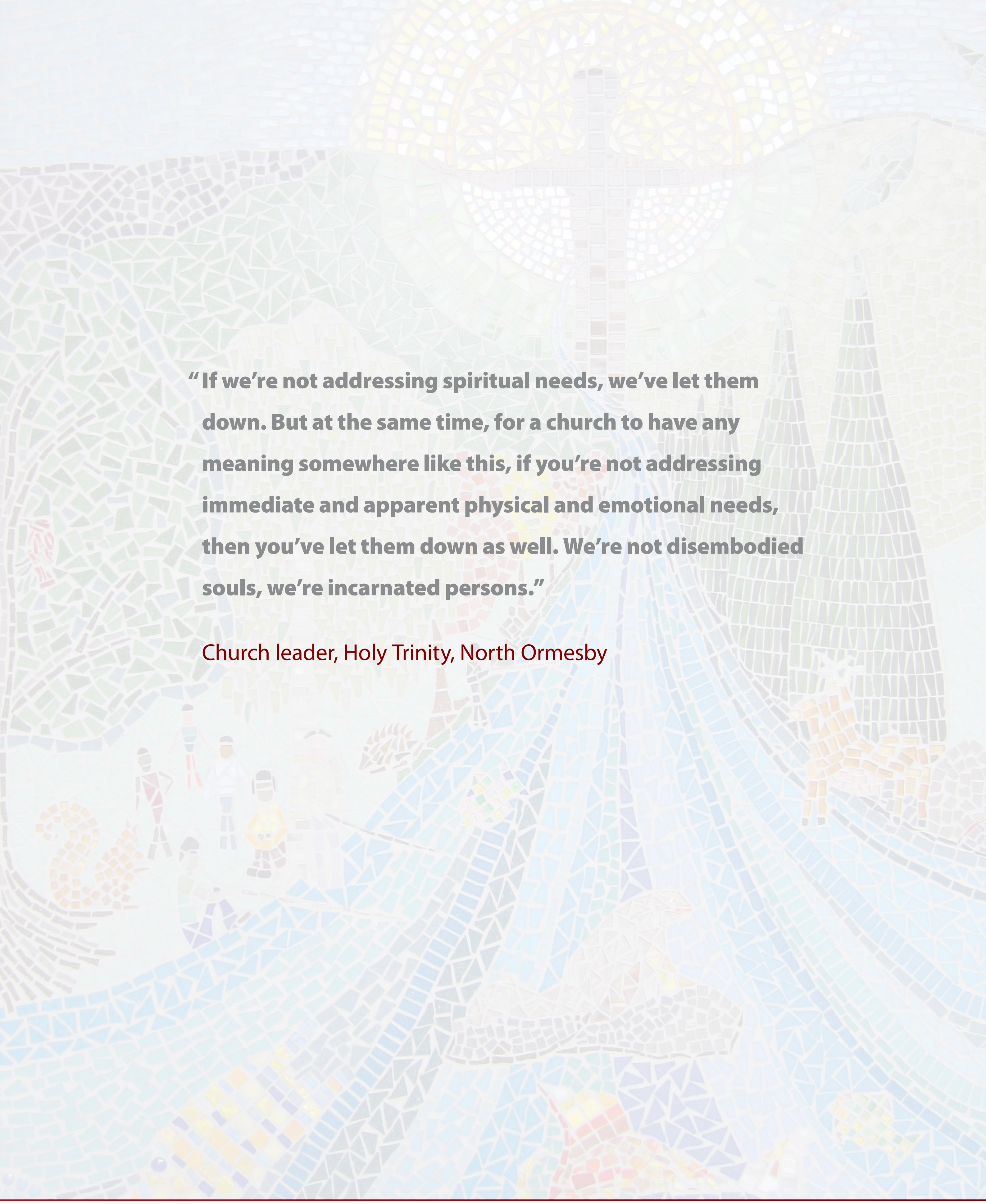
It has a rural feel, and incomers speak of the friendliness of the area, but it suffers from many of the problems that are more readily associated with post-industrial towns. CompAir Holman, traditionally the largest employer in the area, closed its last Camborne workshop in 2003, just over 200 years after its foundation. High value manufacturing jobs have been replaced by retail work, often with zero hour contracts. Tesco is now the largest employer in Camborne, and occupies one of the old CompAir Holman sites, symbolising the economic change the area has experienced. Camborne is set a few miles back from the coast and not particularly well-positioned as a tourist base. Four wards to the north and west of the centre exhibit particularly high levels of deprivation.

There are around 140 people on the parish electoral roll of Camborne Church. The church buildings – the main church, with a church hall extension, the Parish Vestry Room, and a meeting room – sit at the western end of Camborne's high street, and towards the western edge of the town. Interviewees reported numerical/generational decline in the church attendance, in line with the national picture, but also a sense that the church, although smaller, was healthier – more open, inclusive and hospitable. A part of the congregation was actively pursuing opportunities to serve vulnerable people in the wider community, be that the street drinking community, the elderly, or others who were in some way isolated. Key activities included support for the regional Foodbank, a Breakfast Club for the homeless community and the DISC Café – a drop in centre, open 20 hours a week, providing support and signposting for a variety of vulnerable adults, including the local homeless community.[22]

The church was galvanised not just by a generic humanitarian impulse, but also through their own experience of loss or struggle or financial hardship. For example, a volunteer running the breakfast club had herself been destitute and a recently widowed women had initiated a befriending scheme. The minister and some other members of the congregation saw part of their work as challenging what they saw as the town's prejudice against those in need, and would often emphasise the fragility of everyone's position - "there but for the grace of God". Indeed, there was a degree of local tension about Camborne's alleged reputation as a 'destination' for homeless people and a claim that support services were acting as a honeypot for needy adults.

One of Camborne's challenges was a relative lack of local civic leadership. Identifying trustees capable of providing good governance for local charities, for instance, had proven difficult. In one instance, a day centre/community centre had experienced a mass resignation, and was threatened with closure. The minister, Mike Firbank intervened, organized a public meeting held in Camborne Church, and the wider community acted to secure the centre's future with a new board of trustees. No other organization, said the relevant interviewee, would have had the social standing or clout.

The connections that the church would make between other third parties were significant. A couple of interviewees spoke admiringly of the way that he and his team "held things together". The specific examples given were the foodbank and agency coordination through the Homelessness Action Group (HAG), comprising local police, the town council, Cornwall Council, probation services, drug intervention projects, YMCA, and the staff of the DISC drop-in.



> "If we're not addressing spiritual needs, we've let them down. But at the same time, for a church to have any meaning somewhere like this, if you're not addressing immediate and apparent physical and emotional needs, then you've let them down as well. We're not disembodied souls, we're incarnated persons."
>
> Church leader, Holy Trinity, North Ormesby

2. HOW CHURCHES WORK

In chapter 1, we have documented something of the nature, extent and variety of church-based social action. We do not suggest that our case study churches offered services comparable in scale and scope to statutory provision. More often, they covered gaps or offered personalised empathetic alternatives to statutory provision. They also fostered neighbourliness. Churches can clearly be seen to be providing vital services and support to their communities; they really do provide a kind of social glue. This section will use the activities outlined in chapter 1 to show just how these churches become 'sticky' – what characterises the community activity of churches.

2.1. THEY DEVELOP NETWORKS OF COOPERATION

In the last section, we discussed the ways in which churches engaged in the work of neighbourliness – the platforms which they created for people to connect to each other and with services. Relationships sustained and amplified the work of the churches themselves.

Clergy and other staff spent a great deal of their time brokering and building relationships. They were described by interviewees as 'natural networkers', 'relationship brokers' and were seen as go-to people for other local leaders. One councillor said, "It can be quite a lonely task really – but if you want to bounce ideas off people, they're open to that as well. You know, I can just ring up." Sometimes those relationships were personal and pastoral but, more often, they were built around shared ideas and activities. It was clear that such relationships weren't inevitable – there had been 'other vicars' whom people had found more difficult to work with, or simply not as present – but trust was easier to build than perhaps it might be for other organisations. Churches were there to stay.

Churches seemed willing to work, as one interviewee in North Ormesby put it, with "anyone who had a shared ethos or values or a similar vision and purpose to what we're trying to achieve". As we've already seen, working closely with other Christian denominations, and other faith groups, did not pose a problem. In fact they were eager to do so. In one case study, the minister and church staff were seen as peace-makers between other local groups. One councillor said, "One of the things these guys do – I never could do this and still can't – is bring together all those warring factions, people who don't get on, they bring them together quite easily in a community facing way… sometimes that kind of thing is difficult to quantify."

Why did churches adopt this approach? Simply, churches knew that their own work could be limited in scale and scope, not least by their own expertise or sphere of responsibility. Whether it was working with housing associations, of which there were several, local schools, councillors or representatives of the local council, police officers, Sure Start workers, local businesses, community groups or other religious institutions, close partnerships resulted in greater coherence, more effective use of resources, and therefore greater impact. From the point of view of the partner, they might benefit in various ways – for example, the opportunities to use church buildings or the involvement of church volunteers. They also saw that, where their agency might have a technical responsibility – for instance, tenancy support – to discharge, the network of other personal and ongoing relationships the church could offer would increase the chances of positive outcomes for clients with a range of needs, including those around emotional and mental health. This was a kind of informal 'social prescribing'.[23]

There was also an issue of scale. Case study churches were beginning to think about how they could intervene across wider areas than a single parish. Christ Church, Norris Green in Liverpool had joined with two other parishes to launch a separate charity; others were participating in Church Urban Fund joint venture partnerships. Drivers included the fact that deprivation is entirely blind to parish boundaries, and some problems could only be faced at city or regional level. We return to this theme in the conclusion.

2.2. THEY'RE LOCAL

At first sight, the claim that these parish churches have a local focus is a statement of the obvious. By definition, parish churches serve those who reside in a geographical parish. In contrast to congregational traditions – which, in theory, serve whichever Baptists, Methodists, etc. become *members* of the church – parish churches, at least in theory again, exist to serve all within the parish – including with weddings, christenings and so on.

Though it serves a specific area, it's possible for a parish church to fail to consider the nature of the parish and the conditions in which the church serves. Our case study churches, however, were marked by their close attention to what is happening in their locality.[24]

At the beginning of each interview, we asked interviewees to describe their area. It was notable that clergy, key volunteers and church staff offered comprehensive answers 'off-the-cuff', which compared well and occasionally expanded upon those given by partners in the statutory or voluntary sector. They incorporated historical information about the area and the church, data on employment, deprivation or demographic changes, descriptions of geographical features, community perceptions, information about religious or civic or educational institutions, and their own biography and experience as well as that of residents. We have already noted that interviewees – particularly clergy – consciously sought to balance an area's 'issues' with its 'possibilities'. They also tended to look beyond immediate statistics of deprivation, alluding to ways in which even wealthier areas could be struggling in different ways. Ordinary residents were less likely to discuss the area at length, far more likely to say 'it's alright' even if followed with a 'but' – perhaps though a lack of confidence or a lack of interest as much as through a lack of knowledge!

This was particularly true of areas experiencing a degree of demographic change. Hodge Hill Church in the east Birmingham area had formalised a process of learning. Upon arrival, the incumbent priest, Al Barrett, first initiated conversations about the vision and mission of the church, but then encouraged members to participate in a 'Know Your Church, Know Your Neighbourhood' programme, a course designed by the Diocese of Birmingham and Church Urban Fund.

> [A church member] arrived at one session really excited, she'd got to use her computer and accessed the neighbourhood statistics website – she'd come with Indices of Multiple Deprivation and was really pleased she'd been able to do it… she was able to make sense clearly for the first time of something she's only really felt in a gut feel, anecdotal sort of way – that most of her neighbours that she'd lived with for years had changed. And most of her neighbours now were people who were quite different to her, Pakistani Mirpuri… It enabled us to ask questions around how we begin to relate to those new neighbours.

Through the programme, the church also uncovered a changing employment landscape and a lack of community hubs. As well as this, they identified stories of people's generosity and compassion, which they wanted to celebrate, of which, more below.

For other case study churches, this local knowledge was more implicit. Community projects themselves often served the purpose of gathering information – as the church encountered people using one service, they would frequently discover other needs to which the church would feel called to respond. This extended to identifying specific families in need of extra support. In one instance, a church fed a family of eight for six weeks over the summer holiday, as various family traumas including unemployment and mental illness coincided with school holidays, when children didn't get a free school meal. Details of the family's circumstances emerged almost by accident when one of the family children attended the church youth group. This was local knowledge and engagement at its most granular.

All this enabled churches to respond in bespoke ways to the outcomes of large-scale, social, economic or political change. Contrary to the popular perceptions of religious institutions, the clergy emphasised the ability to respond to what they found in front of them. One minister spoke of the need for clergymen and women to function as change-managers.

> They were training us to be change-managers. There was a constant thread throughout all my training of the missionary nature of God and our need to be constantly on our toes, that there was no kind of settledness in us, so that we needed to wrap ourselves around whatever the situational need was.

2.3. THEY OFFER LEADERSHIP

While some areas, in spite of relative deprivation, were well populated with civic actors, others were not. Interviewees spoke about an absence of local leadership and institutions. More than one interviewee in Camborne spoke of a "brain drain". In other case studies, interviewees speculated that the problem lay simply with low levels of confidence, skills, or civic trust. One practical negative outcome was low levels of governance in some local charities. Churches plugged the civic gap. They did this, first of all, by providing civic leadership in their own right and, second, by encouraging and supporting others as they did the same.

Civic leadership from the church

Clergy and other leaders - clergy partners often took a central role - were highly regarded in their wider community, among both residents and other 'professionals'. A minister, of course, is a professional and a resident. They were variously described as 'walking the talk', 'visionaries', 'adventurous', 'very inspirational', having 'transformed' a congregation, being uniquely able to 'bring people together', as a 'natural networker' and 'broker of relationships'.

What did this mean in practice? Four of the areas served by our case study churches - North Ormesby, Hodge Hill, Woodhouse Close, and Farnborough - had been identified by the Big Lottery for Big Local grants.[25] More than one interviewee was equivocal about the process, fearing it had the potential to divide rather than unite the community and that, should the church be perceived to be trying to control the money, it would damage the fragile trust that the church had built with residents.

In three of these areas, however, the church was nonetheless heavily involved in the process. In one, the minister was chairing the committee that would administer the community consultation processes. We attended an early meeting of the group. In another, members of the church had been involved in training 'community researchers' who would identify local need and target spending. Churches were not the only agencies involved, but it was clear that they were providing a considerable proportion of the manpower and expertise. In the fourth area, where the church was not involved in the administration of the grant, one interviewee, who was not connected with the church, noted how, in spite of the £1 million grant, there had been considerable difficulties in drawing together the requisite number of local volunteers to stand on the committee. There was no culture of volunteering or organising in the local estates. This contrasted markedly with the church which, although operating on a shoe-string by comparison, could muster five times as many volunteers every week.

The equivocal approach to the Big Local grant making process hints at an irony and a difficulty for some of the case study churches. How can churches which are, as we have said, one of the few stable non-state institutions in areas of high deprivation, offer leadership yet avoid being seen as the establishment – institutions with assets, finance and, above all, power? For those that were concerned about this, the answer was threefold. First, they had to build local trust through persistent care and service for the area. Second, they had to work with others wherever possible (more below). Third, unlike many service professionals, they were residents, as dependent as everyone else on local amenities and services, with their children attending local schools – they're both visibly present, and more accessible. One interviewee, a community organiser, spoke of leadership being rooted in the community.

> The role of a vicar is a particular type of leadership, a particular example of leadership, which you don't see so much in other spheres – in the state or in business. It comes from serving people and giving to others and being connected and in relationship with people. So rather than being inaccessible, you're accessible… The vicar is constantly making themselves available to people, relating to people and meeting people individually.

Paradoxically, the kind of rooted and relational leadership valued by the interviewee above was at risk of being lost. One member of the clergy, when asked how much time she spent on fundraising, simply said "too much" and suggested that ministers were increasingly obliged to act as CEOs rather than pastors. Interviewees in a number of the case studies, particularly those where the vicar was more or less the only member of staff, or where he or she had brought about significant change in the congregation, were concerned at the prospect that the minister might one day leave.

Building agency

Research suggests that one of the things that people in deprived communities lack, above and beyond material goods, is confidence in civic participation. For instance, it is clear that levels of volunteering positively correlate to income.

One of the ways in which some of the case study churches were 'pushing the envelope' beyond simple provision of material support was the building of confidence and capacity in those around them. Indeed, in an area which was noted for its lack of local leadership, encouraging public participation was a clear goal for the minister. Asked what he saw as success, the minister replied "if I had 20 Sylvias". Silvia is a pensioner who was running a breakfast club serving the local homeless community.

It's widely accepted that churches are the kind of institutions that motivate high levels of volunteering. This was true of our case study congregations. Of course, most churches depend on a group of lay volunteers to facilitate their day-to-day operation: lay readers, church wardens, 'ministry leaders', and so on. In the case study churches, such lay leaders rarely confined themselves to such church-facing activities – they were often to be found assisting with wider community projects.

In several cases, churches also attracted volunteers with no faith – people of good will, who spoke of 'wanting to give something back', or similar . There were also a number of stories of 'recycled' volunteers, as one church member put it. These were people who might have come into contact with a church foodbank or some other form of support, and been helped to find their feet, who would then begin to volunteer themselves. They were not seen simply as 'clients' or 'service users', with whom there was no prospect of an ongoing relationship, but as possible participants.

However, building levels of confidence and capacity was intensive work. Complex emotional, material, psychological or spiritual needs often stood in the way. In most cases, projects were still run by members of staff, or motivated and skilled volunteers who had come into the area. Where local leadership was being built, the art seemed to be in finding ways of identifying people with whom the church could work, supporting and encouraging them and opening up opportunities. In Hodge Hill, the church asked the local community to nominate 'Hodge Hill Unsung Heroes', and nominees were recognised publicly at an award ceremony. During the ceremony itself, people were asked what community initiative they would like to start if they had the chance, with a view to connecting up those with similar interests. A local resident – one of the 'unsung heroes' – wanted to start a theatre group. He was able to do so, supported by a small grant from the church. The minister built a close relationship with the theatre group's Director and his partner, collaborating with them on productions - such as the Community Passion Play - and a range of other community activities.

2.4. CREATING AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC SPACES

The social significance of the buildings owned by churches, and other faith groups, has long been recognised.[26] They are seen as being an advantage, yet also problematic – they provide a platform for projects and public engagement, yet they may be difficult and expensive to maintain, even when the lead is not stolen from the roof, as it had been in at least one case study.

Some of the case study churches operated on a classic, centre-based model of community engagement. For instance, the parish centre at St Thomas' Church served as a 'hub' for local activities with both religious services but also social and community service groups - healthy eating courses, parenting courses, a work club drop-in centre, a youth club, uniformed organisations and so on. Holy Trinity, North Ormesby, Woodhouse Close Church, the Trinity Centre in Louth and the Church of the Good Shepherd in Farnborough all had similar facilities which provided a platform for serving their wider community. However, all our case study churches had interesting stories around buildings, and how these acted as a catalyst for community engagement, or indeed as a catalyst for a lack of community engagement where they had drawn the attention, time and money of the church inward. None of the churches we visited was indifferent to physical space, and even those without it, or much of it, were acutely aware of the importance of physical spaces and places of meeting.

It is undoubtedly true that buildings can be problematic. St Stephen's, West Bowling, as we have already observed, had significant problems with their main church building. Hodge Hill Church had lost a badly designed but dearly loved and well used community centre/church. St Peter's, Kineton was part of a rural benefice including six church buildings, several of which required a heavy investment of both time and money. Christ Church, Norris Green had been forced to demolish an old church building in a poor state of repair. Changes in building often refocused or, in fact, completely altered the community activity and impact of the church. The Parish of Louth and the Church of the Good Shepherd in Farnborough had both lost buildings - in the former case to fire, in the latter to subsidence- which had then been replaced by multi-purpose community centres, which then became the venue for significant community activities (see case studies). Christ Church, Norris Green began to meet for worship in a local school, but developed the old vicarage into a community centre. Two churches - Hodge Hill Church and St Peter's, Bethnal Green - were actively seeking to acquire new space or expand the physical space available to them.

In spite of perceptions about religious buildings, it was not the case that the primary use of the buildings was for services for the benefit of members of the church itself. One project worker, however, employed by a church community project but without a faith himself, strongly felt that parishioners were so protective of the fabric of the community centre that they were failing in their mission to the poor: "they love the building more than the love God or Jesus". In fact, the community centres themselves were hardly used for explicitly religious services. Church interviewees expressed a desire that the centres should be places where people felt comfortable and welcome. This placed constraints on what should and should not be done in those spaces. It may have been the case that, where there was a church and a community centre, the churches themselves remained comparatively unused on a normal weekday, though this was more a matter of suitability than a feeling that the spaces were necessarily set aside for religious use. Equally, where there was no centre - as at St Peter's, Kineton - the church/sanctuary itself was the venue for the community activity.

Three further things emerge here. First, a good community centre could be a source of income, making the multi-use community centre an attractive model for community engagement. If commercial clients could be attracted to the centre for meetings, a centre could go some way to meeting its own costs.

Second, physical assets were a way for churches to express the worth that they attached to the wider community. One interviewee in North Ormesby argued that the quality and aesthetic of the building made the point that the community had value – that it deserved a high quality and well maintained building, not just a "utilitarian box". The Centre, she suggested, had made people feel "posh". Other interviewees suggested that the Trinity Centre had attracted Middlesbrough Council and Tees Valley Housing to invest considerably in housing development on a site adjacent to the Centre.[27]

Third, these spaces were more than generic community centres bolted onto churches. Rather, they were shaped and bound by the value and virtues of hospitality. As we have said, they were used in a different way from worshipping spaces; they were not really used for acts of worship, and some interviewees were cautious to the point of anxiousness about not alienating people by being perceived to be proselytising or 'preachy'. This, however, did not make them secular. Rather, their religiousness was expressed in the high value attached to welcome and hospitality.

In summary of this chapter, we observed that church-based community projects have four important features. First, they are nearly always developed, delivered or informed by the fabric of local networks and relationships. Second, the work of churches was attuned to local needs and attentive to local dynamics. Third, they relied on the leadership offered by local clergy, but that leadership is considered to be different in nature to other institutions. Churches are also attentive to the need to build agency and confidence in others. Finally, the work of churches was often determined by the ways in which they used public spaces, be they churches, church halls or green spaces.

CASE STUDIES 5-8

ST PETER'S, BETHNAL GREEN

Bethnal Green constitutes two wards in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets. In a borough which also includes Canary Wharf, Brick Lane and parts of Shoreditch and Haggerston, there is something of a sense of it having been left behind. However, good transport links - it sits on several major commuter routes into the City - and, until recently, relatively low property prices have encouraged a significant influx of younger professionals and a corresponding gentrification. A frequent comment in interviews with older residents was a perception of the area as being 'on the up'. There has been a significant inflow of new owners and private rental occupiers who have changed the economic and social profile of the area. The extremes in income and living standards across the area nonetheless remain.

The word which came up most frequently in interviews to describe the area was "diverse". ONS (Office of National Statistics) 2006 population estimates have 56% of the population in Tower Hamlets belonging to an ethnic group other than white British with 30% being of Bangladeshi origin and 8% from other white backgrounds. In the 2011 census, only 31% of the population were white British. More than 150 languages are spoken in Tower Hamlets and community organizers estimate a similar number for Bethnal Green itself. Compared to national figures, Tower Hamlet's population is also unusually young and transient.

The church was built in 1841, one of a number of similar churches built within a decade to serve the rapidly expanding population of East London. Despite having a large institutional building - though not a church with capacity for more than 150 people and a separate church hall, it is not the most visible of churches. Hidden away from the nearby main roads, it is surrounded on all sides by large social housing estates. Its location is not entirely disadvantageous, however, since it serves as a clear focal point for those estates, one of which is named St Peter's after the church. It has a garden area which, reportedly, was totally overgrown and once used extensively for drug deals, but has since been reclaimed, and now contains an ornamental and vegetable garden.

Most of St Peter's local sister churches from the same era have closed. By the early 2000s, the congregation had dwindled to only a few (maximum of 20), elderly members and when the previous vicar departed it was expected that St Peter's might close. A fight by members of the parish kept it alive, if not in a terribly healthy state, with an Anglican sister as the part-time Priest-in-charge.

The current vicar, Adam Atkinson, was originally using the unoccupied vicarage while serving as a curate in Shadwell. Eventually, he led an "infusion" from St Paul's, Shadwell which brought a group of about 20 people to partner with the existing congregation. There are now two services most Sunday mornings, one Eucharistic and liturgical, rooted in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, and the other which grew from the Charismatic Evangelical background most familiar to those initially leading the new partnership. People go to both services and, every month, everyone from the two congregations worships together in what styles itself as a cross-tradition Communion.

With a diverse congregation, today numbering about 90 on any given Sunday, the church is involved in a large number of projects. In particular, the Church is a member of TELCO, and deeply involved in the practices of community organising. The church promotes the City Safe scheme to help tackle gang violence, runs youth programmes, and attempts to counter food poverty through involvements in foodbanks, "bring and share" meals, growing food and a pop-up café. There is a youth programme – and youth worker – in place though, for whatever reason, the current youth programme seems primarily to attract teenage boys.

St Peter's is also developing ambitious plans for the future, particularly looking to address the issues of housing - they have been in conversations with local housing associations and have helped put together a housing bond for community workers - and employment, particularly via social enterprise schemes. Central to the latter commitment is the ambitious plan to develop the church and hall into multi-purpose venues which would include space for social enterprise activity and community space. 'Reclaiming' the streets is an important theme of their engagement and there have been activities like prayer walks and plays in the nearby park in an effort to win them back from drug dealers and criminals.

The situation is not without difficulties. The financial and human sustainability of all the different levels of engagement is a major concern. The sheer amount of energy and work expected of volunteers also runs the very real risk of burnout, something which is increasingly being recognized and addressed. The crypt re-development is seen as crucial to the future plans and sustainability but, at present, the necessary funding has not been secured.

Wider perceptions of the church in the community are extremely positive, with one partner agency bluntly observing that the infusion made a difference not just in terms of the sustainability of the church, but in bringing in people with a higher level of skills and a greater capacity to realise projects. Again, the minister and wider staff team were seen as proactive and engaging.

CASE STUDIES 5-8

ST PETER'S, KINETON

St Peter's, Kineton is the main church in the Edgehill Benefice, comprising six churches in rural Warwickshire, between Banbury and Stratford-upon-Avon.

Kineton itself is the major settlement in the area, with just under 4,000 residents. Unlike our other case studies, Kineton is a largely prosperous and ethnically homogenous settlement. In terms of employment, the village increasingly serves as a commuter dormitory for Banbury, Stratford-upon-Avon, Royal Leamington Spa and even London, although there are thriving small businesses in the area. Agriculture and farming looms large in the consciousness of the area. However, it includes two social housing estates, built specifically to house the travelling community. The people on these estates, and in Kineton in general, suffer from particular problems around a higher than average cost of living - being off gas supply, having difficulty accessing services readily available in larger towns, food costs etc.

The current minister, the Rev. Barry Jackson, had trained in an urban parish in South Leamington and had felt called into urban ministry. As a community minded curate on the look-out for a post, he was initially cautious about the prospect of serving in the largely rural parishes of Edgehill, and could only see the difficulty of working with six ancient churches with no decent facilities. He reports a sense of being spoken to by God – "it's nothing to do with the buildings, what do you think of the people?" On arrival, he was surprised by the level of social need in the area. He particularly referenced single men as a group that was struggling locally. There were services, support and provision for young families, but none for single men.

He spoke of finding a latent desire in the church to connect to different parts of the community – the church was already running a coffee morning and working with the local primary schools. Partly because of financial problems, much engagement was focused on the buildings, church services and fundraising concerts. After cancelling a Sunday service in order to get the congregation to clear the gardens of some of vulnerable local residents, the church began to develop a greater appetite for community action.

The benefice now describes its mission as 'loving God, serving others and growing community'. St Peter's itself is part of or runs several community facing projects – for example, a small but growing foodbank, with the food distributed from the church, a CAP money course, and a lunch club for elderly residents. They are also looking to install computers and a broadband connection in the main church building, providing internet access for residents who are looking for work or to access benefits. Beyond this, the church has developed a series of informal but generative partnerships with other local organisations, the most significant with a local housing association, but also with a local school and a SureStart Centre. What was most significant was the church's ability to provide people and a place for gathering. Both the housing association and the SureStart Centre took advantage of the way the church 'Meeting Point' coffee mornings would draw people from the social housing estates. Here, they could connect to their own client groups and pick up on particular support needs.

CASE STUDIES 5-8

WOODHOUSE CLOSE CHURCH

Woodhouse Close sits about a mile to the south west of Bishop Auckland town centre, and was built to house residents of housing clearances in the area. According to older interviewees, people were originally enticed to Woodhouse Close not only by the promise of new housing but also of economic development. The jobs, however, never materialised. The area is the most deprived in the local authority area, and Woodhouse Close Central is the 102nd most deprived ward in the country, according to the 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation. At the time of writing, unemployment sits at 7.5%, compared to the national average of 2.9%.

The church is a Methodist/Anglican local ecumenical partnership, though the building was initially built as a Methodist Church, opening as the estate was still filling in 1961. The location and history of the building meant that residents readily identified the church as belonging to them and the estate. Interviewees commented on the 'open door' policy of the church – the building is open six days a week, and personnel are very accessible. Others said that it was significant that the worshipping space and community centre were linked by a common corridor, indicating the deep connection between the worshipping life of the church and its community impact.

Woodhouse Close Church and Community Centre host a range of activities, reflecting "our mission in the community from birth to adulthood… we always try to be responsive to need". They operate a thrift shop in which donated items are sold at low cost, the church also supplying household goods in emergency situations, a furniture project collecting and selling furniture at low cost, access to N.E. First Credit Union, and they provide crisis response packs as well as signposting to other agencies. They also host a range of community groups – playgroups, a young people's theatre company, lunch clubs for older people, community hairdressing and more. Though the church is both relatively small and relatively old, it maintains a large base of volunteers. The centre manager reported that she relies on about 60 volunteers for the weekly running of the community centre, drawn from Woodhouse Close and Woodhouse Close Church, but also other churches in the Bishop Auckland area.

As with other case studies, specific personnel stood out as key players in the church's impact, building on what interviewees described as years of work by both clergy and development workers. Interviewees mentioned Rev. Brenda Jones as being a significant part of why the church is so well connected in its community. One interviewee described her as being a vicar who spends more time out in the community than in the church. A series of centre managers had also been crucial in mediating the church's welcome to the community, being the first face people saw when they walked into the centre. The clergy and staff were well connected with local community members and partner organizations, and were regularly described by others as having an outward facing and accessible approach. Residents we spoke to also trusted the clergy, staff and members of the church, describing them as welcoming, authentic, non-judgmental, and not overtly 'evangelical' in message or overtly religious in their aesthetic.

Woodhouse Close Church faced two challenges – one internal, and one external – both of which threatened the sustainability of their work in the community. The internal challenge was that the congregation, though highly committed, was ageing. The task of sustaining the existing level of community activity was dependent on the church's ability to attract and develop new volunteers with the same level of commitment and time. The external challenge was accessing sufficient funding. There was a feeling that, in the past, it had been relatively easy to raise support through grants and that those grants that were available were not so outcome focused. Interviewees suggested that funding sources seemed to be drying up.

CASE STUDIES 5-8

CHRIST CHURCH, NORRIS GREEN

There has been a church at Christ Church, Norris Green since the estate was first developed in the late 1920s/early 1930s. Although once a thriving congregation serving the area, by the early decades of the 21st century a small congregation of 15 was meeting in a very large, semi-derelict church building. A vicar had even been attacked in front of the church and hospitalised. Rev Helen Edwards arrived in 2005 and calculated that the building needed £0.5 million spending on it to make it safe and usable. The church relocated to a local school, and was forced to request a special faculty for the building's demolition after arson attacks and acts of vandalism.

Norris Green is not only one of the most deprived areas in Liverpool, but it's among the most deprived nationally. Almost a quarter – 22.2%, or some 3,400 residents in the Norris Green Ward – fall into the most deprived 1% of neighbourhoods nationally. It has particularly high levels of single parent households, child poverty, and household income is significantly below the national average.

The congregation moved to a local community primary school and most of the land on which the church had stood was sold to Cobalt Housing, a local housing association, who built some much-needed smaller houses on the plot and a large new vicarage. The old vicarage was then developed into a church community centre comprising offices, meeting rooms and a community garden.

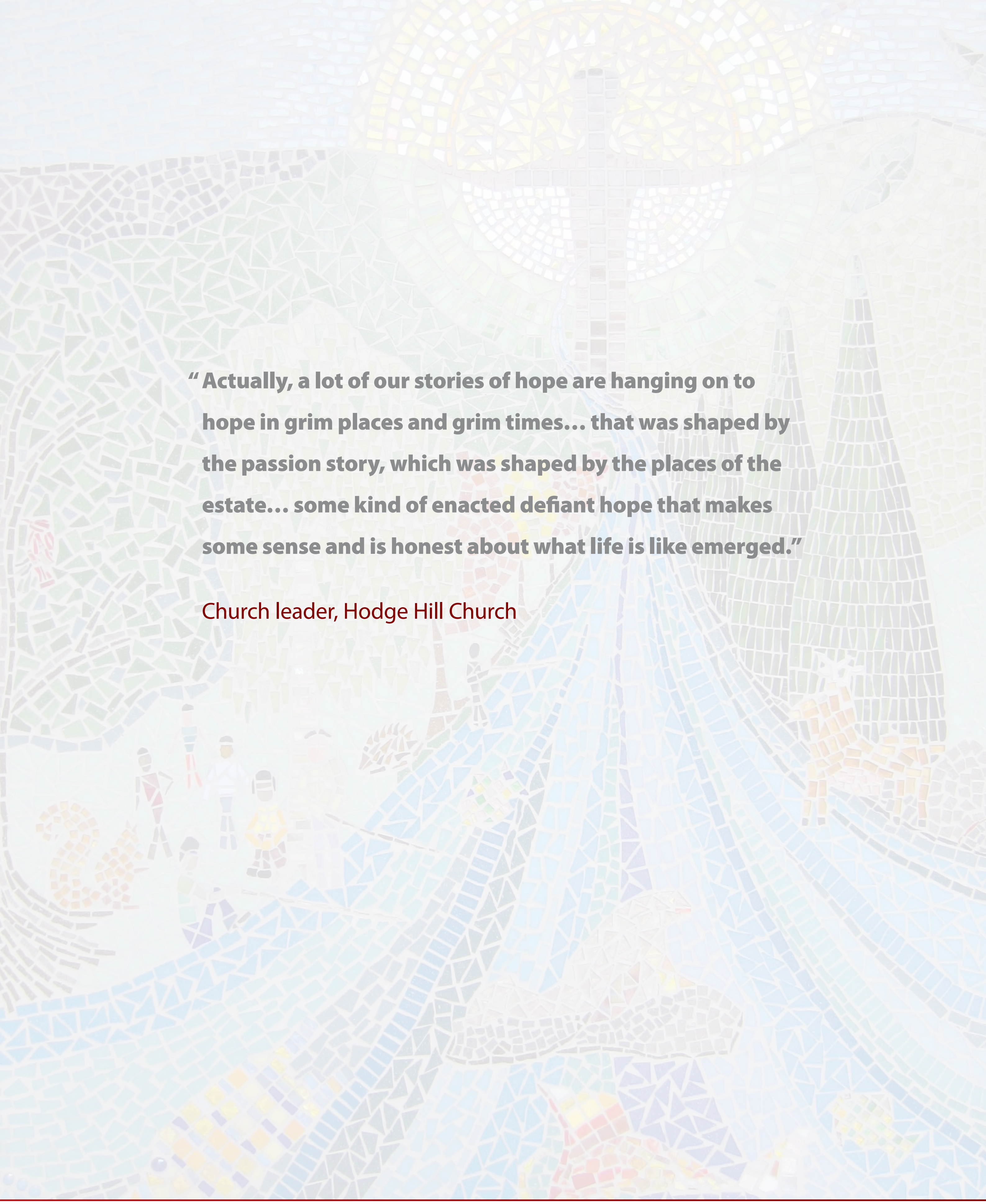
Christ Church, Norris Green has grown since its move into the primary school. The congregation is reflective of the area in its socio-economic and racial make-up: it is predominantly white, has a relatively high level of unemployment and a significant proportion are retired people, although young families are also a visible feature in the church. Even those in work tend to be engaged in short-term, low-skilled and insecure employment. A particular feature of Christ Church, Norris Green was that many people in the area, and in the church itself, faced mental health problems, including schizophrenia, several had personality disorders and large numbers suffered from depression and anxiety.

During the week, a variety of community activities take place, often based in the community centre. Many of these activities are run as part of Triple C (Liverpool), the local community charity set up by Christ Church in partnership with two other local churches, the Good Shepherd and St Christopher's, to meet local need. Triple C employs a children and family worker, an older person's worker, a deanery youth worker and a support and development worker. A significant number of volunteers come from Christ Church, Norris Green. Triple C (Liverpool) has responsibility for the shared debt advice centre and foodbank and supports a child contact centre here, which provides a safe and welcoming environment for estranged parents to meet with children. Many project volunteers definitely did not identify as members of the church.

CASE STUDIES 5-8

Christ Church/Triple C have three youth groups meeting weekly: the preschool group attracting 12 regulars with 30 registered and meeting once a week, a group for 5 to 8 year-olds attracting about 15 children, and then a group for 9 to 11 year-olds with a similar number. The older children would meet for a meal; the Children and Family worker observed that this helped them learn simple skills such as cooking and laying a table. Beyond this, Showstoppers ("a bit like messy Church") would meet once every half term in two local primary schools. It includes songs and games and parents have to come with the children, so it is a way of creating quality family time and engaging the parents. During the summer holidays, the church runs a three-week playscheme, hosting up to 90 children a day and organising day trips to the coast. Lots of volunteers from the local community who are not regularly involved in church help out. They see nearly 200 children over the three weeks.

Christ Church is clearly a highly respected and a very central partner for other community organisations. There was a sense that, until the development of the Norris Green Community Alliance, there was "no alternative" – that Christ Church and Triple C were the only major community actors actually based in Norris Green.



> "Actually, a lot of our stories of hope are hanging on to hope in grim places and grim times… that was shaped by the passion story, which was shaped by the places of the estate… some kind of enacted defiant hope that makes some sense and is honest about what life is like emerged."
>
> Church leader, Hodge Hill Church

3. WHY CHURCHES SERVE

We have set out what churches are doing in deprived communities above, and then asked whether they work in distinctive ways. We have argued that churches are deeply attentive to their local context, they offer and build leadership and that they are particularly good at creating and sustaining hospitable public spaces. They also develop networks of people – with or without faith – that are prepared to engage in work towards the common good. This research does not claim to be able to answer the question of whether or not churches were unique in these respects. We can only say that our case study churches were all, in spite of their different contexts, disposed to work in these kinds of ways.

We also found that when churches engage in the kinds of public activity discussed above, they do so *as churches* – institutions with distinctive ideas, commitments, practices and limitations. What are these ideas and practices, and how are they significant for understanding the activities of local churches? As part of this research, we looked for insights into what shaped and motivated our case study churches to act in the ways they do.

Why is it important to explore the motivation of churches? Political rhetoric approves and encourages faith-based community activity where it conforms to a generic religious humanitarianism, where 'at their heart' all religions express the same ethical vision. Where other motivations are screened out, there is a possibility that the churches' witness and pastoral activity will be undermined, and the faithful may be left "little reason to devote their lives to Christian discipleship necessary to sustain the work".[28] Churches might also be misunderstood, and attempts made to graft together their activities with state services in inappropriate ways. Underlying theological assumptions will determine the way in which faith-based projects or religious volunteers think about and relate to other agencies – how would volunteers of a church-based work club react to the idea that job seekers might be sanctioned if they failed to attend their project?

Not all interviewees would launch into expositions of public or practical theology to unpack their motivations. Many volunteers just wanted to 'give something back' to the community, while others were motivated by a personal experience of hardship – the church had been there for them, and they wanted to make sure that the church could continue to be there for others. For others – usually clergy – explicit theological reasons were near front and centre of their explanation of what they were doing, although even here there were no hard and fast barriers between different ways of thinking about the world. It was clear that they, and a small number of other leaders/congregants, held and articulated the mission and theological identity of the church, sometimes in direct conflict with other ideas about what the church was for.

This complex picture which emerged from interviews cannot be explained by the proposal that their Christian beliefs led to Christian actions. A more realistic approach could be to suggest that being part of a Christian community, engaging in Christian acts of worship, reflecting on these in explicitly theological terms, and having a number of religious connections cumulatively encourages forms of Christian social engagement. We discuss these in greater depth below.

3.1. THE BARRIERS BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PUBLIC, SACRED AND SECULAR, ARE PERMEABLE

Theologian Luke Bretherton has observed that the early church was a social body that included aspects of life from the personal-household and the public-political spaces, the *oikos* and the *polis*.[29] This, he argues, continues to have radical implications: it creates a form of solidarity that is simultaneously personal and public, rooted in the religious community but with the potential to spill beyond it, most obviously in the command to love neighbours. This is at the root of the Christian concern for the welfare of 'the city', expressed in different ways in Catholic Social Teaching and Anglican social thinking, amongst other traditions.

This is clearly not just 'theology', in the sense of disciplined academic reflection on the history and teaching of the Church, but is also embedded in the practices of real churches. Relational language and metaphors abounded, and they were readily transferred into what would usually be thought of as different categories. A statement might start as 'theological', but blend into a statement which was more 'social', or vice versa. As one leader at St Stephen's, West Bowling said: "There is community all the way through the Bible, and it's all about relationships. The Church is about people, it's about relationships. And a place like [this] has lost its community... And I think people are just desperate for it." You would hear the same from the other end of the spectrum – as one resident of West Bowling put it repeatedly "For me, it's the family I never had. 'Cause like I say, when I came here in '98, I chose to move and I left everybody behind... All these are my church family… It's like I'm in my family each day."

Through the churches, the personal struggles of members of the congregation and others in the community become public, not because churches are politically partisan but because the Church is prevented from gathering for the Eucharist – in Sam Wells' term, becoming companions – and yet being indifferent to their physical and material condition. Those who are rarely recognised as having public claims worth recognising – the unemployed, the poorly paid, children and the young – are part of a public institution, and their claims begin to filter into the public square. This was most obviously the case in churches that were involved in community organising, a practice which includes the presentation of personal testimonies to public officials in an effort to create tensions and force change.

Conversely, when the church is understood both as *oikos* and *polis*, worship itself can have a kind of political meaning. Earlier, we saw how churches working in contexts where there were intergenerational tensions or problems with gang violence consciously encouraged young people to take leadership roles in the worshipping life of the church. This was a conscious act of formation, acknowledging the necessity, capacity, and expectation that young people were the future of both the church and the wider community. It was therefore also a 'public' act, responding to the local politics of generational relations which conceived young people as part of the problem.

There were differences in how these theological commitments were framed or applied – naturally, given the variety of contexts. Ironically – given that these were Anglican churches – some adopted a kind of 'post-Christendom' stance, whereas others were more disposed to emphasise the longevity, rootedness, stability and centrality of the parish that went beyond anything that the state could offer.

3.2. CHURCHES BELIEVE THAT GOOD RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE MEANS AND THE END

Around half the case study churches had explicit mission statements. They spoke about the 'vertical' relationship between the churches/individuals and God, but also about the 'horizontal', social relationships with others. St Peter's, Bethnal Green saw itself as a place where people should "worship God, make friends and change the world", while St Peter's, Kineton's was "loving God, serving people, growing community". Vision statements like these hint at the way that our churches saw their universe in three relational dimensions. The absence of relationship in any of these dimensions was a problem. They aspired to deepen relationships in each and, in their outward focus, were constantly calibrating their activity against the language of welcome and hospitality – simultaneously acknowledging that they were strangers to many, but highlighting their moral responsibility to the other.

Was there a sense that talk of 'making friends' and 'growing community' was basically indicative of a desire to evangelise or proselytise project beneficiaries? No – the case study churches were, naturally, interested in their own numerical growth. From the perspective of the survival of each and every congregation, growth was non-negotiable. It was "the norm of anything organic". However, it was not the only condition of their survival – one minister spoke of needing lay leaders who were disciples, not just "people who wanted to keep a church going". If they were not, the church would "fizzle out" anyway. The task, therefore, was both to broaden and to 'deepen' the church - in some ways the latter task was harder. By extension, as two elderly interviewees in Camborne noted, the church was much smaller now than in their youth, but a smaller church may be healthier – more hospitable, open and generous.

The relationship between community activity and evangelism was therefore an attenuated one, about which churches and community workers were thoughtful and cautious. In fact, churches were conscious that trust in the wider community could be easily destroyed if there was any hint that social activity was merely a cover for evangelism. If strings were attached, said one community worker, word would get round pretty quickly. "I'm not going to coerce them in," said one minister, "If it happens, if it's a natural process, if it's about people sharing of themselves and of their faith, that's great. There's no trickery, there's no deceit about it, no ulterior motive. It's brilliant if they do, sad if they don't, but there's no coercion." For a church to be authentic to its context, it had no choice but to keep hold of the spiritual and community aspects of its work. "If we're not addressing spiritual needs, we've let them down. But at the same time, for a church to have any meaning somewhere like this, if you're not addressing immediate and apparent physical and emotional needs, then you've let them down as well. We're not disembodied souls, we're incarnated persons."

There are two ways to misunderstand the relationship between the worshipping life of churches and their efforts to grow community. The first risk is that we do not recognise that churches are capable of acting in different registers, in imagining that they are always evangelising, incapable of speaking in non-theological terms or incapable of working meaningfully and intelligibly with statutory institutions or secular partners. The second risk is that we apply artificial or theoretical categories, that there are two obvious categories labelled 'sacred' and 'secular', or 'church' and 'community', in which people or projects could be automatically slotted. On several occasions, residents attending a session would say that they were 'going to church'. They felt that when they encountered it on a social or project level, it was still something called 'church'. They were participating in the life of this community, drawing from it and in many cases giving to it.

3.3. CHURCHES BELIEVE THAT HOPE IS REASONABLE

Several of our case study churches were situated in the most deprived locations in England. The problems encountered in each of the case studies were complex, deep-rooted and long-term. Few were amenable to a quick fix and, although inward investment clearly was making a difference in some areas, there was ample evidence that money, in the absence of social networks, norms of behaviour, educational ability, or basic life skills, was at best going be used inefficiently and, at worst, risked being divisive within the community.

The biggest issue in most areas was the massive change in local labour markets. Populations had grown up around employment in industries that had gone and would never return. A big influx of regeneration money - such as the European Regional Development Fund supporting the Heartlands Centre in Camborne/Redruth - might improve the built environment considerably but, ultimately, could do little to correct the different kinds of economic and social dislocation that an area had experienced.

These churches took material deprivation very seriously, but they were not overwhelmed by the cultural, economic and political tide. They believed that some kind of redemptive activity was possible – and indeed they did not just think it, they did it. As we have already noted, they tended to resist the idea that unemployment, poverty, or poor life chances were the overriding realities of an area. The churches were *positive* about their community.

Hope is encoded into the worshipping life of these churches, which is a story of hope against despair and resurrection from death. Neither the worshipping, liturgical life of these churches nor their public engagements were a 'bolt on' to the other. It therefore mattered if the church was able to ritually enact the reason for its hope for the wider community. Speaking about the Community Passion Play in Hodge Hill, the minister reflected that, "Actually, a lot of our stories of hope are hanging on to hope in grim places and grim times… that was shaped by the passion story, which was shaped by the places of the estate… some kind of enacted defiant hope that makes some sense and is honest about what life is like emerged".

The theological ground led them to have hope in people. They were committed to notions of human dignity: as one interviewee from Christ Church, Norris Green put it, simply and rhetorically, "people matter, don't they?" Our case study churches were all looking for ways to celebrate their community, and acknowledge and harness skills and innate gifts, whether through basic volunteering or more sophisticated time-banking projects. We heard stories of a single mother working an extra shift in order to give food to the food bank; of a pensioner who had suffered from significant poverty in her past running and financially supporting a breakfast club for vulnerable residents; of a community worker who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer working on through chemotherapy in order to sustain the church's community activity.

Hope was also something that could be offered to the wider community. One, non-Christian, volunteer at the DISC project in Cornwall described the mission of the church, "I would say that the mission is to lighten certain aspects of people's lives that could be difficult, to allow other people to realise that there's light at the end of the tunnel – there are people that do care. And above all to remain with the idea of hope – I think hope is an important thing".

Again, no strong distinction was made between the personal and the public, or the sacred and the secular. Adam Atkinson, minister at St Peter's, Bethnal Green, said:

> We were praying around the place – there was the word 'resurrection'. Where there's been death and disappointment and despair… that there would be new life and people would experience that across the board. From people being healed physically and also people who have dog mess in their garden time after time and that being better. Where people look on the church and see flowers and it looking bright and beautiful and they think that that's a good thing to have as a neighbour, through to shops on the Hackney Road being City Safe havens – and not elevating one over another.

Local residents often had a quiet scepticism about 'solutions'. The sense of hope described above was essential in responding to this, but it needed to be sustained hope. Indeed, without perseverance, offers of hope were counter-productive, breeding cynicism. In the Farnborough case study, a Community Worker recalled the lukewarm response the Community Project first received from the local community. It wasn't that they didn't want or even appreciate the services offered. It was that they had seen similar projects - though not, in those instances, from the church - come and go with depressing regularity. Funding cycles were short. Grants were not renewed. Projects ended abruptly. Community workers left the area. There was a widespread sense that this time would be no different.

That the Community Worker was still there, more than 20 years later, was a testimony to the fact that this time it was different. Hope, therefore, was not an abstract sentiment, and churches had to establish legitimacy to speak of it. One of the key aspects of churches per se within such communities is that they are there for the long haul, not so vulnerable to funding cycles, and persevering with their community activity. This was especially important in deprived areas where it could take a particularly long time to build up trust, but it was judged a crucial virtue in any case: for hope to be authentic, it needed to be preserved.

3.4. CHURCHES SEE THAT THE IMPORTANCE OF INCARNATIONAL SERVICE

We've argued above that churches are closely attuned to local needs; they're attentive to *these* people, at *this* time, under *these* conditions. Theologically, this is partly rooted in the idea of the incarnation; that God addresses humanity by coming and making a home amongst us.

To use the term in a purely adjectival way, churches are incarnated. They have 'skin in the game' in a way that many state-employed service professionals may not. They maintain no professional distance from their community. Indeed, this could come at some cost. Helen Edwards, the vicar of Christ Church, Norris Green, mentioned that her predecessor was physically assaulted by local youths. Ministers usually 'live above the shop', and – as we have noted – represent a different kind of leadership, where they are continually made available to others. One minister had chosen not to take up the well-appointed vicarage next to the old church, but moved into an end of terrace house in a needier part of the parish.

The idea of the incarnation has deeper theological implications for our case study churches. First, there was a rejection of the various dualisms which minimise the importance of physical realities in favour of a Christianity that is only relevant to people's souls. Dominic Black, the minister at Holy Trinity, North Ormesby said, "… there's this phrase that Jesus used, 'I have come that they have life in all its fullness'." He was rejecting a choice between two kinds of community engagement, one intended to help the Church create a fringe and then evangelising it, the other a model which establishes the public legitimacy of the Church and clergy by casting them as purveyors of social work. "It's a Kingdom-based thing – part of that fullness is to know Christ, but it's not just about that, people need to be physically and emotionally cared for as well. In our children's work it's not just about this religious stuff, it's also about healthy eating and messages of exercise and lifestyle and play".[30]

Second, the idea of the incarnation speaks against a Christianity understood as having the right ideas about God, as opposed to being obedient in service of God and neighbour. The Church, to use the paradigm of the parable of the Good Samaritan, is called to extend and expand its definition of neighbour, to include those that are not seen as having worth. But the Church is never called to love its neighbour in theory, but always to demonstrate neighbourliness to those it actually encounters. So the Church finds its legitimacy not in being as much like secular welfare as possible, or in adopting appropriate positions – liberal or otherwise – on welfare reform. Its legitimacy rests on its ability to serve those whom it encounters. To build trust, churches needed to persuade residents that they 'got it' and clergy needed to persuade residents that they weren't going to leave in short order for a leafy country parish. Longevity was highly prized, and both churches and communities had been disappointed with those that had promised help and support, but had not stayed the course.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

PARISH OF LOUTH

The Parish of Louth covers the market town of Louth in Lincolnshire, together with the villages of South Elkington, Welton-le-Wold and Stewton. The Parish maintains six churches, three in the town of Louth itself.

In the main, Louth is a prosperous market town. It has a population of around 16,000, and is sometimes described as the capital or gateway to the Lincolnshire Wolds. The unemployment rate is lower than the national average, significantly so in the wealthier parts of Louth. However, wards to the east of the town – Trinity and St Margaret's – suffer from higher levels of deprivation in income, employment, education and, in particular, health, with low life expectancies and a significantly higher than average incidence of smoking and diabetes.

St James' Church – a fifteenth century building – dominates Louth's skyline, and performs a role as a civic church as well as being the home to the largest Sunday congregation. St Michael in Louth provides worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. On Eastgate, bordering the Trinity ward, sits the Trinity Centre. It sits on the site of a church that burnt down in 1991 – the tower of the church remained standing, and the planning authority insisted that a newly designed community centre incorporated the old tower. Various designs were contested, and the new centre, which incorporates a licensed chapel, was not opened until 1999.

The team rector, Nick Brown, describes each church as bringing different gifts to the parish and hopes that worshippers will acknowledge the different ways of gathering in different parts of the parish in order to exercise diverse ministries. The parish is currently served by two full-time priests - the Team Rector and a Community Chaplain - and a number of assistants and associates both lay and ordained.

The Trinity Centre is a base for much of the community work undertaken by the parish. It houses the Community Larder foodbank which is supported by other local churches and unusual in that it is accessible on most days of the week. It also hosts regular community meals - Tasty Tuesdays, Fish on Fridays and a monthly Sunday lunch, with services in the chapel beforehand - and a Wednesday drop-in, a partnership with East Lindsay District Council, where residents can come and meet with a range of agencies for advice and support - the council's housing support team, a local housing association, a credit union, community health workers and Lincolnshire CVS - and have internet access. As well as this, the Trinity Centre provides space for a range of community groups, from a slimming club to yoga to flower arranging. It is also the venue for a well-attended monthly Messy Church service. Thus, the Centre is an informal place of meeting for the network of external agencies who join in its work.

In terms of the mission of the parish, the Trinity Centre clearly provides a focus for activity immediately adjacent to one of the most deprived wards in the region. It is significant that it offers not just the last port of call for the those who are suffering material poverty - during the visit, researchers met a foodbank client who had spent time sleeping rough in the lee of the local tennis court clubhouse - it is also providing services for those suffering from loneliness or isolation, particularly the elderly. The centre's open door approach is vital, and it enjoys a steady trade from those that have come to know the centre and its staff.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

ST THOMAS', BLACKPOOL

The parish of St Thomas', Blackpool sits across two of the most impoverished wards in the whole country. In the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, one of the local 'lower layer super output areas' ranks 8th out of all such areas in the country. Over 50% of the children in the area live in poverty. Most work is seasonal or in the public sector, but with the latter being under increasing pressure - reduced by 50% since 2010 according to one councillor - and facing significant cuts, and the former reliant on a tourist industry that functions for only a few months a year, there are few jobs around, even for those with qualifications.

The night-time economy, particularly the stag and hen parties, is one of the few sources of employment, yet it increasingly places a strain on local services and crowds out family visitors. The pleasure beach now tickets entry to prevent drunk parties scaring off families. Interviewees identified population churn as a significant problem, as people come seeking work and to take advantage of a major over-supply of cheap, poor quality, accommodation, particularly, small terraced houses converted into bedsits. There is an associated problem with loneliness, isolation, a well above average suicide rate and degree of mental illness.

St Thomas' is a fairly large early 20th century church which sits a little out of the centre of Blackpool and away from the seafront. A large parish centre - two main floors, plus a large basement area -sits next to the church. Between them is a small green area which functions as the only such area not currently subject to gang or other crime issues. A major road adjacent to the church effectively serves as a community dividing line, with some history of gang clashes.

The church has had a reputation for many years as a welcoming, low evangelical Anglican church. Its motto, in fact, used to be "the people's church" and it is a motto which many local people from outside the church recall, even though it is no longer used. In fact, its reputation for a particular brand of worship led to it once having a very large congregation drawn from all over Lancashire. The appointment of the new vicar led to a number of tensions, not least because she removed the entire paid staff in an effort to focus the church on its local parish commitments. The congregation dropped by over 150 members in a short space of time, though it is now recovering numbers from local residents.

The remaining congregation is very committed to a range of very local activities. Several congregation members talked in terms of a stronger, more motivated, rebuilding congregation that was increasingly "winning people over". Examples of this new focus include the use of a prayer bus, which drives out into the town centre and has a team of volunteers on board who invite people on for tea, to chat, and to pray for what they might need. It was also exemplified in a prayer walk and worship service on a local street known for its brothels. There is a focus on the church going out and being for, not merely in, its local parish.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

The church has a particular focus on children and youth work, a part of the population for whom there was little other service provision locally. Not only does the church provide activities, but all children and youth activities are accompanied by free food, since the church had become aware of some children being underfed.

Food in fact is a theme which is also apparent in a number of other church activities, including both programmes to engage the elderly and through the "food pantry" which they explicitly do not identify as a foodbank, because the church was keen to avoid a dependence culture. There have also been efforts to counter the problem of unemployment through a work club which runs every week and seeks to help people not only find work but feel cared for and rediscover their own self-worth. They also focus on practical skills like how to use computers, CV writing, using job websites and skills workshops.

There are problems and, despite removing almost all the paid staff, there is still a clear financial concern. Several of the main projects rely in part on funds and grants from other organizations that are feeling the strain of recent cuts. Some projects, like the work club, may need to be scaled back if alternative funding cannot be found. Sustainability is also a concern in terms of the strain it puts on some volunteers. There is a core of volunteers - some 20 "really solid and reliable ones" - but there are concerns to grow that number. Surprisingly, the volunteers who support the youth and children's groups seem to be drawn primarily from local, but not necessarily Christian, parents.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST, ANGELL TOWN, BRIXTON

The Angell Town estate – built in the 1970s, but already deteriorating in the 1980s – had already been a notorious 'sink estate' and crime hotspot. After significant redevelopment in the early 2000s, the area is much improved, though adjacent areas have not benefited in the same way. Brixton has begun to gentrify as higher earning families look for affordable homes. As the minister puts it, "white flight is over". Though positive in some respects, this offered clear challenges, for instance to the sustainability of Brixton market. The parish of Angell Town – which incorporates the Angell Town and four other estates – is still the second most deprived in the diocese of Southwark, and one of the most deprived in the entire country. Overall, crime rates have fallen but the area is still troubled by gang violence. The unemployment rate is about twice the national average. In 2011, 45% of the population were living in local authority housing, compared to a national average of 9.4%. The area is ethnically and religiously diverse – 56% of the population say that they are Christian, 13% Muslim and 20% report having no religious affiliation.[31]

St John the Evangelist is a vibrant, mainly black, congregation worshipping in the 'Modern Catholic' tradition. It is served by a priest – the Rev Dr Rosemarie Mallett – and a curate – the Rev Peter Milligan. The church building, built in the mid-19th century, fell into disrepair in the post-war period and, after a fundraising campaign, was rededicated in 2002. The church has a hall, but it is used by a local Christian charity as a nursery. They're limited, therefore, in terms of the space available for community projects.

That being said, they're very focused on doing what they can to engage with some of the challenges faced by the local community, which are also visceral realities to the church community – gang violence, poverty, and the asylum and immigration system. Mallett reported spending much time in offering pastoral and practical support to those in the middle of immigration cases. They have a significant focus on children and young people, although they don't express this through traditional youth work but rather by incorporating young people into the full life of the church, appointing young church wardens, who shadow the senior wardens, and are expected to play a part in serving as servers, readers and intercessors. Once a month, the young people lead the service. The church also works closely with the local Church of England Primary School, organising, for instance, an Easter peace walk through Brixton as a witness against gang violence.

To focus on young people was to consciously offer an alternative to the state of fear which characterises the relationships between generations locally, and also to ensure that the young people are able to grow into leadership roles within the church and beyond. For Mallett, both internal and external challenges required that the church should "build people up", "instil service and confidence" and that people are "up-skilled". The local school also identified this as a serious need in the community. The congregation was also working with London Citizens, again with an explicit focus on building leadership skills in younger people. Interviewees made no strong distinction between people being encouraged to offer internal leadership within the church, or external leadership in the community.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

Again, partnerships were a significant part of St John the Evangelist's impact. Other local organisations – the Karibu Centre, the Ebony Horse Club and local councillors - saw the church as a useful way of connecting in or doubling up on links with the local community. For example, if a child stopped showing up at a particular group/service, the church could be a useful avenue for checking up on what was going on. The stability and longevity of some of these institutions, especially the church, was identified as a key factor in their work in the community. One interviewee observed how, when councillors or council officials left after a couple of years, networks and relationships would be lost, so the community really needed people who would stick around over a longer term. The church and its leadership were highly respected, with a local community organiser arguing that Mallett and others provide a different kind of leadership – accessible, human and servant oriented.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, FARNBOROUGH

The Church of the Good Shepherd in Farnborough – or COGS at it is widely known – was originally the daughter church of St Peter's, Farnborough. Established in 1950, the original building was pulled down forty years later because of subsidence, and a new, multi-purpose centre erected in its place.

At the same time, church members and the new curate-in-charge decided to place an emphasis on reaching out into the local community. This is mixed, with high and low-end housing stock, professionals and long-term unemployed and, now, different ethnic groups rubbing shoulders in immediate vicinity.

The first move was the re-establishment of a parent and toddler group, which is still going strong, and then, within a year or two, a full "Community Project".

Sue Riddlestone, formerly a social worker in South London, was appointed to head up the Community Project on a part-time basis in 1993, being paid through the church. The focus was initially on parenting and childcare needs. This soon developed into a Children's Clothing Exchange, which was first opened in the church's prayer room and subsequently moved to a nearby retail space, when it was renamed Olive Branch.

The following year, the shop closed, leading to a brief suspension of the exchange, but it was soon reopened in the church halls, where it remains today, with 30-40 visitors each week and over 600 in total on the books.

In the intervening years, the church started up a wide range of community initiatives, most funded by the church itself. CADS, a Carers and Disability Social Group was set up in 1998; a Furniture Store in 1999; lunches for the senior citizens in 2005; SPOT courses (Supporting Parents Of Teenagers) courses in 2006; and a mum's meals course, helping people with healthy eating, practising cooking skills, and basic literacy and numeracy, in 2006.

Some of these lasted a few years, some over a decade – some closed because of lack of interest, some because of lack of volunteers, and one because of a lack of dry storage! The range is a reminder that not all projects are successful but also that the church sought to serve local needs and to work in co-operation with other agencies. When the local need either fell away or other charitable or statutory bodies implemented similar but better-funded projects in the vicinity, COGS would feed into these – such as by donating all its Furniture Store goods to a nearby project – even when it came at the expense of closing down its own enterprise.

One clear local need was for food and, by 2000, the church had set up the Food Store, later called The Larder and effectively the first foodbank in the area. This remains as popular as ever – providing parcels for around 40 adults and children each month – despite the fact that six more have opened in the locality.

CASE STUDIES 9-12

Rachel Bennetts arrived as Team Vicar in the mid-2000s at just the same time as an unusual but pressing need emerged in the form of thousands of Nepali migrants in the wake of a new policy on Gurkha settlement in the UK. This caused some community tension, which was exacerbated by the fact that many migrants had little or no English, something that threatened to ghettoise communities still further.

In response, the church set up an English Class for Nepali adults, run by a former missionary in Nepal, initially with funding from her previous church, and thereafter self-supported by her work as a part-time speech therapist. The courses – two hours every week during term time – are popular and growing, with over 50 attending each week.

COGS works in partnership, meeting local needs, with local funds and local volunteers. With over 40 volunteers each week, from the church community and beyond, it is trusted by local services, community groups and residents. In the words of one interviewee, "even non-church people say 'this is our church'".

4. CONCLUSIONS

We set out to explore what churches are doing in deprived communities, but we also wanted to explore the granularity of social action within the Church of England. Is there anything about it that is unique or unusual? What drives their involvement – and what part does the sacred play in their work? In this final section, we will briefly summarise our research findings before exploring the implications.

4.1 FINDINGS IN SUMMARY

Twelve case study churches in areas of high or relatively high deprivation were offering a diverse range of services to the wider community. Some fell into the category of basic support services – the provision of food, shelter or clothing. All the churches were engaged in food banking of varying degrees of sophistication. Other important areas included work with schools and a range of other youth and children's activities, employment support, and various forms of life skills support – financial education, cookery courses and, in one case, language education for immigrant communities. There were a range of other, stand-alone or unique activities that we haven't reported here, such as a knife bin in a Brixton churchyard. If they didn't fit easily into an obvious category, this was an illustration of the way in which churches developed bespoke responses to specific local need.

We identified one other significant category which we called, for want of a better word, 'neighbourliness'. Churches used a great deal of their time and space providing platforms for people to build relationships with each other – cafés, lunch clubs and so on. Although intangible, this lay close to the heart of churches' vision of healthy communities. They cared about restored and flourishing relationships.

But relationships were both an end and a means. Our case study churches were dense networks of "morally freighted relationships", but those networks extended beyond the boundaries of the church to residents and other institutions. Our interviewees suggested that clergy are good at bringing people and organisations together. This relational approach reflected churches' understanding that they were, in fact, only a small part of a diverse ecology of interests in any community – they weren't resting on the laurels of establishment. The relationships also amplified impact. Indeed, they could almost be described as the currency of impact.

Other significant factors included the churches' attention to locality and place – their ability to read and respond to their environment and their ability to offer alternative civic leadership and build the agency of others. We found that good buildings could be hugely significant, providing a platform for all of the above and much else. At the same time, buildings were of variable quality and were being used in a variety of ways. Their absence did not prevent significant and creative forms of work within the wider community, though it might, therefore, take on a very different shape.

Behind all this lay rich theological commitments and 'thick' ecclesiological practices. It mattered that these were churches, since churches are communities that are often better able to resist the forces of individualism. They wanted to sustain communities and see them flourish. In spite of sometimes high levels of deprivation and, though they could not for their own part change the underlying causes, churches maintained a realistic hope that communities could flourish – hence their work around 'neighbourliness'.

Churches combined the private and the public, the personal and political, with little discrimination. Ultimately, they were 'powerful' institutions because they were incarnated institutions – they had, as we have put it, 'skin in the game'. They do not have the liberty of indifference and inaction.

4.2 IMPLICATIONS

We started this report by reflecting on two contradictory narratives– the first that the church is in serious, even terminal decline and the second that it is well placed to renew public services.

In terms of the existential future of the Church of England, our case study visits suggested that rumours of the Church's demise had been exaggerated – or at least that care needed to be taken to complement national level statistics with close attention to the lived experiences of churches. Our case study churches were places of vibrant spirituality, and they mattered to their communities. Most of them were growing, in difficult circumstances, and becoming more reflective of their context and less havens of a residual middle class. They had also achieved a level of legitimacy locally that didn't rest on the laurels of establishment, but on their committed presence and durable relationships. Size is not irrelevant, but nor is it synonymous with health – all of these churches were small, but they were also maintaining a significant level of activity and having a powerful impact, even if on a modest scale. The Christian gospel, understood in its fullest sense of personal and social transformation, was central to the social welfare work of these churches. Faith was not a privatised 'motivation' or 'ethos'. The very fact that churches continued to act as they did was a testament to how hope – a hope for "abundant life" in the present – was possible, rather than despair being convincing.

As a social welfare provider, churches would certainly provide bang for the buck. Relatively small amounts of money serve to 'leverage' a variety of other assets for the common good – volunteers, buildings, relationships. Churches have assets and people, and the experience in the case studies shows that they are also locally trusted and sensitive to local need. Churches do not merely support their members, but offer care for all those in their communities and are cautious to avoid alienating people with language or activities that could be perceived as coercive. In fact, people that benefit from church run projects often compare them favourably with other providers.

Churches and church-based agencies are, therefore, right to point to and celebrate the work of local churches – certainly our case study churches were having a significant impact on their neighbourhoods. Neither churches nor their secular partners should become too addicted to 'projects' or 'social action' alone. To follow their lead of our case study churches, other congregations must reflect on the finding that one of the most valuable things they can do is can promote neighbourliness.

This does not mean, however, that churches and church-based agencies should not act practically to tackle local problems. Pragmatically, however, most commentators agree that the relationships between the Church of England and public bodies are hindered by a mismatch of structure. In other words, most activity takes place at the level of the parish rather than the Diocese, while state-based agencies will rarely work at such a granular scale. Thus, the very advantage of the parish system – its human proximity – becomes a potential problem. There are already examples even in our own case studies of churches developing local formal partnerships covering larger areas. These local partnerships are organic and, in the search for greater scale and impact, the human and relational proximity of the church is not lost. The formation of Church Urban Fund's Together Network is one means by which the wider church has sought to access, resource and build upon the work taking place at the parish level. Effecting even modest change in neighbourhoods is hard enough, but effecting change across cities and regions is only possible through greater collaboration.

It's all too tempting to assume that what churches exist to do is provide social welfare, but the mission, presence and purpose of the Church – particularly in deprived areas - can't be reduced to that. It creates social goods that are simply not in the gift of the state or its agencies. In particular, we have reflected at length about "neighbourliness" – how, in fractured communities within an increasingly individualist and lonely society, churches simply provide ways for people to come together. When it comes to understanding the place of the Church in society, we suggest that there is a more modest and more realistic task facing the Church than the reimagining of the welfare state, which is to continue to make the case that churches – not just faith-based social action – are relevant, public and necessary.

As churches, public agencies and national policy makers negotiate and renegotiate their relationship over time, there are fundamental questions which must be answered beyond the practical considerations which must be negotiated. One of them is, to what do we attach public value? We suggest, on the basis of this research and in light of work developing elsewhere, that the strength and quality of relationships in any given locality are undervalued. It is easier to attach value and resources to the tangible outputs of social welfare projects. If neighbourliness can, and should, be defined as offering public value, then there are clear implications for where and how resources – public or ecclesial – flow. For the duration of the next parliament, national government and policy makers will be grappling with the question of how to support and sustain deprived communities in what is likely to be a period of ongoing economic challenge. Alternative approaches will have to focus, not simply on physical regeneration, but also on 'social' regeneration – the quality and quantity of relationships and social networks in areas of high deprivation, and the extent to which these can help communities remain resilient. Taking account of the presence and work of churches could make the difference between public initiatives in this field faltering or prospering.

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3 Clive Field, British Social Attitudes, 2012, *British Religion in Numbers*:http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2013/british-social-attitudes-survey-2012/.

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5 Francis Davis, Elizabeth Paulhaus and Andrew Bradstock, *Moral, but No* Compass (Von Hügel Institute, 2008).

6 Dr Shana Cohen, Sughra Ahmed, Alice Sandham, *Near Neighbours Report* (Woolf Institute, October 2013). For a reflection on the work of Near Neighbours in a multicultural society, see David Barclay *Making Multiculturalism Work* (Theos, 2013).

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8 NCVO Almanac data suggests the charitable sector as a whole is static rather than shrinking, though income from statutory services is down marginally. See http://data.ncvo.org.uk/.

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14 According to Jesus, after all, the command to love your neighbour as yourself is second only to the command to love God with all your soul, mind and strength (Mark 12.29 and Luke 10.27).

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16 Bacon, *Plugging the Gap*, p 7.

17 Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibility of Faithful Witness* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010),p. 103.

18 Ezekiel 47.12.

19 See http://cuf.org.uk/thrive-together-birmingham/training.

20 "Asset-based community development is founded on the idea that change will only happen if we identify and mobilise the gifts and capacities of local people and the social, physical and economic resources of a local place. It is an approach that seeks to build strong, sustainable communities from the 'inside out', through forging and nurturing relationships of care and creativity". Al Barrett, *Asset Based Community Development: A Theological Reflection* (Church Urban Fund, October 2013) http://www.cuf.org.uk/research/theological-reflection-asset-based-community-development.

21 For an account see Al Barrett, *#BromfordJesus - The Gospel According to Us*, 27 March 2013, at http://thisestate.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/bromfordjesus-gospel-according-to-us.html.

22 The DISC Project was closed at the end of March 2014 because of a shortfall in funds.

23 A term and practice increasingly used in the healthcare system, whereby patients with social emotional or practical needs are referred to non-clinical groups for support and friendship.

24 The theologian Eugene Peterson, reflecting on the work of the farmer and poet Wendell Berry, puts it like this: "The importance of place is a recurrent theme – place embraced and loved, understood and honoured. Whenever Berry writes the word farm, I substitute parish… it is absurd to resent your place: your place is that without which you could not do your work. Parish work is every bit as physical as farm work. It is these people, at this time, under these conditions". Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*(William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), p. 131. I am grateful to Dr Martyn Percy for pointing me in the direction of Petersen's reflections.

25 A £1 million grant, over 10 years, with its use determined by the local community. See http://www.localtrust.org.uk/big-local/.

26 See, for example, Robert Furbey, Adam Dinham, Richard Farnell, Doreen Finneron and Guy Wilkinson with Catherine Howarth, Dilwar Hussain and Sharon Palmer, *Faith as Social Capital* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006). Available at http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/faith-social-capital.

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28 Nicholas Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*(Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 104.

29 Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, p. 49. Bretherton here develops the idea of Bernd Wannenwetsch in *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*(Oxford University Press, 2004).

30 Holy Trinity, North Ormesby was one of the case studies which paid close attention to the built environment, indicating a concern not just for sustaining existence but for quality of life. An engraved stone in the Trinity Centre captures their approach, reading: "in the spirit of support, learning, culture, faith and fun".

31 Statistics for Lambeth 011C (Lower Layer Super Output Area)