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UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES FACING URBAN CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND WHO ARE SEEKING TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE MISSION IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

By

JOHN COULTER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

2013

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Graduation Date   May 17, 2013

Prof. Jerram Barrs, Faculty Advisor _____

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ABSTRACT

Deep and comprehensive changes in Ireland's culture, coupled with the breath-taking speed of change, have rendered traditional patterns of ministry and mission in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, increasingly ineffective. The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. Important insights and good practice could then be identified to help congregations to become more effective in mission in their own local community.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with nine ministers from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The review of literature and analysis of the nine interviews identified three key areas which have a significant impact on a congregation's mission in their local community. The three areas of focus were: the nature of the mission of the church, the leadership of the mission of the church and the practice of the mission of the church.

This study concluded that congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which want to develop effective mission in their local community should seek to develop a fully orbed, biblical understanding of the nature of the mission of the church expressed in words and deeds. They should also seek to develop the kind of visionary leadership which enables the congregation to face up to the reality of its changing context, overcome hindrances and make the necessary changes which will enable it to fulfil its God given mandate for mission. Finally they should benefit from the experience of others and avoid those practices which hinder effective mission and embrace those practices which facilitate effective mission.

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For

Lynn
&
Hollie and Jonathan

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The world has changed!

Roxburgh and Romanuk, the widely experienced church leadership consultants, in their book *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church To Reach A Changing World*, say, "Almost every book one picks up these days and most conferences on leadership begin with the same theme: our culture is in the midst of rapid, extensive transformation at every level. We are moving through a period of volatile, discontinuous change"[1] The problem is not change per se. Culture is always in a process of change; change is a constant. The problem, says Roxburgh, is discontinuous change, which "is disruptive and unanticipated; it creates situations that challenge our assumptions. The skills we have learned aren't helpful in this kind of change."[2]

Continuous change is the development of an existing situation, a variation on what has gone before, but not that different from what has gone before. It is change within a pattern one is comfortable with, and is therefore familiar, predictable, and manageable. However, discontinuous change transforms a culture into something new and different. Discontinuous change creates an unpredictable environment where the "time honoured" ways of doing things no longer produce the desired outcomes, and working harder with the skills one has developed over the years, makes little difference.

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[1] Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 1st ed. (San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 2006), 6.
[2] Ibid., 7.

This climate of "volatile, discontinuous change" has created huge challenges for every organization in Western society, including the church.

Writing about discontinuous change in relation to organisations in the commercial realm, in his book *Leading Change*, John Kotter says, "The rate of change in the business world is not going to slow down any time soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up…"[3] In his view, the effect of globalization and its related technological and social trends will present organizations with even greater challenges in the immediate future. However, he says, for the same reasons, it will also throw up exciting new opportunities. He observes that the typical twentieth-century organization has not coped well with the pace of change, arguing that in organisations, "Structure, systems, practices, and culture have often been more of a drag on change than a facilitator."[4] In his opinion, "If environmental volatility continues to increase, as most people now predict, the standard organization of the twentieth-century will likely become a dinosaur."[5]

The purposes of God[6] and the promise of Jesus[7] guarantee the continued presence of the church until the end of the age, no matter what circumstances prevail. The church will not go the way of the dinosaur. But what will it look like? How will it be organised and structured? What characteristics will mark its on-going mission in the world? The challenges for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are captured well by Dr Gary Millar in his foreword to *Engaging With The Community: The challenge of mission in the 21st*

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[3] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston : Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 161.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ephesians 3:10-11
[7] Matthew 16:18

century, a discussion document prepared by the Social Issues and Resources Committee

of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He says,

> Wherever we live on this island – in the city or the country; north or south of the border; east or west of the Bann – the church of Jesus Christ faces enormous challenges. We live in a time of frighteningly rapid change. We live in a context where the church's past influence (even dominance) is quickly eroded. No longer is the church seen as the bedrock of Irish society. No longer is the church allowed the final word in matters of morality. No longer is the church's opinion sought on every matter of importance to our community. We are experiencing a seismic shift in Western culture – Christians from every tradition are having to come to terms with the fact that life will simply never be the same again.[8]

This study considered how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

seek to develop mission in their local community, as they respond to the deep and

comprehensive changes in the culture.

Problem Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has patterns of ministry and mission which

have served the church well in the past, but seem to be increasingly ineffective in

Ireland's rapidly changing culture. The membership and influence of the Presbyterian

Church in Ireland, in common with all of the historic denominations in Western Europe,

have declined significantly during the past forty years. The 2012 Minutes of the General

Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland show a serious decline in the number of

families (twenty-three per cent), persons (thirty-nine per cent), communicants (twenty-

nine per cent) and baptisms (seventy-two per cent) in the thirty-seven years between 1974

and 2011.[9] Congregations in urban situations in particular have been at the forefront of

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[8] A discussion document prepared by the Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Engaging with the Community: The Challenge of Mission in the 21st Century* (Belfast: Presbyterian Church in Ireland Board of Social Witness, 2001), 5.

[9] *Statistics of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, Minutes of the General Assembly and Directory of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Belfast, 1975), 180; *Statistics of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, Minutes of the General Assembly and Directory of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Belfast, 2012), 280.

decline. For example, the percentage decline in the number of families, persons, and communicants in the Belfast presbyteries was approximately double that of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as a whole for the period from 1974 -2011.[10] At a denominational level, the Board of Mission in Ireland has been active in highlighting the issues and problems, and seeking to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to presbyteries and congregations to help equip them for the challenge of developing effective mission. On the ground in local communities, ministers and elders must lead congregations in their response to changes in society, and they must face the challenge of developing more effective forms of mission. Kirk sessions, which have traditionally exercised a management role in congregations in stable situations, are now being called upon to provide visionary leadership in a rapidly changing environment.

Many congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are inward-looking and focused on the needs and concerns of their dwindling membership rather than pursuing the missionary mandate of the church. Many congregations have become alienated from their local community, and there seems to be a widespread misunderstanding among its membership regarding the nature of the church's mission. Those congregations which are trying to engage in mission find many of their members resistant to change in the way the church expresses its life and mission. They also discover that those outside the church have an increasingly negative view of the church and struggle to understand the message it is trying to communicate, if they show any interest at all. Most people seem unwilling to participate in church services or programmes, no matter how sensitively they have been modified to accommodate new people. Robinson and Smith, the church-planting

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[10] *Statistics of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, 1975, 180; *Statistics of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, 2012, 280.

consultants and practitioners, argue in their book *Invading Secular Space: Strategies For Tomorrow's Church* that "the church in the western world finds itself in deep crisis,"[11] and it would seem that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is no exception.

In a memorable word picture, Roxburgh and Romanuk capture something of the sense of this crisis, as it is experienced in so many congregations where people are struggling to cope with widespread and unrelenting changes in society, and the pace at which that change is happening. They say, "It is as if we are prepared to play baseball and suddenly discover that everyone else is playing basketball. The game has changed and the rules are different."[12] In many congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, there is undoubtedly a sense of disorientation, uncertainty, and a loss of confidence. In some situations there are unfortunate examples of the fabled "ostrich tendency," with church leaders and members burying their heads in the sand in the face of unwelcome realities. In other situations, members and leaders feel hurt because it seems to them that their leadership and service, or that of beloved predecessors, are being unfairly criticised.

Roxburgh and Romanuk argue, "The classic skills of pastoral leadership in which most pastors were trained were not wrong, but the level of discontinuous change renders many of them insufficient and often unhelpful at this point."[13] They insist that new situations require the cultivation of new leadership skills and capacities, and congregations must face the reality that simply working harder in the same ways as before is not sufficient to address the new challenges they face.

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[11] Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2003), 15.
[12] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 11.
[13] Ibid.

Roxburgh and Romanuk point out that they are not actually criticising the

leadership and work which shaped the church for most of the twentieth century, since in

their view the approach that was taken then was appropriate in that context. "Our point,"

they say, "is that the world has changed…This does not make those who have led us in

the past wrong; it means we are functioning in a different context."[14] They illustrate their

argument with the example of missionaries who move from their home environment to a

different culture. The missionaries must leave behind ways of thinking and leading that

served them well at home, and develop the new capacities and approaches which are

necessary for an effective role in their new context with its particular cultural

assumptions and background.

Robinson and Smith insist on the importance of gaining a realistic grasp of the

extent of the crisis facing the church in the western world, but they also highlight a

number of important biblical and historical convictions which provide a helpful

framework for thinking about the life of the church. They list a number of fundamental

convictions about the church which undergird their discussion of the challenges it is

facing in the twenty-first century. They state:

> First, that the church is called to share in the mission of God. Second, despite its
> weaknesses and manifest failures the church continues to occupy a central
> position in the intention of God for his world. Third, that the church in the
> western world finds itself in deep crisis. Fourth, that however profound that crisis
> might be, the church is called to rediscover its life and witness. Fifth, that the re-
> imaging of the church can only take place around the centrality of its call to
> mission. Sixth, the church has encountered such radical challenges in the past.
> Seventh, that it is possible for the church to be recast to meet the challenges of our
> age, and that even now signs of the future church can be detected by those with
> eyes to see.[15]

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[14] Ibid., 10.
[15] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 15.

Biblical confidence in the central place of the church in the purposes of God and a

biblical understanding of the importance of mission as the heartbeat of the church's life

are crucial to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as its congregations seek to respond to

the missional challenges facing them.

Christopher Wright, who has written extensively on the nature and importance of

mission, shares, "Mission is not just one of a number of things that the Bible happens to

talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase

'what it's all about.'"[16] The Bible does not merely contain some important texts which

provide a rationale for mission. Rather, the whole Bible is a "missional phenomenon," the

product of and witness to the mission of God. Wright wants his readers to understand that

the Bible is the story of "God's mission through God's people in their engagement with

God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation."[17]

Wright is convinced that the Bible is all about mission, and that the church is also

meant to focus on mission. In his book, *The Mission of God's People*, he argues that

mission lies at the very heart of God's purpose for his church.[18] John Stott agrees, "Many

churches are sick because they have a false self-image. They have grasped neither who

they are (identity) nor what they are called to be (their vocation)."[19] He continues, "The

church is a people who have been both called out of the world to worship God and sent

back into the world to witness and serve."[20]

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[16] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 22.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2010), 35–47.
[19] John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 53.
[20] Ibid., 55.

According to DeYoung and Gilbert, in their book *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, that relationship between witness and service, or word and deed, in mission is a complex and troubling one for many evangelicals,[21] with genuine, Bible-believing Christians arriving at different conclusions on the issue. Most seem to agree that both are important, but there is a struggle to achieve a consensus on precisely how they fit together.

There are challenges in developing a healthy, biblical understanding of the nature and importance of mission in congregations, and there are also enormous practical challenges for congregations seeking to adapt to the changing culture around them. The challenge of leading the kind of change which will allow the development of effective congregational mission in a rapidly changing society must not be underestimated. Many congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are ill-equipped in terms of mind-set, strategy, and structure for the missional task which faces them, and the possibility of resistance to change seems fairly high.

Dean Williams is on the faculty of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, and he is an internationally recognised expert on leadership and change. In his book, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*,[22] he identifies the key task of leadership as enabling people to face the real problems they are confronting. He warns that people typically prefer to avoid this difficult work and will often busy themselves with other tasks as a way of evading their real responsibility. In their book, *Leadership On The Line*, Ronald Heifetz and Marty

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[21] Kevin DeYoung, Kevin and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 20–27.
[22] Dean Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, 1st ed. (San Francisco : Berrett-Koehler, 2005), 3–30.

Linsky,[23] who are also on the faculty of Harvard University's Kennedy School of

Government, examine the reasons why people often resist necessary change. They point

out that leaders often fail to appreciate the extent of the loss they are expecting others to

bear in order to achieve necessary change, and are therefore taken by surprise by the

depth of opposition they encounter.

Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which have a biblical

commitment to mission and a willingness to adapt to changing situations, must also face

the challenge of authentically re-engaging with their local community. In many

congregations, barriers created by a lengthy period of disaffection and alienation must be

overcome if effective mission is to develop. Tim Keller argues that to engage effectively

with their communities, congregations must become what he calls "missional churches."

A missional church, as he defines it,

> …gears absolutely every single part of its life – its worship, community, public
> discourse and preaching, education – for the presence of non-believers from the
> culture surrounding it. A missional church's congregation reflects the
> demographic make-up of the surrounding community – and therefore it gives non-
> Christian neighbours attractive and challenging glimpses of what they would look
> like as Christians. A missional church's worship is "evangelistic" in the sense that
> it makes sense to non-believers in that culture, even while it challenges and
> shapes people with the gospel. A missional church's people are outwardly
> focused, so involved in the local community, and so alert for every opportunity to
> point people toward Christ, that evangelism happens naturally through
> relationships. Because of the attractiveness of its community, the contextual
> nature of its message, and humility of its people, a missional church will discover
> significant numbers of people always in its midst, "incubating" and exploring
> Christianity. It must welcome them in hundreds of ways. It will do little to make
> them "comfortable" but will do everything to make its gospel message
> understandable.[24]

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[23] Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston : Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 9–50.

[24] Timothy Keller, 'Contextual and Missional' (Lecture in pdf format that was given during the London City Mission's Urban Plant Life Conference and Consultations, London, 2008.,), 1, http://lcm.endisinsight.com/Mobile/default.aspx?article_id=157814.

Keller's definition raises many of the practical issues with which congregations must be willing to wrestle if they are to develop effective mission in their local community.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. Four main areas, which are central to the exploration of how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland develop effective mission in their local community, were identified. They are: the nature of effective mission, how effective mission becomes a priority in the life of a congregation, the main hindrances to effective mission, and the factors which make a positive contribution to a congregation's ability to engage in effective mission. The following research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. What are the characteristics of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

2. How does the development of effective mission in the local community become a priority for a congregation?

3. What factors hinder the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

4. What factors facilitate the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

Significance of the Study

The body of literature dealing with the nature of mission, leading change, and the practice of congregational mission is large, but there is almost no reference to an Irish

context or to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Therefore, this study brings together a consideration of the relevant literature and an examination of the experiences of a number of Presbyterian ministers who are actively involved in helping congregations to develop effective mission in their local community.

This study will benefit anyone thinking about congregational mission in a local community. It will be of particular benefit to ministers, elders, and members of congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as they try to develop effective mission in their own communities. Through this study, the researcher sought to clarify the nature of mission and its significance for the life of the church in the light of the Bible's teaching, which could be very beneficial in motivating individuals and congregations to more urgently seek to develop effective mission in their local community. The researcher also sought to clarify the common challenges and hindrances involved in developing effective mission, and he will identify potential strategies for addressing them. This could provide useful practical guidance which would enable leaders and congregations to avoid or successfully manage common pitfalls and problems. Advance knowledge of the kinds of issues and challenges to be faced should help people to be more realistic in their expectations and to maintain their motivation for change.

The researcher sought to identify factors which promote and facilitate effective mission, highlighting key principles and good practice. This will help leaders and congregations to focus attention on those aspects of congregational life and witness which have the potential to make the most positive impact on the development of the congregation's mission. Congregations motivated by the biblical vision for mission as the

core of their congregational life and witness, focused on the key factors which facilitate effective mission, and better equipped to cope with the challenges and hindrances to mission, will be much better placed to engage in effective mission in their local community. Congregations obediently and skilfully playing their part in the purposes of God, in dependence on the Lord, can reasonably expect to be used by him to effectively sow gospel truth and reap a spiritual harvest.

Definition of Terms

Urban Congregation: For the purpose of this study, an urban congregation is loosely defined to include towns and commuter villages as well as cities.

Mission: "Mission is a common word in need of a careful definition"[25] and developing a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of mission is one of the discussion points of this study. However at a general level, mission can be defined as the task given by God to the church, to communicate his love and his offer of mercy, in Jesus Christ, to all the people of the world.

Missional: The word missional has been used in a variety of specific senses in recent literature, but for the purpose of this study, missional is to be understood simply as an adjective referencing mission as described above. Therefore a missional church is a church seeking to communicate God's love and his offer of mercy, in Jesus Christ, to all the people of the world.

Effective Mission: For the purpose of this study effective mission is defined as, the communication of God's love and offer of mercy, in a manner which is appropriate, relevant, and helpful. It is communication which is able to succeed in advancing understanding because it is suitable for the context in which it takes place.

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[25] Kevin DeYoung, and Greg Gilbert,, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 15.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. While the literature addressing the issue of mission in the context of Irish Presbyterian congregations is very limited, there is a huge volume of literature on the subject of mission. This wealth of material discussing the many biblical, theological, and practical questions, problems, and concerns pertaining to mission provides important insights for Irish Presbyterians seeking to shape an effective response to the missional challenges facing them.

Since congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are seeking to develop effective mission in the context of a rapidly changing society, it is also important for this study to address the particular challenges associated with providing appropriate leadership in a changing environment. There is very little in the way of literature dealing with leading change in an Irish Presbyterian context, but there is a growing body of work addressing the issue of leading change in the wider church context. There is also a substantial body of important work outside the church, written by those involved in business and government, which has valuable light to shed on the difficult challenges involved in providing leadership in a changing environment. Although these books are not written from a biblical perspective, and do not address Christian mission directly,

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they do identify important principles and key insights which are extremely helpful when thoughtfully and carefully applied with discernment in a church setting.

For those who are uncertain about the value of insights offered by writers from outside the church, it might be helpful to note the view of John Calvin, the enormously influential sixteenth century reformer, theologian, and bible teacher. In his book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin warns against dismissing the insights and contributions made by any authors simply because they come from outside the church.

> Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God.[26]

In other words, Calvin argues that since all truth is God's truth, there should be a welcome for the understanding and enrichment that truth brings, no matter where that truth is found.

In order to develop a greater understanding of the research problem associated with this study, literature relating to the areas of mission and leading change has been reviewed and the results arranged under three general headings: the nature and importance of mission, leading mission in a changing context, and the practice of mission.

The Nature and Importance of Mission

What is mission and why is it important?

The question of decline in church attendance and membership has exercised the minds of church leaders in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in common with others in

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[26] Jean Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 273.

the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and the United States.[27] However, in their book

Invading Secular Space: Strategies For Tomorrow's Church, Robinson and Smith, the

church planting authors and consultants, assert, "The challenge for the church now is to

stop thinking merely about methods to reverse decline but to reconsider the basic purpose

and call of the church."[28] In essence their argument is that while the numerical decline in

the church is the presenting problem, and is undoubtedly a very real problem, behind it

lies a deeper, and more important issue – the loss of mission as the centre of the church's

life and purpose.

Robinson and Smith argue that the early church was so focused on urgently

spreading the faith that there was little thought or reflection given to how the church

should be organised and structured. "In other words the Christian community was

engaged in mission and the church was shaped by mission."[29] Gradually over time

however, and particularly since the time of Constantine, the church became part of the

mainstream social order, and mission became just one of a number of functions the

church performed. The result, according to Robinson and Smith, was a subtle, but very

important shift in thinking, as the nature of the church began to increasingly shape the

mission of the church. A concern for mission was gradually replaced by a tendency for

the church to promote its own life as an end in itself, and this, in the view of Robinson

and Smith, is what is expressing itself in the current concerns about numerical decline in

the church. Robinson and Smith argue persuasively that mission is the raison d'être of the

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[27] Hamilton, Norman, *Reconnecting With a Missing Generation*, A Report commissioned by the Presbytery of North Belfast and the Board of Mission in Ireland of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Belfast, 2000); The Special Commission, *Church Without Walls : Report to the General Assembly 2001* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001); David Olsen, *American Church In Crisis The: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2008); Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2007).
[28] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 56.
[29] Ibid., 46.

church, and suggest the possibility that the experience of failure and decline in the Western church may yet prove beneficial, if it leads to a situation where "…the church ceases to do church but to do mission."[30]

The centrality of mission in the life of the church is clearly established by Chris Wright, the Old Testament scholar, theologian, and expert in cross-cultural mission. He has written more than twenty books, and his *The Mission of God, Unlocking The Bible's Grand Narrative* presents a comprehensive and masterful discussion of the fundamental significance of mission. Wright's careful and extensive exegesis of texts from the Old and New Testaments provides a convincing argument that the whole Bible attests to the fact that mission is not merely one aspect of the church's work based on a few biblical texts, but rather the chief purpose of the church. He explains, "…the whole canon of scripture is a missional phenomenon in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God toward his creation and us, human beings in God's own image, but wayward and wanton."[31]

John Stott, the respected and influential evangelical statesman, Bible teacher, and author, says in his book *The Contemporary Christian* that "Christian mission is rooted in the nature of God himself. The Bible reveals him as a missionary God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), who creates a missionary people, and is working towards a missionary consummation."[32] Stott jokes that if he was preaching this material as a sermon, his text would have to be the whole Bible, since the whole Bible speaks to the subject of mission and is therefore necessary, if one is to lay an adequate biblical foundation for Christian

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[30] Ibid., 56.
[31] Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 48.
[32] John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 325.

mission. Drawing on work by J. Andrew Kirk, Chris Wright says, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission."[33] There can be no doubt that the clear teaching of the whole Bible is that mission is at the very heart of the life and purpose of the church.

Defining Mission

In their book, *What Is The Mission Of The Church*? Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert argue that "mission" is a common word in need of careful definition. They begin their answer to the question in the book's title by acknowledging the challenge.

> The question is deceptively complex and potentially divisive. For starters what do we actually mean by mission? And if that can be settled, we then face more difficult questions. Is the mission of the church discipleship or good deeds or both? Is the mission of the church the same as the mission of God? Is the mission of the church distinct from the responsibilities of individual Christians? Is the mission of the church a continuation of the mission of Jesus? If so, what was his mission anyway?[34]

It has been common in evangelical churches to equate mission with evangelism,[35] and in particular with cross-cultural evangelism.[36] However Christopher Wright, while recognising and affirming the place and importance of evangelism, argues that the biblical understanding of mission is much wider. He defines mission as, "…all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose…the multitude of activities that God's people can engage in, by means of which they participate In God's mission."[37] This definition involves social action as well as evangelism, and it includes the everyday life and work of every

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[33] Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 62.
[34] DeYoung, Kevin and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 16.
[35] Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978).
[36] Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 23.
[37] Ibid., 25.

Christian offered in the service of others as part of the mission of the church. It also

affirms that mission is not first and foremost about what people do, but about what God is

doing. Wright says,

> Mission, then, in biblical terms, while it inescapably involves us in planning and action, is not *primarily* a matter of our activity or our initiative. Mission from the point of view of our human endeavour, means the committed *participation* of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation. The mission is God's. The marvel is that God invites us to join in.[38]

The mission of the church, according to Wright, is to participate with God in his mission.

When seeking a biblical understand the mission of the church, Wright starts with

Abraham in Genesis 12, rather than with the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:19-20

or the spread of the Christian church in the book of Acts (important though these are).

Carefully guarding against an erroneous "health and prosperity" application, and taking

into account the reality of the presence of sin and its impact in a broken world, he argues

that the blessing Abraham was to receive and share with the nations was marked by

fruitfulness, abundance, fullness, and rest in the enjoyment of creation, and by a holy and

harmonious relationship with the creator. According to Wright, all that individual

Christians and churches do to help others experience a deeper enjoyment of creation and

a deeper relationship with the creator is mission. Wright says the Apostle Paul is explicit;

all who are in Christ are the seed of Abraham, inheritors of the promise, and the agents

through whom God's blessing comes,[39] and that blessing comes to people from every

nation, tribe, people and language.[40] Christians are to understand the "Great

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[38] Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 67.
[39] Romans 4:16-17
[40] Revelation 7:9-10

Commission" of Matthew 28, not as a new departure for the church, but as a continuation of God's ongoing mission to bless the world, clarified and re-affirmed by Christ.[41]

Michael Green, the internationally renowned evangelist and former professor of evangelism at Regent College in Vancouver, takes a similar line. In his book, *Evangelism Through The Local Church*, he teaches,

> The mission of the church is, of course, much broader than evangelism. It embodies the total impact of the church on the world: its influence; its involvement with the social, political and moral life of the community and nation where it is placed; its succour of bleeding humanity in every way possible. This mission includes evangelism. The greatest thing we can do for anyone is bring them face to face with the Christ who died for them. But it is clear that evangelism is one aspect, and one only, of the total mission of the church.[42]

For Green, evangelism is a very important aspect of mission, but mission also involves the church's response to human need whatever shape it takes.

John Stott defines mission in his book *Christian Mission In The Modern World*, as "…everything the church is sent into the world to do. Mission embraces the church's double vocation of service to be 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world.'"[43] In defending his definition, Stott asserts that "mission" is not a catch-all word for everything the church does, since worship, for example, is distinct from mission. Differing from Wright at this point, he also argues that the word "mission" cannot properly be used to cover everything that God is doing in the world. Stott says of God, "In providence and common grace he is indeed active in all men and all societies, whether they acknowledge him or not. But this is not 'mission.' Mission concerns his redeemed people, and what he sends them into the world to do."[44] He adds, "For God the Creator is constantly active in

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[41] Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 66–72.
[42] Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (Kent, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 9.
[43] John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 30.
[44] Ibid., 19.

his world in providence, in common grace and in judgement, quite apart from the purposes for which he has sent his Son, his Spirit and his church into the world."[45]

Stott resolutely defends his view that any definition of mission must include word and deed; the proclamation of the gospel accompanied by loving and compassionate service in Christ's name. He offers a biblical defence of the importance of social concern in mission by calling for a fuller, more biblical understanding of five key scriptural doctrines.[46] He argues that an adequate doctrine of God must include his concern for all of life, not just the spiritual, the nations as well as his own people, and justice as well as justification. An adequate doctrine of man must recognise the worth of those created in God's image, who are not simply souls which must be saved, bodies which must be cared for, or social beings with community problems, but all three. True love for another requires a concern for their total welfare. Stott urges that an adequate doctrine of Christ is conscious of his incarnation, when Christ set aside his glory and humbled himself to serve, as he proclaimed the good news and demonstrated its arrival in his care for others. An adequate doctrine of salvation must not separate salvation from the kingdom of God, which is God's dynamic rule breaking into human history through Jesus. It must not separate Jesus the saviour from Jesus the Lord of all of life, and it must not separate faith from love. It is faith in Jesus alone which saves, but the faith that saves is never alone. It inevitably shows itself in good deeds of love. Finally, an adequate doctrine of the church must recognise that the church is a people called out of the world to belong to God and also a people sent back into the world to witness and serve. Stott argues that when these biblical doctrines are correctly understood, they lay upon the church an obligation to be

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[45] Ibid., 30.
[46] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today.* (Basingstoke, England: Marshall Pickering, 1984), 13–26.

involved in the world in a mission marked by word and deed. Elsewhere, he continues, "Authentic mission is a comprehensive activity which embraces evangelism and social action and refuses to let them be divorced."[47]

Alistair Brown, general director of the Baptist Missionary Society in the United Kingdom, in his book, *I Believe In Mission*, defines mission under three broad headings. He says mission involves helping individuals find salvation; doing God's works of love; and transforming or restoring fallen systems to God's pattern. He says he likes the term "holistic mission" because it reminds people that mission deals with every facet of their being, not simply their spiritual need. However he also warns that one must be careful to ensure that the need for spiritual transformation, which was so central in the ministry of Jesus and the early church, is not displaced or neglected. "Mission to the whole person covers the need of the whole person, and that includes spiritual rebirth."[48]

Wright agrees with Brown, and adds, "Social action with no evangelistic interest is as nonholistic as is evangelism with no social concern. To be concerned for the poor and hungry but not concerned for people hearing the good news of Jesus is not even to follow the example of Jesus, let alone 'holistic mission.'"[49] Brown goes on to say that mission includes following the example of Jesus in acts of love done for people in all kinds of need. Jesus brought God's love to earth. He made people well, set them free, fed their bodies, and gave them new lives "because that's what love does when it encounters need."[50] "God hasn't lost his desire to touch people with his love…So he meets their need

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[47] Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening*, 337.
[48] Alistair Brown, *I Believe in Mission* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 78.
[49] Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 275.
[50] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 85.

[through] our mouths, our hands, our feet, as we embody his love."[51] "Good news of a loving God will always be felt in works of mercy. Mission includes loving people in their need."[52] John Stott makes the same point, arguing that the church's mission must be modelled on Christ's mission. Therefore, since Christ gave himself in the selfless service of others in a wide variety of forms according to men's needs, including feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and comforting the sad, so the church must do the same.[53]

Brown develops his definition of mission further by arguing that it should go beyond simply relieving individual need (important as that is), and try to tackle the societal and systemic causes of that need wherever it is possible to do so. He elaborates, "So you don't just feed the hungry, you ask why they have no food. You don't just help the poor, you ask why financial systems and governments keep people poor. You don't just help comfort victims of evil systems, you ask what can be done to change those systems."[54] Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert take quite a different tack from those already mentioned above and join with other missional thinkers who are concerned to guard the church from "…overly optimistic (and exhausting) utopian dreams, a loss of God-centeredness, and a diminishment of the church's urgent message of Christ crucified for hell-bound sinners."[55]

DeYoung and Gilbert want to correct what they see as, "…an overexpansive definition that understands mission to be just about every good thing a Christian could do as a partner with God in his mission to redeem the whole world."[56] They argue that

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[51] Ibid., 86.
[52] Ibid., 90.
[53] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 24.
[54] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 91.
[55] Kevin DeYoung, and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 24.
[56] Ibid., 20.

mission is not simply a synonym for living a faithful Christian life, but has a more precise

meaning. Mission is, "…the specific task or purpose that the church is sent into the world

to accomplish,"[57] and when trying to determine what that specific task or purpose is, they

say "the best place to look is the Great Commission."[58] DeYoung and Gilbert question

Wright's assumption that the church is called to conscious participation in all aspects of

the mission of God, suggesting that instead the church might be called in some instances

to bear witness to what God is doing, rather than participating with him. They ask, "What

if our mission is not identical with God's mission? What if we carry on Jesus's mission

but not in the same way he carried it out?"[59] They suggest that it is better to derive our

understanding of the church's mission in terms of the explicit commands of scripture

rather than from the work which God is seen to be doing. And they argue that it makes

sense to look primarily to Jesus for that explicit missiological directive, since he claims

the right to send the church even as the Father had the right to send him.

While looking to Jesus for his directive for the church's mission, however,

DeYoung and Gilbert take issue with John Stott's view that evangelism and social action

are full partners in Christian mission, since the church's mission, like that of Jesus, is one

of service. They suggest that it is misleading to summarize Jesus' mission as one of

service in the sense that it focused on meeting temporal needs. Jesus did meet temporal

needs, but according to DeYoung and Gilbert, those needs were far from the main point

of his work. Rather, they argue, "The mission of Jesus is not service broadly conceived,

but the proclamation of the gospel through teaching, the corroboration of the gospel

through signs and wonders, and the accomplishment of the gospel in death and

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 29.
[59] Ibid., 42.

resurrection."[60] They also question the wisdom of assuming that because Christians are

sent as Jesus was sent, then their mission must be exactly the same as his, saying, "We

cannot re-embody Christ's incarnational ministry any more than we can repeat his

atonement. Our role is to bear witness to what Christ has already done."[61]

As well as looking to Jesus for an understanding of the mission of the church,

DeYoung and Gilbert also consider the example of the early church as it responds to the

Great Commission in Acts.

> The book of Acts is especially important because in it we can actually see the
> scope and nature of the earliest Christian mission. If you are looking for a picture
> of the early church giving itself to creation care, plans for societal renewal, and
> strategies to serve the community in Jesus's name, you won't find them in Acts.
> But if you are looking for preaching, teaching, and the centrality of the Word, this
> is your book. The story of Acts is the story of the earliest Christians' efforts to
> carry out the commission given them in Acts 1:8.[62]

While they recognise that Acts includes concern for temporal needs expressed in signs

and wonders, and the church's sharing of material goods with others, DeYoung and

Gilbert insist that the book of Acts is first and foremost the record of the expansion of the

apostolic witness to the ends of the earth.

Following some very detailed exegesis and interaction with other authors on

mission, DeYoung and Gilbert offer their definition of mission:

> The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring
> the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples
> into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and
> in eternity to the glory of God the Father. We believe this is the mission Jesus
> gave the disciples prior to his ascension, the mission we see in the New
> Testament, and the mission of the church today.[63]

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[60] Ibid., 57.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 49.
[63] Ibid., 62.

Although their definition of the church's mission has no place for social action or deeds of mercy, DeYoung and Gilbert are at pains to point out that they are not opposed to Christians and churches engaging in such activity. They assert:

> …we strongly support churches undertaking mercy ministries in their communities. Both of our churches have programs and support missionaries that aim to meet physical needs while also hoping to share the gospel whenever possible. Though we do not believe that the mission of the church is to build the kingdom or to partner with God in remaking the world, this does not mean we are against cultural engagement. Our point is simply that we must understand these endeavors in the right theological categories and embrace them without sacrificing more explicit priorities.[64]

They add, "We are of the strong opinion that the Bible teaches that we Christians are to be a people of both declaration and demonstration, and that our churches are to be communities of both declaration and demonstration."[65] The goal of their book they say, "…has not been in any way to discourage good works, but rather to encourage them in the long run by being crystal clear about where and how good works fit into Christian theology and into the Christian life."[66] However in their view, there is a differentiation between the responsibilities of individual Christians to love their neighbours and help the poor, and the mission of the church, which is to proclaim the gospel.

Tim Keller, senior minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and internationally acclaimed author, says the Bible contains not only ringing calls to evangelism, but also a strong call to enforce justice and care for the poor. He appeals to the teaching of the letter of James saying, "…those who say they have justifying faith but close their hearts to the poor are mistaken or liars (2:15-18.),"[67] adding that according to

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[64] Ibid., 27.
[65] Ibid., 223.
[66] Ibid., 223–4.
[67] Timothy Keller, 'Church and Culture' (Lecture in pdf format that was given during the London City Mission's Urban Plant Life Conference and Consultations, London, 2008.), 8.

the context of the book of James, "All the 'works' that are the marks of real, saving faith are actions like caring for widows and orphans (1:27,) showing the poor respect and treating them equally (2:2-6,) and meeting material needs for food and clothing (2:15-16.)."[68] According to Keller, caring for the poor saves no one, but he argues that "…it is the inevitable outcome of saving, justifying faith."[69]

Keller notes the historical decline of the mainline Protestant churches in the United States, explaining,

> Those churches began with a strong emphasis on service and justice ministries alongside of evangelism, but eventually those emphases came to replace evangelism. Evangelism came to be redefined as "making the world a better place to live." The gospel came to be redefined as inclusion and justice for all. Completely lost was the concept of evangelism as a call for repentance, faith, and conversion. Many fear that a renewed emphasis on mercy and justice ministries will again displace vigorous evangelism and discipling. They also fear that such work will draw off needed resources from evangelism and traditional missions. In reaction to the new emphasis on doing justice, many insist that the mission of the church is strictly to preach the word, evangelize, and make disciples. Warnings about the "social gospel" are warranted, but we must still come to grips with the calls of the Bible to the Christian community to do justice and love mercy.[70]

Keller makes the point that the fear of an unbiblical imbalance in one direction must not be allowed to create an unbiblical imbalance in the opposite direction.

What Is The "Social Gospel?"

In considering the place, if any, of social action in mission, it is important to note that social action to reform society and improve the circumstances of individuals is not the same thing as the "social gospel," which was developed by theological liberals such as Walter Rauschenbusch in the early years of the twentieth century. John Stott clarifies the important differences between what he understands as the church's legitimate and

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

biblically necessary response of love and compassion to a broken world, and

Rauschenbusch's call to the church "to transform humanity into the Kingdom of God."[71]

According to Rauschenbusch, the church's purpose "is not a matter of getting individuals

into heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven."[72] Stott

points out two key errors in the social gospel of Rauschenbusch. First, it incorrectly

understands the kingdom of God as a society which has been "Christianized," or

reconstructed on a Christian basis. Second, it implies that God's kingdom can be brought

about by human effort, in contradiction to Jesus' teaching that it comes as the gift of God.

Rauschenbusch's "social gospel" is firmly rejected by Stott, who instead offers a biblical

understanding of the kingdom of God, including its social dimensions, which is not at all

similar to that advanced by Rauschenbusch. Stott elaborates:

> The Kingdom of God is not Christianized Society. It is the divine rule in the lives
> of those who acknowledge Christ. It has to be "received," "entered" or
> "inherited," he said, by humble and penitent faith in him. And without a new birth
> it is impossible to see it, let alone enter it. Those who do receive it like a little
> child, however, find themselves members of the new community of the Messiah,
> which is called to exhibit the ideas of his rule in the world and so to present the
> world with an alternative social reality. This social challenge of the gospel of the
> Kingdom is quite different from the "social gospel."[73]

Having differentiated the "social gospel" from a proper, biblical, social concern (as he

understands it) and dismissed it, Stott goes on to argue a solid biblical case for the

necessity of social action in any understanding of the church's mission in the world.[74]

The Relationship Between Word and Deed in Mission

Understanding the relationship between evangelism and social action or word and

deed has proven to be a troublesome issue for evangelicals. Brown argues that the fear of

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[71] Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today.*, 7.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 7–8.
[74] Ibid., 13–26.

being side-tracked from the task of proclaiming the gospel of individual salvation, and the temptation to write off this world and live merely for the next, can distract Christians from fully orbed mission, so that evil triumphs, people suffer, and God's rule in his world is diminished. Brown recognises that ultimate liberation from this world's bondage to sin and decay, promised in Romans 8, will only happen when Jesus returns. But he argues that it is on God's agenda now, and has been since Jesus announced good news for the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed.[75]

John Stott explains the biblical relationship between evangelism and social action as "…partners who belong to each other and yet are independent of each other."[76] He says at heart, social action is not a means to evangelism or a manifestation of evangelism, but rather an end in itself, as an expression of the love of God for lost people. It may open the door to evangelistic opportunities, and help make the gospel message visible, but the proper motivation is love for its own sake. Tim Keller disagrees with Stott's suggestion of independent partners and suggests that a more helpful approach is to see evangelism and social concern, not as independent from each other, but as interdependent equals.[77] Keller argues,

> Mercy and evangelism are like smoke and fire – where one is the other must be near. If we fail to provide for both the ministry of mercy and the ministry of the word, we may still have an active and successful-appearing church. But actual growth of the kingdom of God will not be occurring.[78]

Gary Millar adds,

> …evangelism and social action are inextricably linked in the purposes of God. They are not the same thing – neither are they alternatives. It is just as misguided

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[75] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 94–95.
[76] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 27.
[77] Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1997), 112.
[78] Ibid., 116.

to refuse to give hungry people soup because they need the gospel more, as it is to say that it doesn't matter if we are actually sharing the gospel with anyone as long as we are giving out soup! …If we are disciples of Jesus, we must commit to both.[79]

Tim Keller summarises the current discussion on this issue very helpfully, suggesting that there are basically four positions in regard to the relationship between word and deed in the church's mission.[80] First, the church's mission is a word mission only. Second, it has a mission of word and deed, with word having a priority. Third, it has a mission of word and deed without giving priority to either word or deed. Fourth, its mission is one of deeds only; it does not promote belief but only serves the good of society. Keller says, "Part of the tension inside the evangelical church stems from the fact that both position #2 and #3 can be made very strongly."[81]

According to Keller, those who hold word and deed together, but give a priority to evangelism (position two), have a number of concerns. They recognise that society tends to welcome the church's social contribution, but is generally hostile to its evangelism. Therefore prioritising evangelism will help prevent the church from sliding into the path of least resistance and concentrating on social action at the expense of evangelism. They also point out that the most explicit references to Jesus sending his disciples out into the world major on word ministry. Finally, they argue that against an eternal backdrop, it makes more sense to focus on person's spiritual needs which have eternal significance, than improving their living conditions for a limited time. Advocates of position two, (prioritising word over deed) recognise that Christians must obey the command to love their neighbour, and adopt the cultural mandate of Genesis chapters one and two, to work

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[79] Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Engaging with the Community: The Challenge of Mission in the 21st Century*, 5.
[80] Keller, 'Contextual and Missional', 1.
[81] Ibid.

for a God honouring society, but they argue that the church's role is to prioritise

evangelism and discipleship.[82]

Those who hold word and deed together with equal priority (position three), says

Keller, argue that the missionary mandate given to God's people in both the Old and the

New Testament calls them to model God's grace and loving compassion in their

community life. Justice for widows and orphans, hospitality to outsiders, and fair

treatment for the poor were important aspects of Israel's calling to be "a light to the

nations." In 1Peter 2:9-12, Israel's commission is applied to the church. The church is a

holy nation belonging to God and declaring his praises; the good deeds of its people,

done among the pagans, will bring glory to God. According to this view, says Keller,

> …the Great Commission is just the cultural mandate re-issued in a new situation.
> Jesus sent us into the world not only to evangelize but to disciple, and to disciple
> people to do all for the glory of God, to follow Christ not only in their private life,
> but their public life, is to send the church out into the world to work with
> Christian distinctiveness in vocations, to love our neighbor, to seek the peace of
> our city.[83]

Keller says that this view aims to present a "seamless cloth" approach which holds word

and deeds together and recognises God's command to the church do both.

Keller believes that these positions are not as far apart as they might at first

appear. He accepts that in the abstract, evangelism is more important than social justice

because the eternal is more important than the temporary. However, he asks, "In what

real life situation would you come into a person's presence and life and only talk to him,

without doing loving deeds? The New Testament condemns this kind of 'abstraction' in 1

John 3:17-18."[84] Keller seems to be suggesting that the "abstract" thinking in this

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[82] Ibid., 1–2.
[83] Ibid., 2.
[84] Ibid.

instance is unhelpful and leads to an unbiblical conclusion. He argues that, "Evangelism, in principle, is the most important ministry, but in practice it must always exist in an inseparable weave with deed ministry."[85] He also suggests that, "The church's gospel ministry includes both evangelizing non-believers and shaping every area of believers' lives with the gospel, but that doesn't mean that the church as an institution under its elders is to corporately carry out all the activity that we equip our members to do."[86] Keller is willing to admit that the role of the "church gathered" or institutional church is primarily preaching and discipleship, and that the "church dispersed" or individual Christians have greater freedom to engage in social action. However, he argues that the distinction is not as clear cut as some would make it, and that the institutional church can helpfully engage in different levels of social action, while being careful to recognise its limits.[87]

Evangelism

While it is true that mission is more than evangelism, it is certainly not less than evangelism. John Stott says, "Anything which undermines human dignity should be an offense to us. But is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel?"[88]

Defining Evangelism

Michael Green refers to three definitions of evangelism, which he finds helpful in different ways. The first is the simple idea of "overflow," which involves "…someone who is so full of joy about Jesus Christ that it overflows as surely as a bath that is filled to

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[85] Ibid., 3.
[86] Keller, 'Church and Culture', 9.
[87] Keller, 'Contextual and Missional', 4.
[88] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 35.

overflowing with water."[89] Although very limited as a definition of evangelism, it does draw attention to one important aspect, that natural and spontaneous quality which according to Green so much evangelistic activity lacks. Green's second definition understands evangelism in terms of "one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread". "I like the equality it underscores," says Green.[90] The evangelist is not any better or on any higher ground than the person to whom they are talking. It is simply that the evangelist knows where to go to have their needs met. The third definition of evangelism referred to by Green and attributed to the Anglican Archbishop William Temple,[91] is the well-known and widely accepted definition, "To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."

JI Packer, former professor of systematic and historical theology at Regent College, Vancouver, finds much to commend in Temple's definition, but contends that it goes astray in one fundamentally important aspect. It defines "…evangelism in terms of an effect achieved in the lives of others; which amounts to saying that the essence of evangelising is producing converts."[92] Packer argues that while the evangelist's aim is to convert, the results of evangelism depend "…not on the wishes and intentions of men, but on the will of God Almighty."[93] He defines evangelism as the faithful communication of the good news; God's message of mercy to sinners. According to Packer, if evangelists

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[89] Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, 8.
[90] Ibid.
[91] The Bishop of Rochester, 'The Report of the Commission on Evangelism', *The Churchman,* Volume 059, no. 4 (1945): 147, http://www.churchsociety.org/churchman/articles.asp?vol=059.
[92] J.I Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 40.
[93] Ibid.

are not seeking to bring about conversions, they are not evangelizing. He adds, "But the

way to tell whether in fact you are evangelizing is not to ask whether conversions are

known to have resulted from your witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making

known the gospel message."[94]

Derek Tidball, former principal of the London School of Theology and a prolific

author, is also convinced that evangelism should be defined in terms of communicating

the good news rather than achieving results. Defending his understanding of evangelism

in an article in *The New Dictionary of Theology,* he says,

> The theology of evangelism must be derived from the original setting in which the
> word was used. The Gk. verb *euangelizesthai* means "to announce good news,"
> and is found 52 times in the NT. The noun *euangelion* means "good news," and
> occurs 72 times, mostly in Paul. The noun *euangelistēs*, meaning "evangelist,"
> appears only three times (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5). Evangelism, then, is
> "to share or announce the good news" and as such it is not to be defined in terms
> of particular methods. Methods may vary widely, provided only that their style
> matches the message to be proclaimed (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2, 5). Nor should
> evangelism be defined in terms of successful results. The NT shows that wherever
> the good news is proclaimed some will respond with repentance and faith, while
> others will be indifferent and still others reject it (*e.g.* Acts 17:32–34; 2 Cor. 4:3–
> 4) .[95]

According to Tidball, there is no doubt that evangelism is to be understood simply in

terms of making good news known, regardless of how it is received.

Apologetics

"Apologetics is a precise and well defined area of Christian ministry which is

related to evangelism, yet distinct from it. Apologetics is a kind of pre-evangelism,

something that lays the ground for evangelism at a later stage,"[96] says Alister McGrath,

professor of theology in Oxford and London and a prolific author on Christian themes, in

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[94] Ibid., 41.

[95] Sinclair B Ferguson, David F Wright, and J. I Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 240.

[96] Alister E McGrath and Michael Green, *Springboard For Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 16.

his book *Springboard For Faith*, co-authored with Michael Green. McGrath explains that apologetics comes from the Greek word meaning "a defence" or "a reason for doing or believing something," and is about showing people that Christianity is not irrational, but makes good sense. Apologetics, according to McGrath, explains and commends the reasonableness and attractiveness of the Christian and seeks to neutralise some of the obstacles that make it more difficult for people to believe the gospel and come to faith in Christ. McGrath sees the relationship between evangelism and apologetics in the following terms, "Apologetics aims to clear the road of obstacles to faith. Evangelism provides the opportunity to respond to the Christian gospel in faith"[97]

The Goal of Mission

John Piper, the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church and a prolific author says,

> Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.[98]

Piper says all of history is moving towards one goal, "the white hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth."[99] According to Piper, mission is not the greatest goal, but the means to the greatest goal, and is therefore the second greatest human activity in the world. His aim, he says, is not to diminish the importance of missions, but to insist that God must be magnified above all else, including mission. He points out that while it is possible to be distracted from God in trying to serve God,

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[97] Ibid., 20.
[98] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! : The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 17.
[99] Ibid., 20.

"When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the darkest peoples on earth."[100]

In his commentary on Romans chapter one, John Stott agrees,

The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18), but rather zeal – burning and passionate zeal – for the glory of Jesus Christ… Before this supreme goal of the Christian mission, all unworthy motives wither and die.[101]

Stott, in considering a number of worthy motives for missionary engagement, is in no doubt that the chief goal of the church's mission is the glory of God.

Wright agrees with Piper and Stott, saying, "The goal of all our mission is the worship and glory of the one true living God."[102] He argues,

The mission of God, therefore, is that dynamic divine love that drives God to seek the ultimate well-being and blessing of human beings by bringing them into a relationship with himself in which they love, worship, and glorify him, and find their greatest joy in doing so. So also the mission of God's people is to be agents of that redemptive love of God. We live to bring others to worship and glorify the living God, for that is where they will find their greatest and eternal fulfilment and joy.[103]

Wright contends that mission is of central importance in the life of the church, but ultimately it is a means and not an end in itself. The purpose or goal of mission in the life of the church is to bring people from every nation tribe and tongue to glorify God by worshipping, trusting, and obeying him through the gospel of Jesus Christ.[104]

The literature reviewed in this section leaves no doubt about the significance of a clear, biblical understanding of the nature and importance of mission for congregations of

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[100] Ibid., 18.
[101] John R. W Stott, *The Message of Romans : God's Good News For the World* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 53.
[102] Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 244.
[103] Ibid., 245.
[104] Ibid., 246–247.

the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. Mission is fundamental to the church's purpose in the world. Evangelism is integral to mission, but mission is more than evangelism, including acts of kindness and love offered in Jesus' name. Mission is not restricted to any particular geographical location and includes ministry in a congregation's local community as well as overseas.

Leading the Response to Change

Having considered the evidence for the decline of the church in Western Europe, Robinson and Smith ask, "Given the extent and seriousness of this decline and rejection, why are church leaders not entirely occupied with asking how such a situation can be reversed?"[105] Their response identifies three issues which need to be considered. First, many churches toady are surviving on wealth inherited from previous generations of contributors. This provides a financial cushion in the present, which allows them to continue to exist even though they are in significant decline, and it blinds them or enables them to turn a blind eye to the urgent need for change. Second, the long-term pattern of decline has been clear and unremitting for fifty years. Living with decline as a long-term constant factor seems to have dulled the senses of many church leaders and members to the seriousness of the situation. Thirdly, there is a widespread feeling that no one really knows what to do about the situation. A string of potential solutions, many imported into United Kingdom churches from the United States, have been tried and found wanting. There is a sense in which the urgency to seek a better way forward is being undermined by a feeling that everyone is in the same boat, and nobody knows where to turn.[106]

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[105] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 21.
[106] Ibid., 22–29.

This sense of confusion and uncertainty among church leaders in the face of such significant changes in culture and their impact on the church is captured by Roxburgh and Romanuk, who assert that congregations which want to engage effectively in mission to their local communities will require new thinking, new approaches, and new skills. It is not that the old ways of doing things were wrong, or that people were incompetent. Rather, the problem is that the cultural context has changed.

Leadership in a Time of Change

In his book *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, Dean Williams argues that the primary challenge of leadership is helping people to face reality and deal with the actual problems they are confronting, rather than symptoms, decoys, or false tasks. He explains,

> As individuals and in groups, people tend to shy away from addressing tough, complex, painful problems that are caused by their own values, habits, and priorities. Rather than look at the reality of the predicament they are in, they often distort what they see, put the problem outside themselves, scapegoat others, and create distractions – all as a way of distancing themselves from responsibility for the real issue.[107]

At the heart of real leadership, says Williams, is a willingness to take responsibility, and to help others be responsible for, facing up to reality and the challenges and opportunities it presents. Leaders must engage their people in a diagnostic process which will seek to accurately determine the real problems being faced, and the degree of willingness of their people to face them. This will involve identifying which aspects of reality are being avoided, why people feel threatened, and what resources are available to respond to the challenges. It is important to note that this is a process rather than a one-off activity, which facilitates on-going learning and adjustment as people develop the capacity to

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[107] Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, 10–11.

accommodate new realities. The leader must also engage people in problem-solving

processes which will enable them to respond positively to reality, resolve the conflicts in

values and priorities which reality creates, and develop and embrace new ways of acting

which allow for genuine progress. Williams states that for the problem-solving process to

work effectively, it must actively involve the people affected, rather than being a solution

imposed by the leadership. He argues that the leaders' role is not to get the people to

follow them, but to get the people to confront reality and do the work of adaptive change

for themselves.[108]

Williams identifies the possibility of providing counterfeit leadership. He defines

this as actions which, regardless of the leaders' integrity or intentions, focus people's

attention on false tasks which end up diverting them from reality and the possibility of

real progress. Williams suggests four indicators of counterfeit leadership. The first is a

preoccupation with dominance, which reduces people's capacity to express energy,

responsibility, and commitment in grappling with reality, rather than encouraging it. The

second is a failure to fully engage all of the various factions and interest groups among

the people, to help them play their part and actively contribute to the work of making

progress. The third is unwillingness on the leaders' part to look beyond their own comfort

zone or the prevailing wisdom, when responding to new challenges. Williams says real

leaders "…must be willing to test deeply held assumptions and question prevailing truths.

Too often managers in organisations write off people they dislike and refuse to entertain

ideas that don't agree with their particular paradigm or sense of the way things should

be."[109] The final indicator of counterfeit leadership given by Williams is a conviction on

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[108] Ibid., 12–13.
[109] Ibid., 26.

the leader's part that they alone have the "truth" and "know" the way forward, held in a way which results in them imposing their solutions on their people by force or through personal charisma. Williams recognises that leaders will sometimes, for a period, have to exercise strong control, or get people to follow them, or motivate people by the power of the leader's convictions, however these must be provisional rather than the settled approach.[110] Williams concludes,

> Fundamentally, real leadership must focus people on tackling their toughest adaptive challenges – not false tasks. To do that work successfully, leaders need a diagnostic process to discover the real threats and real opportunities the people face. They must have an intervention strategy to draw attention to the problem and the promise. And, they must be able to mobilize that various actors in the social system to do the necessary sense-making and problem-solving work that will give the people their best shot at success. It can be difficult and demanding work, but no other work is more important for our collective well-being and shared prosperity.[111]

For Williams, the difficult and demanding challenge of leadership is mobilising people to face reality and respond positively to it.

Resistance to Change

In *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky call attention to what many ministers promoting change have discovered in their own experience, that "exercising leadership can get you into a lot of trouble."[112] They point out that, "You disturb people when you take unpopular initiatives in your community, put provocative new ideas on the table in your organisation, question the gap between colleagues' values and behaviour, or ask friends and relatives to face up to tough realities. You risk people's ire and make yourself vulnerable."[113] Williams also

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[110] Ibid., 29.
[111] Ibid., 30.
[112] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 2.
[113] Ibid., 2.

highlights the dangers inherent in providing real leadership. He says, "In getting people to face what they do not want to face …the leader puts him or herself in a vulnerable position, since a group can get defensive, even hostile. Therefore, the ability to read the dynamics of the setting and combine it with smart strategy is essential to success."[114]

Heifetz and Linsky suggest that the big problem is not resistance to change, but resistance to loss. They argue,

> People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss. You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime. You place yourself on the line when you tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. Although you may see with clarity and passion a promising future of progress and gain, people will see with equal passion the losses you are asking them to sustain …The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore or kill the messenger.[115]

They refer to the example of those who look to their doctor for a quick and painless remedy for a health problem and are faced instead with a call to make substantial changes to their lifestyle. When told they must give up favourite foods, alcohol, or cigarettes and give up time and put more effort into engaging in much needed exercise, patients resist, complain about their doctor, ignore their advice, and then make excuses and even lie about their noncompliance with the advice given. Leadership often involves having to confront people with a need for change which will result in significant loss and then calling them to face up to the painful question, "Of all that we value, what's really most precious and what's expendable."[116]

Heifetz and Linsky differentiate between two types of challenges faced by organisations, which they call "technical challenges" and "adaptive challenges."

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[114] Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, 74.
[115] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 11–12.
[116] Ibid., 13.

Technical challenges are those which people already have the know-how and the standard operating procedures to handle. Adaptive challenges, however, are unresponsive to existing procedures or expertise. Adaptive challenges require new thinking, experimentation, new discoveries, and new learning, resulting in changed attitudes, values, and behaviours, to enable people to "make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment."[117] The authors identify a key challenge to adaptive change when they say that at the beginning of the adaptive process, it is very difficult for those involved to see whether the costly changes they are being called to make will bring any real improvement in their situation. What people do see clearly is the loss they will be required to bear, and they therefore typically and naturally will try to avoid the pain of loss by postponing changes, passing the burden to someone else or calling for someone to come and rescue them.

Heifetz and Linsky clarify the internal pressure leaders feel when their people look to them for easy answers to adaptive challenges. Under the weight of the expectation that leaders should know what to do in a challenging situation and the realisation that people want answers not more questions and uncertainty, many leaders consciously or unconsciously "fake it" by treating an adaptive challenge as a technical one. The authors say, "This is why we see so much more routine management than leadership in our society."[118] They identify this temptation to treat an adaptive challenge as a technical one, as the single most common source of leadership failure in politics, community life, business or the non-profit sector, in their experience. They paint a very vivid picture of this aspect of the leadership challenge when they say,

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., 14.

> When you are in a position of authority, there are also strong internal pressures to focus on the technical aspects of problems. Most of us take pride in our ability to answer the tough questions that are thrown our way. We get rewarded for bearing people's uncertainty and want to be seen in a competent, heroic light. We like the feeling of stepping up to the plate and having the crowds cheer us on. Yet raising questions that go to the core of people's habits goes unrewarded, at least for a little while. You get booed instead of cheered. In fact, it may be a long time before you hear any applause – if ever.[119]

This analysis of the internal pressure that leaders experience explains clearly why leading change can be so difficult and why organisations often struggle to respond adequately to their changing environment.

The question of why people and organisations resist those who seek to help them change the habits, attitudes, and values which hold them back, is very helpfully illuminated by an illustration that Heifetz and Linsky use.[120] They tell the story of a medical professional who works in the emergency room of a New York hospital and often has to treat women who have been battered by their boyfriends or husbands. When asked why they don't improve their lives by leaving their abusive partner, the women typically answer by saying that he only gets violent when he's been drinking, and that when he is sober he is really attentive and loving, and always there is the question, "What would I do alone?" The medic's experience is that it is very difficult to persuade the women to give up a love they know, even though it is marred by violence, for a love they have never experienced. His experience seems to suggest that even a poor, and sometimes dangerous, relationship can provide a measure of satisfaction and familiarity which proves to be more desirable than the discomfort of sustained uncertainty about what will replace it, no matter how much better the new reality promises to be.

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[119] Ibid., 18.
[120] Ibid., 26.

> Habits are hard to give up because they give stability. They are predictable. In going through the pains of adaptive change there is no guarantee that the result will be an improvement. Smokers understand this. They know that the odds of getting cancer are uncertain, while they know for sure that an enormous source of relaxation and satisfaction will be lost when the cigarettes are gone.[121]

Their example shows clearly how uncertainty about the value of pursuing difficult and demanding change can conspire to undermine the effort required to improve a poor situation.

Heifetz and Linsky point out a number of other factors which combine to undermine the ability of people to embrace adaptive change. They suggest that for a woman to leave an abusive relationship in the hope of a better life can create unpleasant feelings of disloyalty to other people whom she loves, and to values which are deeply held and contribute to her sense of identity. "People hold onto ideas as a way of holding on to the person who taught them the ideas."[122] "Some of our most deeply held values and ideas come from people we love – a relative, a favoured teacher, or mentor. To discard some part of their teaching may feel like we are diminishing the relationship."[123] Feelings of disloyalty to significant people in a person's life, currently or in the past, are often a cause of resistance to change. So are feelings of incompetence. "A battered woman experiences some competence in coping with her familiar setting; starting anew means going through a sustained period in which she experiences a loss of that competence as she retools her life."[124] Heifetz and Linsky sum up their discussion on resistance to change by saying,

> The dangers of exercising leadership derive from the nature of the problems for which leadership is necessary. Adaptive change stimulates

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[121] Ibid., 27.
[122] Ibid., 28.
[123] Ibid., 29.
[124] Ibid., 27.

resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent: that's a lot to ask. No wonder people resist.[125]

Managing change is about managing loss. Leaders who understand this will not be surprised by the resistance they face, and they will be in a much stronger position to respond to it.

Williams says leaders should recognise the threat they represent to other people and be courageous, but also shrewd and strategic, in where and how they intervene. They should find partners who can support them, give good advice, bring balance and perspective, and help the leader to avoid being foolhardy, excessively stubborn, or imprudently jeopardizing the work.[126]

Resistance to adaptive change takes four basic forms with countless variations, according to Heifetz and Linsky. They advise, "When exercising leadership, you risk getting marginalised, diverted, attacked or seduced. Regardless of the form, however, the point is the same. When people resist adaptive work, their goal is to shut down those who exercise leadership in order to preserve what they have."[127] Marginalisation is having your credibility, authority, and influence so undermined that you are unable to promote adaptive work. Diversion redirects your time and energy away from the priorities of adaptive change to some other, often worthy, but ultimately non-adaptive issue. Personal attack may be physical, but is usually verbal and may focus on a person's

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[125] Ibid., 30.
[126] Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, 74–87.
[127] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 31.

character or competence or family, or it may be a distortion or misrepresentation

of their viewpoint. The goal is to distract attention from the difficult issues of

adaptive work. Finally, seduction is a process by which leaders lose their sense of

purpose because of an initiative which has a special personal appeal. For example,

the desire for approval from a particular person or group can cause a leader to

back away from the agenda of adaptive change.[128]

Heifetz and Linsky issue a call to realism among those who are charged

with leadership, saying,

> It would be wonderful if adaptive work did not involve hard transitions,
> adjustments, and loss in people's lives. Because it does, it usually
> produces resistance. Being aware of the likelihood of receiving opposition
> in some form is critical to managing it when it arrives. Leadership, then,
> requires not only reverence for the pains of change and recognition of the
> manifestations of danger, but also the skill to respond.[129]

Ministers and elders leading change must recognise that resistance to change from within

their congregations is inevitable. It is not a reason to give up, but it must be addressed

sensitively and skilfully so that it does not derail necessary change. Dissenters can make

a valuable contribution to the change process by, "…asking the really tough key question

that you have been unwilling to face up to yourself or that others have been unwilling to

raise."[130]

Leadership and Management

John Kotter draws attention to the difference between management and

leadership.[131] Management involves keeping existing operations running smoothly, and

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[128] Ibid., 32–48.
[129] Ibid., 48.
[130] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 145.
[131] Kotter, *Leading Change*, 25–31.

leadership involves creating new operations and adapting successfully to significantly

changing circumstances. Kotter says that for historical reasons, there are many more

managers than leaders in most organisations. He also points out that the emphasis on

management rather than leadership causes organisations to be inward-looking and

bureaucratic. He adds, "The combination of cultures that resist change and managers who

have not been taught how to create change is lethal."[132] He then argues that, "…the only

rational solution is to learn more about what creates successful change and to pass it on to

increasingly larger groups of people."[133]

In its 2011 Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland,

the Board of Christian Training's Panel on Leadership said, "There is an urgent need to

re-examine how we lead."[134] The Report argues that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is

in decline and moving relentlessly towards a crisis point, and that the need for "effective

leadership is absolutely imperative."[135] There is recognition of the need to be discerning

and to be wary of adopting unbiblical leadership practices; however there is also a real

awareness that doing nothing in the face of a major leadership crisis is not an option. The

Panel identified a number of areas for consideration: the provision of suitable leadership

training (including change management) for ministers, elders, and other congregational

leaders; the use of Kirk Session "action teams" to address the problem of unwieldy

numbers of elders involved in every decision making process; the methods of selecting

elders so that there is a greater emphasis on providing congregations with the most

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[132] Ibid., 29.

[133] Ibid., 30.

[134] R. B. Savage, *Board of Christian Training: Panel On Leadership Report*, Presbyterian Church in Ireland General Assembly Annual Report (Belfast, 2011), 195.

[135] Ibid.

effective leadership; and a congregation's arrangements for leadership development when they are seeking "leave to call."

Strategies for Leading Change

Having considered the challenges involved in leading in a context of discontinuous change, Williams, Heifetz and Linsky, and Kotter each give their own distillation of practical wisdom on how to respond to the challenge, throwing up a number of important common themes. Dean Williams has a six stage framework for discussing what he calls the challenges of real leadership. He looks at the issue of values and the importance of exposing contradictory values in an organisation. He discusses the challenge of developing the capabilities within an organisation which are necessary for progress. He focuses on the challenge of transitioning from one set of values to another, which is more helpful for coping with a new context. He considers how to protect and sustain what is valuable in an organisation during a period of particular difficulty. He addresses the creative challenge, providing guidance on how to equip an organisation to do what it has never done before. Finally, Williams looks at the challenge of leading during a period of extreme danger for an organisation.[136]

Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky have a five point framework for those leading an organisation's response to change. They emphasise the importance, for leaders, of gaining perspective and an overview of what is really occurring in a change situation. They highlight the significant impact that relationships play in effective management of the change process. They examine the nature of conflict during change and look at how to establish control and manage it. They insist on the importance of the leader helping

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[136] Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, 57–213.

people to take responsibility for their work rather than doing it for them, a counter-intuitive inclination among high performing and skillful leaders. Finally, they underline the challenge of holding steady on a chosen course when the heat and pressure of resistance to change begins to build up, and the temptation to slow down, change course or give up becomes very real.[137]

Heifetz and Linsky also pay attention, in a four point strategy, to the personal challenges for leaders who are involved in a process of change management. They encourage leaders to be aware of, and manage, their own personal hungers and desires, recognising that everyone has needs for power, control, affirmation, rest, friendship, and intimacy which affect how they lead. They discuss the importance of being anchored, or differentiating self from role, and maintaining the difference. In the final two chapters, which have distinctly spiritual overtones, they encourage leaders to think about what is most important to them, what gives their life meaning, and to think about life beyond their work. They reflect on how the challenges of leadership impact the emotional heart of the leader, and they encourage leaders to consider the virtues of an open heart.[138]

John Kotter's framework for leading a response to change is an eight-stage process. He begins by highlighting the necessity to create a sense of urgency about the need for organisational change to respond to the changing external environment. Then he looks at the challenge of developing a guiding coalition or an effect team to lead the necessary change. He emphasises the need for vision that captures an imaginable and desirable picture of the future, and then discusses the challenges of communicating that vision effectively to the rest of the organisation. He focuses on how to empower people to

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[137] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 49–160.
[138] Ibid., 161–236.

make broad-based changes which are consistent with the vision, recognising that the more people in the organisation that contribute positively to the process of change, the more likely it is to be effective. He argues for the value of generating short-term wins in the change process, so that credibility and confidence are created to maintain commitment to the longer-term change process. Kotter believes that resistance to change is always present in an organisation, even if it remains quiet for a period; therefore he underlines the need to consolidate gains, and continue promoting necessary ongoing change, to prevent a positive process from stalling before it is completed. Finally, he insists that the change process is not completed until new approaches are firmly rooted in the organisation's culture.[139]

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that the leadership challenges facing congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seeking to develop effective mission in their local community will include trying to understand and come to terms with the deep and comprehensive changes in the culture, helping congregations to take responsibility for whatever changes are necessary to adapt to the culture, managing the resistance to change which will inevitably arise from within the congregations, and trying to equip ministers, elders, and other leaders to provide visionary missional leadership rather than simply managing the existing work of the congregation.

The Practice of Mission

Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seeking to develop effective mission in their local community will undoubtedly encounter a variety of challenges as they seek to engage missionally with their local community. The relevant literature

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[139] Kotter, *Leading Change*, 33–158.

suggests a number of practical steps which will help congregations to be more effective in their missional involvement.

Choose to Depend on the Lord

Roxburgh and Romanuk make a crucially important point which is foundational for anyone seeking to develop effective mission through a local congregation. God continues to work through his people! Roxburgh and Romanuk are very aware of the challenges facing congregations as they seek to engage missionally in the rapidly and radically changing culture of their local community. They argue:

> Many congregations are in significant decline. For a lot of people, the congregation is little more than a haven in a heartless world… Nevertheless, it is still populated by the people of God. God chooses to create new futures in the most inauspicious of places…. If the Spirit has been poured out in the church – the church as it is, not some ideal type – then we are compelled to believe that the Spirit of God is at work…[140]

Although congregations may have become compromised and may struggle to engage missionally with their local community, the situation is not hopeless where God is present among his people.

What is required is a conscious looking to the Lord and a deliberate depending upon the Lord to do what he has promised in his word to do. Wayne Grudem, research professor of theology and biblical studies at Phoenix Seminary, says, "Jesus Christ himself builds the church by calling people to himself. He promised, 'I will build my church' (Matt 16:18). And Luke is careful to tell us that the growth of the church came

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[140] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 9.

not by human effort alone, but that '*the Lord* added to their number day by day those who

were being saved' (Acts 2:42)"[141]

John Stott adds,

There is an urgent need for us to humble ourselves before the sovereign Holy
Spirit today. Sociological knowledge and communications expertise are
important. Indeed they are gifts of God to be used in evangelism. But we have to
beware lest they diminish our reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. Only the
Holy Spirit of God can take words spoken in human weakness and carry them
home with power to the mind, conscience and will of the hearers. Only he can
open the eyes of the blind to see the truth as it is in Jesus, unstop the ears of the
deaf to hear his voice, and loosen the tongues of the dumb to confess that he is
Lord. The Holy Spirit is the chief witness; without his witness, ours is futile.[142]

Stott rejects an "either/or" approach, and insists that the church must offer its best effort

in mission while, at the same time, being careful not to depend on that effort, since

nothing less than the work of the Holy Spirit can make witness fruitful.

That dependence on the Lord, which is indispensable for effective mission, is

primarily expressed in humble and believing prayer. As J.I. Packer says,

Prayer …is a confessing of impotence and need, an acknowledging of
helplessness and dependence, and an invoking of the mighty power of God to do
for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In evangelism, as we saw, we are
impotent; we depend wholly upon God to make our witness effective; only
because He is able to give men new hearts can we hope that through our
preaching of the gospel sinners will be born again. These facts ought to drive us to
prayer. It is God's intention that they should drive us to prayer. God means us, in
this as in other things, to recognise and confess our impotence, and to tell Him
that we rely on Him alone, and to plead with Him to glorify His name.[143]

Jerram Barrs takes a similar view when he says, "This recognition that 'unless

God builds the house' all our labours are in vain (Psalm 127:1) is the right place

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[141] Wayne A Grudem, *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 853.

[142] Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening*, 371.

[143] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 122.

to start…We begin with a proper sense of humility about our role and about our fitness for the task ahead, and that humility should lead us to prayer."[144]

Packer, quoting James 4:2 and Matthew 7:7f, argues that God will not pour out his blessing while people are too proud or lazy to ask for it. The universal rule, as Packer calls it, whether in evangelism or elsewhere, is that humble dependence expressed in prayer is required by God before he sends blessing. God's purpose in tying blessing to prayer, says Packer, is, "…that we may constantly learn afresh that we depend on God for everything. And then when God permits us to see conversions, we shall not be tempted to ascribe them to our own gifts, or skill, or wisdom, or persuasiveness, but to His work alone, and so we shall know whom we ought to thank for them."[145] Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland wanting to develop effective mission in their local community should consciously and deliberately choose to depend on the Lord in their missionary activity, and express that dependence in humble and believing prayer.

Plan to Succeed

Bearing in mind all that has already been said, about being careful to depend on God rather than human effort, knowledge, expertise, and techniques, Christians must be careful not to draw the false conclusion that human planning is unnecessary or unspiritual. "Should we not rely on the Holy Spirit?" asks Peter Brierley, leadership consultant, author, and editor of the *UK Christian Handbook*, in his book *Priorities, Planning and Paperwork*. His answer is,

> Yes we should, but He is the Spirit who leads us, guides us into the truth, and there is no reason to believe that He should not help us with setting our goals a year ahead of fulfilment as well as in accomplishing

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[144] Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 46.
[145] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 122–3.

them…Far from being unspiritual, goal setting can stimulate faith, prayer and general good works.[146]

John Piper takes a similar line in a New Year's Eve sermon in 1984, exhorting, "The fact that the Lord is ultimately in control of the future does not mean we shouldn't plan. It means we should commit our work to the Lord and trust him to establish our plans according to his loving purposes."[147] Rick Warren, senior pastor of Saddleback Community Church, in his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, says,

> Some pastors and theologians believe that any planning, organizing, advertising, or effort is presumptuous, unspiritual, or even sinful, and that our only role is to sit back and watch God do his thing…This way of thinking produces passive believers and often uses spiritual sounding excuses to justify a church's failure to grow.[148]

Warren argues that church growth is a partnership between God and man where God's power and skilful human effort (including planning) combine to accomplish God's purposes. Warren affirms, "We cannot do it *without God* but he has decided not to do it *without us*!"[149]

Andrew Baughen, a former strategy consultant and now Vicar of St. James, Clerkenwell, in London, in his book, *The Because Approach: Innovating Church For All*, outlines a six-stage strategy for congregations wanting to engage in mission in their local community. He also maintains a healthy balance between developing strategy and depending on the Lord, arguing that Jesus will build his church, and that it is God's power which makes the church grow, but that Christians plant and water as God's fellow-

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[146] Peter Brierley, *Priorities, Planning and Paperwork.* (Kent, England: MARC Monarch Publications Ltd, 1992), 29–30.

[147] John Piper, 'A New Year's Plea: Plan! - Desiring God', 1984, http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/a-new-years-plea-plan.

[148] Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church : Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 59.

[149] Ibid., 60.

workers.[150] "Preparing a strategic plan, therefore, isn't about usurping Jesus as the Master Builder. It's about co-operating with him as we follow his intended growth plan for our church."[151]

Planning is part of a responsible approach to the development of effective mission. Piper argues, "The Proverbs teach us to plan. The greatest missionary who ever lived (the apostle Paul) was a planner. God is a God who does all things according to plan. And Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem because of the most loving plan ever devised. He planned for our joy; we ought to plan for his glory."[152] "The bee is praised. The mosquito is swatted,"[153] adds Peter Brierley. He makes the point that it is not how busy you are, but why you are busy – what you are busy doing – which is of crucial significance. His useful and very practical guide to establishing priorities and goals, and developing specific plans to achieve progress, emphasises the importance of being clear about what is essential and being realistic about how it will be accomplished. If congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are to develop effective mission, they must be intentional; consciously and deliberately focused on achieving that purpose. Rick Warren, says, "Nothing precedes purpose. The starting point for every church should be the question, 'Why do we exist?' Until you know what your church exists for, you have no foundation, no motivation, and no direction for ministry."[154] Warren argues throughout his book that "purpose" must be the guiding principle, the driving force behind all that happens. Purpose should determine the structures, programmes, preaching,

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[150] Matthew 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 3:6-9
[151] Andrew Baughen, *The Because Approach : Innovating Church for All* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 20.
[152] Piper, 'A New Year's Plea: Plan! - Desiring God'.
[153] Brierley, *Priorities, Planning and Paperwork.*, 17.
[154] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 81.

budget, calendar, and staffing in a congregation and provide the basis for evaluating the congregation's effectiveness.[155] Proper planning will enable the congregation to prioritise and effectively resource its primary responsibility for mission.

Baughen aims to help churches develop clear biblical, contextual, and intentional plans for mission and discipleship. He believes that strategic planning is consistent with the example of Jesus, who had a clear idea of priorities and direction for his own ministry, worked out in prayerful dependence on his Father. Baughen argues, "Planning is about engaging with God's growth plans. Planning begins and ends with prayer: - It's about discerning God's calling for us and our church – It's about trusting God's power to build our church."[156] Baughen suggests a two-pronged approach to prayerfully begin to try to discern God's purposes in mission for the congregation. The first prong is taking a long, hard, and honest look at a congregation's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats using a SWOT analysis, and trying to identify gaps in aspects of the congregation's missional activities using a Gap analysis.[157] The second prong involves making a concerted attempt to identify the main groups of people members of the congregation could reach, and thinking through what it would take to connect with them.[158]

John Stott takes a similar approach, suggesting a local community survey and a local church survey. The first is designed to develop a clearer idea of the nature of the area and the people the congregation is to missionally engage, and the second assesses

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[155] Ibid., 137–152.
[156] Baughen, *Innovating Church for All*, 21.
[157] Ibid., 30.
[158] Ibid., 52–53.

the appropriateness of what the church is doing in light of the needs of its community.

Stott explains,

> Out of this reflection will grow a strategy for mission. The leadership (preferably with others who may wish to be involved) will set both long-term and short-term goals and establish a list of priorities…All such decisions will be designed to help the church to identify with the community, and to develop structures which facilitate an authentically incarnational mission.[159]

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland's own mission planning process was introduced by its Board of Mission in Ireland in 2008-2009, and is designed to help congregations "To recapture the sense of mission being at the heart of both the Bible's message and the Church's life."[160] The Board of Mission in Ireland argues that,

> Effectiveness in mission arises from the merger of intentional attempts to plan undertaken in a humble attitude of prayer …Mission planning is not an exercise in attempting to limit God to working within the confines of what our finite minds can construct; rather we seek to prayerfully listen to what God is saying and join Him as He leads. This will help us to sort out our priorities, make choices about what to do first, and maximise our effectiveness on the ground.[161]

The Board's "Tell It Again" resource is consistent with the writings of Baughen and Stott. It helps congregations to develop a mission plan by prayerfully working through a process looking at what the Bible says about mission, clarifying the current missionary activity of the congregation, looking at the needs of the local community, and then seeking to discern what God is calling the congregation to do in local mission now, and in what direction he is leading for the future. The Board urges, "As congregations, this process asks that we set ourselves to identify the story of what God is calling us to do, to

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[159] Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening*, 250–251.

[160] Board of Mission in Ireland, "Tell It Again: Towards a Congregational Mission Plan. Why?", 5, http://www.missionireland.org/siteFiles/resources/pdf/Mission_Plan_Church_Booklet_1_Why.pdf.

[161] "Board of Mission in Ireland: Presbytery Mission Plan Manual", 1, http://www.etelligent.uk.com/etelligent/published/bmi/siteFiles/resources/mission_resources/Revised_manual_IA_Aug_200808061144.pdf.

reconnect in mission, and to plan for our part in the future he is unfolding."[162]

Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland wanting to develop effective mission

in their local community should humbly seek to discern the will of God for their

engagement in mission, and make definite plans for that engagement, based on the ability

of the congregation and the needs of the local community.

Develop Relationships with People Outside the Church

In a context where more and more people in a local community are no longer

involved with any church, one obvious thing that leaders must do is to help their

congregations find ways to connect meaningfully with people outside the church.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Board of Mission says,

> In the past most local congregations enjoyed the luxury of a place at the centre of
> the communities in which they were set. The atmosphere of society was friendly
> towards the Church, as both the shaper of moral values and for the part it played
> as a hub of local activity. Often this is no longer the case. We find ourselves
> increasingly pushed towards the margins of both society and community.
> One of the greatest deficits we need to overcome is the loss of connection
> between Church and community. We need to be proactive in finding ways of
> befriending those outside of our congregations. They are not coming to us and we
> must rediscover the priority of going to them. Many of these people hold beliefs
> and pursue lifestyles very different from ours. God's love is as expansive as the
> world. His offer of eternal life is as inclusive as "whoever believes" in Christ.
> This truth calls us to leave the comfort zones of association with people who are
> just like us, to reach out in mission to those whom, otherwise, we might not
> naturally relate.[163]

Andrew Baughen highlights the importance of relationship building[164] because he argues

that the church is called to go. He says the church needs to be reminded to make people a

priority because throughout the Bible, people are God's priority. He shows how Jesus

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[162] Board of Mission in Ireland, "Tell It Again: Towards a Congregational Mission Plan. How?", 6.
http://www.missionireland.org/siteFiles/resources/pdf/Mission_Plan_Church_Booklet_6_How.pdf.
[163] Ibid., 6.
[164] Baughen, *Innovating Church for All*, 36–69.

modelled this in his own ministry, pointing out that in the gospels, Jesus is often

portrayed socializing with people. He explains,

> Throughout all four gospels we encounter Jesus in people's homes, sharing life
> with them over meals. He was well known for this and was even criticised for
> being careless about the company he kept (Mark 2:16). Jesus liked being with
> people and went out of his way to meet new people in each village.[165]

Jesus also taught this to his disciples, sending them out with his authority and with the

mission to take his message to people who were lost. Baughen follows up his biblical

basis for relationship building with lots of helpful practical ideas for individuals and

churches on how to actually go about building relationships with people outside the

church. He says, "There is no need to set up a false dichotomy between a 'go' and 'come'

strategy. Often, like the woman at the well, we go to people in order to say 'Come, see a

man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'"[166]

Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, in his book,

Becoming A Contagious Christian, said, "As people in our culture have grown further

and further from their Christian roots and heritage, they've become less and less

comfortable talking to anyone – especially people they don't know – about matters of

faith."[167] He added, "If we are going to impact our world for Christ, the most effective

approach will be through friendships with those who need to be reached."[168]

Alistair Brown, general director of the Baptist Missionary Society, in his book, *I

Believe In Mission*, highlights a common problem for most churches. He paints a

humorous picture of the average Christian who is at a church activity every night of the

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[165] Ibid., 41.
[166] Ibid., 49.
[167] Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: How to Invest Your Life in Reaching Other People* (Bucks, England: Scripture Press, 1994), 123.
[168] Ibid., 124.

week. "She hasn't time for neighbours. They'd get in the way of her doing her Christian work. Besides, she's still searching for the right way to witness."[169] His point is that many of the keenest people are so tied up with activities inside the church that they have little time to spend with people who do not come to church activities. And even when they do get to spend time with friends or neighbours, they lack the confidence to share their faith naturally. Michael Green takes a similar view, suggesting that evangelism through the local church is hindered because of the cultural isolation in which so many Christians exist. He says that many Christians live in a Christian ghetto. They know people at work or in other places who are not yet Christians, but they have no close friends who are not yet Christians. Green lays some of the blame at the door of pastors who expect members of their congregations to attend far too many church meetings. He also recognises that many Christians prefer to spend their free time with others who share their faith, because it is easier and more comfortable to do so. He argues that to follow the Jesus way, Christians must take the time and make the effort to get out of their cultural ghetto and "be in the world, but not of the world."[170]

Ajith Fernando is director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, and has an international evangelistic and bible teaching ministry. In his book *Jesus Driven Ministry*, he highlights the example of Jesus, who spent so much time with people outside the religious community that he earned the epithet, "friend of tax collectors and sinners!" In a section titled "Being where the lost are,"[171] he argues that Christians should be, "…proactive in going to places where they can interact with the unconverted."[172]

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[169] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 137.
[170] Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, 15–16.
[171] Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 211.
[172] Ibid.

Fernando recognises that spending time in certain situations and company carries with it the real danger that Christians will become vulnerable to subtle and powerful forms of temptation and underlines the importance of proper accountability. However, he argues that regularly spending time with those outside the Christian community creates the context in which all kinds of natural opportunities arise to help people in Jesus' name, to share the gospel message in relevant and appropriate ways, and to invite people into the life of the church community.

Bill Hybels agrees, "It's amazing how often we overlook the fact that He (Jesus) spent the majority of his time with those outside the religious establishment… Time, however, tends to soften history, and the sinners Christ hung out with may seem to us more safe and sanitized than the ones who so recklessly rebel against Him today."[173] Fernando also points out that as well as creating missional opportunities, spending time with those outside the church helps Christians to have a clearer understanding of the questions, issues, and concerns that are shaping the thinking of those they are seeking to reach.[174]

Churches have tried to equip their members to share their faith using a variety of evangelism training courses, which usually teach a short summary of the gospel, a range of communication techniques, and an element of biblical motivation for mission. These have undoubtedly proved helpful to many. However, in his book *The Heart of Evangelism*, Jerram Barrs, professor of Christianity and contemporary culture at Covenant Theological Seminary, sounds a cautionary note which must be taken seriously.

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[173] Hybels and Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 127–128.
[174] Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry*, 212–213.

While recognising the value of evangelism training courses and gospel summaries, he warns of the danger of falling into a "programmatic" approach. Barrs cautions,

> Always, even when using such a summary, I am committed to listening to unbelievers, to encouraging unbelievers to ask their questions. Always I am ready to change, shorten or expand the summary. In other words, I must be ready to have a genuine conversation with the individual before me rather than giving him or her "the pitch" as if I am a salesman who is eager to get through my presentation as quickly as possible and make my sale.[175]

The point, according to Barrs, is to allow a discussion to be guided by the real interaction taking place with another person, rather than by a concern to stick rigidly to a predetermined presentation. The pre-learned summary can be a guide which may help, but it must not be permitted to de-personalise a conversation or determine its course.

Alister McGrath, professor of theology in Oxford and London, takes a similar approach in his book *Springboard For Faith*, co-authored with Michael Green. He says, "…avoid sounding like a tape recorder spewing out pre-programmed responses to pre-set questions."[176] He asserts that one of the most important skills in explaining the Christian faith is a simple willingness to listen to people. By listening to people you can begin to understand where a person is on the road to faith and what obstacles to faith they may be facing. Rather than impersonally and inflexibly working through a memorised gospel presentation, McGrath's advice is to try to work out where people are in their thinking and then start from there.

Alistair Brown reflects on the incarnation and its significance for the mission of the church and asserts, "Effective mission will always have that depth of engagement about it. It'll mean real involvement between people. It can't be done at a distance. It

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[175] Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 176-7
[176] McGrath and Green, *Springboard for Faith*, 22.

means getting close to others."[177] He also says, "Those who are good at mission have learned a sensitivity and dependency on the Spirit far more than they have mastered methods and techniques of witness."[178] Brown suggests that Christians can fall into two almost opposite errors. Some want quick results and latch onto a training book or a course in evangelism, thinking it is the answer and that it will make the difference. In the process, they end up relying more on the method than on the Lord who alone gives people new birth. Others think that techniques have nothing to offer. They believe that the right things will happen and the right words will come to them without any prior thought or preparation. Brown says, "Looking for opportunities to speak about Jesus, and knowing what to say when those opportunities come is not unspiritual. It's common sense and caring. Learning from an evangelism programme is not futile. Trusting in it to save people is what's futile."[179] According to Brown, evangelism courses can make a helpful contribution to the work of mission, but they must be used with discernment.

Express Practical Love and Care to Those Outside the Church

Gary Millar is convinced of the primacy of evangelism in mission. He points out that,

> …people are not reconciled to God because someone gives them a blanket, or provides childcare for them. As the Apostle Paul makes so clear in Romans, people are rescued from sin and brought under the Lordship of Christ as they respond to the message of Christ – not by social witness (or any other kind of witness that does not involve an explanation of the great news about Christ).[180]

However he goes on to argue that current attempts to share the gospel message with those outside the church are rendered ineffective by a failure to genuinely engage with the local

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[177] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 138.
[178] Ibid., 152.
[179] Ibid., 153.
[180] Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Engaging with the Community: The Challenge of Mission in the 21st Century*, 4.

community. He says there are two compelling reasons for a congregation to engage with

its local community.

> First, our proclamation will ring hollow if it isn't backed up with practical
> concern. If our message is shouted out from our fortress to a world at a distance
> our words will simply be blown away by the wind. Of course, the greatest
> expression of our compassion for people is that we care enough to share the
> glorious message of Jesus with them. But the plain fact is that people who are not
> Christians often do not immediately recognise this – they do not always interpret
> our proclamation as an expression of love. This is why our proclamation must be
> matched by practical Christ-like love. In other words, engaging with the
> community is a fundamental building block of effective proclamation (this is part
> of the purpose of Jesus' own healing ministry. Second, we must "engage" because
> we are called to care for those around us – we are called to exercise a ministry of
> mercy to our world. This is "caring with no strings attached." It is not evangelistic
> in and of itself – it is simply a physical expression of the grace of God. This is
> why we must be close enough to our community to care.[181]

Millar's point, that acts of love and care must be part of a congregation's mission because

these are commanded by scripture, has been considered earlier in this literature review.

However, his idea that loving and caring acts help to prepare the way for the church's

gospel proclamation has support elsewhere.

Robinson and Smith, referring to the findings of American researcher Loren

Mead, argue that, "The single biggest factor in determining whether or not people come

to church resides in what they think of the church. In short, those who live in our

community are significantly influenced by whether or not the church has a social

value."[182] They say the way Christians live and bear witness has a significant impact on

how the church is regarded by the wider community, and that when the church is well

regarded, people are more likely to respond favourably to its witness. Robinson and

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[181] Ibid., 4–5.
[182] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 60.

Smith acknowledge that this is "always a more complex matter than any single factor on its own,"[183] but note the rich heritage of the idea in scripture and in church history.

They refer to the connection between the favour of the people enjoyed by the apostles, and the growth of the church in Acts 5:12-14. And they cite, as one example among many from church history, the fourth century account of Pachomius from Thebes, who had been press-ganged for service in the Roman army and was in prison awaiting transportation. When local Christians visited the prison bringing food and water for the prisoners, their kindness made a huge impact on Pachomius, and he was subsequently converted.[184] Robinson and Smith call for a change in the basic interaction between the church and the culture, which will show society the value of the church. They argue that the practice of generous goodness, especially to the poor and disadvantaged, will help to bring about such a change, as it did during the Evangelical revival in nineteenth century Britain. "No one engaged in a campaign to abolish slavery in order to boost church attendance, yet paradoxically, by engaging first and foremost in mission the fortunes of the church were transformed."[185]

Tim Keller also makes the connection between church growth and acts of kindness to the poor and disadvantaged, referring to scripture, church history, and his own experience. Pointing to scripture he shares,

> In Jesus' ministry, healing the sick and feeding the hungry was inseparable from evangelism (John 9:1-7, 35-41.) His miracles were not simply naked displays of power designed to prove his supernatural status, but they were signs of the coming kingdom (Matt 11:2ff.) So we see in the book of Acts, several times there is a very close connection made between economic sharing of possessions with

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[183] Ibid., 63.
[184] Ibid., 62.
[185] Ibid., 73.

those in need and the multiplication of converts through the preaching of the Word.[186]

Pointing to church history, he quotes the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate, who said, "Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of the Christians as their charity to strangers...the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor, but for ours as well."[187] And finally sharing his own experience he says, "The practical reality I have seen on the ground—and especially in cities--is that the more we do justice the more effective our evangelism will be."[188] He says that mercy ministries support gospel proclamation in three important ways. First, they serve as a "plausibility structure" for the lost, creating a positive image of the church as a compassionate helper in the community. Second, they build bridges to the lost, bringing the church into contact with many more non-Christians than it would ever have contact with otherwise. Finally, they serve as a means of communicating the gospel. They are a visual aid of the kindness and compassion of God.[189]

Andrew Baughen suggests that what he calls "respect building activities,"[190] are vital if the church is to win a hearing for its message, because the church is typically viewed so negatively by the wider community. He says Christians are thought of as weird or worse, church-going is out of the norm, and the church is often viewed with suspicion or downright hostility. In such a context, he says, the church can correct mistaken and unfair criticism by demonstrating the love and compassion of Christ in its care for others. Baughen says the Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians to live in such a way as to win the

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[186] Keller, 'Contextual and Missional', 3.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 211–216.
[190] Baughen, *Innovating ChurchfFor All*, 70–95.

respect of outsiders, and Christians today must do the same. Among other things, respect is won by "demonstrating genuine interest, long term, in the lives of others."[191]

Churches which are committed to the biblical understanding that words and deeds belong together in mission often struggle with how to go about developing ministries of mercy and service. Robinson and Smith encourage leaders to take risks. They urge, "Good leaders are not afraid to begin something…they recognise that you cannot always predict the outcome of everything that you begin…The overall direction is more important than getting every detail in place."[192] Their plea is not for irresponsibility, but for courageous steps in a positive direction. Rusaw and Swanson[193] tell the story of how Lifebridge Christian Church in Colorado set out to develop mission to its local community, which included good deeds as well as good news. Instead of holding events which occupied the congregation in church-based activity, they created short term service opportunities that enabled their members to serve the local community, such as painting and cleaning for those in need, providing and distributing food hampers, and helping in local schools. They decided not to create new "Christian" versions of programs that were already in existence, but to work in partnership, or volunteer in existing community groups where possible. Instead of impairing relationships with others in the community by creating competition, their partnership approach enabled them to create positive, supportive relationships and to make a useful contribution to community life. They also made a concerted effort to discover more information about their community and its needs, recognising that if they were going to be able to love and serve the community in

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[191] Ibid., 84.
[192] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 158.
[193] Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub., 2004), 37-53.

Jesus' name, they needed to know the community and its people better.

Obviously there are many questions about the practicalities of this aspect of mission. How do Christians partner with people of different beliefs without compromising their integrity? Should Christians help those who have caused their own problems through wrong decisions and actions? Are the financial costs involved in such service prohibitive? Tim Keller in his book, *Ministries Of Mercy: The Call Of The Jericho Road*, responds in detail to these and many other objections, arguing from the Bible that God's grace to the church must provide the model of the church's mission to the world. The church is to show mercy as unconditionally as it has received mercy.[194] He says, "A truly evangelistic church will dispense diaconal aid to non-Christians with boldness, as freely as it spreads the gospel itself."[195] However he adds that the goal of mercy is not simply to provide spot relief, but to restore a person and build them up so that they become self-sufficient, "and that means we must, in love, demand more and more cooperation. Mercy must have the purpose of seeing God's lordship realized in the lives of those we help."[196]

Baughen warns congregations to beware of a charge of hypocrisy. He says that to offer care to people simply to get an evangelistic contact is not care for them, but simply a means to an end for the church. He says it is underhanded for a congregation to claim to be doing one thing when in fact its aim is something different, no matter how eternally vital.[197] Stott takes a similar view, saying that if the church's social action is simply the bait on an evangelistic hook, then "the smell of hypocrisy hangs around our

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[194] Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 94.
[195] Ibid., 102.
[196] Ibid., 97.
[197] Baughen, *Innovating Church for All*, 85.

philanthropy."[198] He argues that social action must be a response of love for its own sake to the need it observes in others, offered with no expectation of anything in return.[199] Keller also addresses the issue. He makes the point that if a person love someone and recognises that their most fundamental need is reconciliation to God, then one does not merely care for them when they are ill or feed them when they are hungry solely as a means to their reconciliation. He says Christians are to care for others because they love them.[200] Elsewhere Keller says,

> When Jesus spoke of giving money and clothing to those that ask, he insisted that we should give without expecting anything in return. (Luke 6:32-35.) We should not give aid only because the person is open to the gospel nor should we withdraw it if he or she does not become spiritually receptive. However, it should always be clear that the motivation for our aid is our Christian faith, and pains should be taken to find non-artificial and non-exploitative ways to keep ministries of the Word and gatherings for teaching and fellowship closely connected to ministries of aid.[201]

He insists that ministries of mercy should be offered as expressions of love and not made conditional on the spiritual response of those who benefit from them. There must be no exploitation of kindness for an ulterior motive. However, he is also clear that ministries of mercy must not become separated from the Christian faith which motivates them or the word ministries which can explain them.

Recognise the Cost of Mission

Andrew Baughen says that Jesus announced his public ministry in Luke chapter four with a reading from Isaiah the prophet which identified him as the Messiah who "Would preach and proclaim an era in which people marginalised by economic, political, physical and spiritual oppression will know the transforming reality of the Lord's favour

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[198] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 26.
[199] Ibid., 27–28.
[200] Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 110.
[201] Keller, 'Contextual and Missional', 3–4.

day by day."[202] Jesus argues that people initially welcomed him gladly, but when they

realised that his compassion extended to those outside Israel, his mission didn't seem

quite so attractive to them, "in fact, if 'people' includes everybody, it's positively

repulsive to them."[203] He says Jesus "didn't put limits on when he was on compassion

duty or who was on his compassion list," [204] adding, "When Jesus eats with despised tax

collectors and touches unclean lepers he is showing his love without limits, and he is also

teaching an important lesson about what it means to be God's people."[205]

Baughen says the church needs to come to a fresh understanding that it is called to

live not for itself, but for the world that the Lord came to save. He quotes Mark

Mittelberg from Willow Creek's play on the second law of thermodynamics, which states

that when left to itself, everything in the physical universe moves towards

disorganisation. Mittelberg says, "The second law of spiritual dynamics is that all of us in

the Christian community, if left to ourselves, move toward spiritual self-centredness."[206]

Baughen says, "It's hard work being different and, by definition, showing sacrificial love

will be costly."[207] He argues that Christians must resist the natural inclination to stay in

their cliques, and only love those who are loveable. Rather, he says, if the church is to

have any influence on its community, it must seek the energy needed to break out of its

comfort zone.

In *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community*, Tim

Chester and Steve Timmis say, "People (in the church) want a form of evangelism they

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[202] Baughen, *Innovating Church for All*, 74.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 75.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid., 165.
[207] Ibid., 81.

can stick in their schedule, switch off and go home from. Jesus calls us to a lifestyle of love."[208] Instead, they emphasise the importance of developing relationships and sharing one's life with others outside the church, creating a context in which the gospel can arise naturally in a manner that is unforced. This includes introducing new friends to the network of relationships in the church so that they can see the Christian community in action. Chester and Timmis argue, "People need to encounter the church as a network of relationships rather than a meeting you attend or a place you enter."[209] The challenge for church leaders is to develop and encourage the kind of contexts which allow this to happen.

Tim Downs takes a similar line. He says, "In a busy world, the extent to which we're willing to invest our own life tells a person a lot about how much we really care – and a lot about the reality of the gospel."[210] He points to the example of the Apostle Paul, who shared not only the gospel but his life as well[211] in his mission to the Thessalonians. Brown agrees, "…real mission is an embrace of love, not a fleeting touch. It's awkward, inconvenient, costly, risky. There's pain, sacrifice, weariness, sometimes even death. But love like that changes lives."[212] His quote from Thomas Edison captures the point nicely, "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."[213] John Stott emphasises the importance of the incarnation as the model for engagement with those outside the church. "It comes more natural to us to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, to think

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[208] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 55.
[209] Ibid., 56.
[210] Tim Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 140.
[211] 1Thessalonians 2:8
[212] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 138.
[213] Ibid., 137.

ourselves into their culture and their problems, and to feel with them in their pains. Yet

this implication of our Lord's example is inescapable."[214] Stott argues that what is

required from the church in order to fulfil her mission is nothing less than a deep and

costly penetration of the world modelled on Christ's incarnation.

Watch Your Attitude

There is no place for "Scalp-hunting zeal in evangelism,"[215] according to Packer,

"because it reflects, not love and care, nor the desire to be of help, but arrogance, and

conceit, and pleasure in having power over the lives of others." Tim Downs tells the

funny, but tragic, story of a half-baked attempt at personal evangelism by himself and a

friend, while involved with Campus Crusade during college. The experience was a

disaster for all involved, although subsequent reflection gave him greater insight into the

nature of true evangelism. He says, "To me the student was only a 'target.' He was there

to help me fulfil my obligation and return to my friends with a story to tell. He was there

to serve my ends. I was communicating a message that could change his life, but it was

all about me."[216] Downs believes that typical evangelism training is about developing

harvesting skills which most people don't use because they feel their family and friends

are not ready for that level of engagement. The result is that they end up feeling guilty

because they have not been "faithful" in using their evangelism training. Or to be

"faithful," they push ahead with the evangelistic presentation and try to pick unripe fruit,

which is damaging to the harvest.[217]

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[214] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 25.
[215] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 80.
[216] Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can*, 36.
[217] Ibid., 183.

Packer reminds his readers that evangelism is an enterprise of love. It must therefore express itself in a genuine interest in people, a concern for their well-being, and a sincere respect for them as individuals. Packer argues,

> If we truly care for them, and if our heart truly loves and fears God, then we shall seek to present Christ to them in a way that is both honouring to Him and respectful to them. We shall not try to violate their personalities, or exploit their weaknesses, or ride roughshod over their feelings. What we shall be trying to do, rather, is to show them the reality of our friendship and concern by sharing with them our most valuable possession.[218]

He is very forthright in his view of an evangelistic attitude which is certainly not unknown in evangelical circles,

> …the indiscriminate buttonholing, the intrusive barging in to the privacy of other people's souls, the thick-skinned insistence on expounding the things of God to reluctant strangers who are longing to get away – these modes of behaviour, in which strong and loquacious personalities have sometimes indulged in the name of personal evangelism, should be written off as a travesty of personal evangelism. Impersonal evangelism would be a better name for them! In fact, rudeness of this sort dishonours God; moreover it creates resentment, and prejudices people against the Christ whose professed followers act so objectionably.[219]

Packer leaves no room for misunderstanding in his view of how proper respect for a person and concern for their eternal welfare should be related.

Jerram Barrs takes his readers through some biblical examples to show how love, expressing itself in genuine respect for the hearers, characterised Jesus and the Apostle Paul when they were communicating the gospel. Barrs says, "Such love is also to constrain us in every relationship we have and in all our attempts to communicate the gospel," and respect "…is to rule the attitude of our hearts towards unbelievers and to be expressed in all our conversations with them."[220] This is very much at odds with the

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[218] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 80.
[219] Ibid., 82.
[220] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 187.

adversarial attitude which is common in most people, including Christians, who live in the "argument culture" of western society, according to Tim Downs.[221] Barrs argues that when confronted with gentile outsiders, opponents among the Jews, foolish pagans who wanted to worship him, and idol worshippers, Paul spoke respectfully and graciously not only to the individuals concerned, but about their religion too. Referring to 1Peter 3:15-16 and Colossians 4:6, he says, "Non-Christians are to be treated with 'grace' and 'respect.' Our words to them must be honouring, no matter what they believe, no matter how they live, no matter how they speak to us or how they speak about us or our faith."[222]

Barrs responds to challengers who question how it is possible to respect unbelievers and sinners when their sin is an offense to God and to his people. He defends his view by acknowledging that although Christians may well experience wholly appropriate distress in the face of sin and unbelief,[223] they must not forget the image of God and the presence of sin in all people. All those who bear God's image are worthy of honour and respect because of it, and all those who sin are in need of God's grace, including those who belong to Christ. Barrs urges,

> We can never look down on anyone as unworthy of our love, honour and respect or we would be disqualifying ourselves. Whoever they are, whatever they have done, we are one with them in human dignity, and we are one with them in human shame. God's response to our sin is grace, the grace of Jesus Christ. Our response to the sin of others is to be the grace that has been extended to us.[224]

He points to the example of Jesus, in his encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4, as a prime example of what it means to communicate the gospel with respect. Despite the social differences resulting from the woman's race and gender, her wrong theology, and

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[221] Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can*, 40–42.
[222] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 192.
[223] 2Peter 2:7-8 and Acts 17:16
[224] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 194.

sinful lifestyle, Jesus met her with grace, gentleness and respect. That is the way he comes to each people, and that is the way he expects his followers to go to others.[225] Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland wanting to develop effective mission in their local community should recognise that the motivation for all mission must be love, which will always express itself with grace, gentleness, and respect.

Be Patient and Flexible

"We need to remember that we are all children of our age, and the spirit of our age is a spirit of tearing hurry. And it is a pragmatic spirit; it is a spirit that demands quick results,"[226] says Packer, who goes on to argue that this same spirit tends to infect the church's evangelism with disastrous results. He contends that Christians are unrealistic in their expectations of evangelism and therefore become impatient and downhearted when there is not an immediate response to the gospel message. This often results in a tragic loss of interest in individuals and the abandonment of essential gospel effort. Packer says, "But this is utterly wrong. It is a failure both of love for man and of faith in God."[227] Instead, says Packer, it must be realised that since the Lord does not promise quick results, the lack of a quick response is no indicator of failure. What is required is patience, sheer "stickability," and persevering love and care. There must be a willingness to get alongside people, find out where they are at spiritually, and gently explain the gospel with the kind of patience which demonstrates genuine love for people and humble faith in the God, who works at his own pace, not that of the church.[228] Packer says this patience, which is so indispensable to evangelism, comes from dwelling on the

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[225] Ibid., 201–202.
[226] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 119.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid., 120.

truth that God is sovereign in grace, that his word does not return to him void, and from remembering the biblical witnesses who so often had to persevere obediently while they waited patiently for the promises of God to be fulfilled.[229]

Tim Downs also makes a very strong case for the need for a patient "sowing" of gospel truth in people's lives, in contrast to what he sees as the almost universal desire in the American church for the work of "harvesting." Harvesting is what is traditionally seen as evangelism, "the attempt to communicate the complete gospel message to a listener and to lead that person to Christ."[230] Sowing is "…the slow, gradual, behind-the-scenes work that prepares a listener – or an entire culture – to be able to hear the gospel."[231] Downs contends that, perhaps because of a belief that the earth is in the very last days, or perhaps because sowing is difficult and slow to show results, there has been a continual undervaluing of the role of the sower and a serious failure to do the work of sowing.[232] This has contributed to a culture where biblical knowledge is very limited and full of misunderstanding, prejudice against Christianity is common, and dominant worldviews are resistant to the gospel message.[233] Downs argues that fully-orbed evangelism involves both sowing and reaping, and that both are necessary. He further warns against the danger of thinking that God is only at work in the harvest where things are "happening," where there is "action," and where there are "results."[234] He asks whether God was at work through John the Baptist, or only when Jesus arrived? Was God more at work through Isaiah who saw results or through Jeremiah, who saw none?

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[229] Ibid., 121.
[230] Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can*, 12.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid., 18–20.
[233] Ibid., 110–123.
[234] Ibid., 178–179.

Downs says that Christians must be willing to accept unmeasurable results. The results

that the church does use for measuring the harvest are unreliable. Tares and wheat are

almost indistinguishable and need God to sort them out, and there are no obvious results

measures in the ministry of sowing. "If you work in ministry, you must be willing to

accept the fact that you will never know exactly what you are producing."[235] Downs

insists that God is as much at work in sowing as he is in harvesting, and that Christians

"must be willing to invest their lives in a task that has no value in the eyes of their

brethren – the long, slow, behind the scenes work of creating [an] environment where the

gospel can take root."[236]

"Sometimes not telling someone everything you know about Jesus and the bible is

an act of faith, love and courage,"[237] says Downs. He argues that patient engagement with

a person, where they are in their gospel understanding, is more useful and appropriate

than simply pushing through a full gospel presentation because it is what the Christian

has been taught to do or feels most comfortable doing. He also emphasises the

importance of using questions as a sowing tool, rather than offering too many answers,[238]

and suggests that when the goal is to persuade rather than merely proclaim, it is important

to build agreement with your hearers as Paul does in Athens.[239]

Jerram Barrs also emphasises the importance of treating people as individuals and

making the effort required for real communication to take place. He says, "There is, then,

an obligation to understand what others believe if we are going to communicate God's

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[235] Ibid., 187.
[236] Ibid., 182.
[237] Ibid., 12.
[238] Ibid., 128–132.
[239] Ibid., 135.

truth effectively."[240] However he notes that, "…sometimes we are plain lazy and cannot be troubled to rouse ourselves to make the effort to find out what other people think and believe."[241] Barrs contends that evangelism is often a slow process and points out that at times Jesus was content to send some people away with some issues to ponder in their heart, rather than with the full message of the gospel. The question is one of God's sovereignty in salvation. He says,

> For us the challenge is, do we believe that God is the one who saves? Do we trust God enough to send someone away without telling that person how to inherit eternal life? Do we recognise that many of those we meet are not yet ready to hear the Gospel, just as the expert in the Law (listening to the parable of the Good Samaritan) was not ready?[242]

The point he makes is that it is better to take the time needed to communicate properly with a person and trust God with the timing of salvation, than to unnaturally "force" a conversation out of fear that the person will have no further opportunity for salvation.

Tim Downs notes that when Jesus sent his disciples out on a mission trip where they would have personal contact with unbelievers, he warned them to be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. He defines shrewdness as, "prudent, sensible, or practically wise,"[243] and says "Shrewdness without innocence easily degenerates into cheap craftiness or cunning – but innocence without shrewdness becomes ignorance, foolishness, and naiveté."[244] Downs says the call to shrewdness is almost universally ignored in missionary activity because the church values speaking truth courageously above shrewdness. However the result is that Christians often appear ignorant and

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[240] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 212.
[241] Ibid., 217.
[242] Ibid., 224.
[243] Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can*, 94.
[244] Ibid.

insensitive in their dealings with those in the wider community. He argues that the challenge of political correctness in communication with the non-Christian world must be taken into account, not ignored and excused as "straight talking." Downs says effective communication requires Christians to take the time and make the effort to understand the values and attitudes of others, and that shrewdness rather than laziness should characterise the Christian's communication. He says as long as the church's focus is on harvesting, or courageous proclamation of the truth without regard for the response of listeners, it can ignore shrewdness. However, if the church wants to sow, to communicate effectively so as to persuade, then shrewdness – prudence, good sense and practical wisdom – are indispensable.[245]

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seeking to develop effective mission in their local community will be prayerful, active in word and deed, not paralysed by the fear of making a mistake, but wise, thoughtful, responsible, respectful, courageous, self-sacrificing, and willing to take risks to realistically engage with the people in their community.

Summary of Literature Review

Literature relating to mission and leading change has been reviewed in this chapter in order to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of effective mission, how it becomes a priority for a local congregation, and the factors which either help or hinder a congregation practically, as they try to develop effective mission in their own community. The results of the review were arranged under three general headings which summarised pertinent themes emerging from the literature. The first section, "The

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[245] Ibid., 95–100.

Nature and Importance of Mission," examined characteristics of mission and various

definitions, and established the central importance of mission for the life of the church.

The second section, "Leading Mission in a Changing Context," focused on the challenges

of providing appropriate leadership in a rapidly changing environment. Finally, the third

section, "The Practice of Mission," identified useful, real-world guidance for developing

more effective mission. However, there is little in the literature which addresses the

issues from an Irish Presbyterian perspective or applies these insights to an Irish

Presbyterian context. This study will therefore focus on an Irish Presbyterian experience

of congregational mission in a local area, and will benefit the church by adding new

knowledge and insight to the understanding of mission from that context and perspective.

In the next chapter, the research methodology that directed this study will be described

and explained.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. In order to accomplish this purpose, a qualitative research method was chosen for the study because it offered the most appropriate means of gathering and analysing useful data. The assumption behind the study was that ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, who have been actively involved in leading congregations in mission in their local community, will have been grappling with many of the most common challenges. It is therefore likely that they will have gained important knowledge and insight, as they reflected on their experience and made adjustments to their changing circumstances, in the practice of mission in their own situation. It is reasonable, then, to assume that this data could be helpful to others who are thinking about mission in their own local community.

Four research questions were developed to guide the exploration of the subject and to provide a framework for the qualitative research:

1. What are the characteristics of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

2. How does the development of effective mission in the local community become a priority for a congregation?

3. What factors hinder the development of effective mission by congregations in

their local community?

4. What factors facilitate the development of effective mission by congregations

in their local community?

Design of the Study

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method because this

methodology best suited the purpose of the study. According to Sharan Merriam,

qualitative research is focused on understanding the experience of the research

participants, "how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the

world."[246] Qualitative research "implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or

'felt' or 'undergone' (Sherman and Webb, 1988, p. 7)."[247] The assumption, says

Merriam, is that, "meaning is embedded in people's experiences and that this meaning is

mediated through the investigator's own perceptions."[248] In trying to understand the

challenges facing Presbyterian congregations engaging in mission, it would clearly be

beneficial to know how some seasoned practitioners in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

have "made sense" of their experience. Therefore, nine ministers from the Presbyterian

Church in Ireland, who have been leading congregations seeking to develop effective

mission in their local community during the past five years, were selected as research

subjects for this study.

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[246] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid.

In qualitative research, "The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis,"[249] and according to Merriam this offers certain advantages over other instruments of data collection, such as inventory, questionnaire, or computer. The "human instrument"[250] is responsive to the context and can adapt to the circumstances appropriately. The human researcher can process data immediately, clarifying and summarising as the study evolves. In light of this, therefore, the study data was collected through personal interviews between the researcher and individual ministers and then analysed by the researcher using the constant comparative method. In this study, analysis began immediately after the first interview, and it had an impact on how subsequent interviews were conducted and on the quality of the data that was produced.

Merriam says that "qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy"[251] which seeks to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories from the data, rather than employing the data to test an existing theory. "In contrast to deductive researchers who 'hope to find data to match a theory, inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data' (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 4)."[252] In Merriam's view, "Often qualitative studies are undertaken because there is a lack of theory…There are thus no hypotheses to be deduced from theory to guide the investigation."[253] Since there is very little in the way of research or literature relating to the challenges facing Presbyterian congregations engaging in mission, a qualitative research methodology seemed to offer the ideal way to fulfil the purpose of the study.

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[249] Ibid., 7.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.

A further characteristic of qualitative research, highlighted by Merriam, relates to the form in which data is presented. Merriam argues that, "Since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning and understanding, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon."[254] This study presents rich descriptions and accounts of the missional experiences of the nine research participants, and of the knowledge and understanding they developed through reflection on their practice of mission.

Research Participant Sample Selection

The ministers selected for this study were chosen in accordance with the purposeful sampling method described by Merriam, which "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned."[255] She also quotes Patton, who says, "…the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling (p. 69, emphasis in the original)."[256] In other words, the strength and value of purposeful sampling lies in choosing those participants who seem to offer the best prospect of providing useful data for the study.

All nine of the ministers who were chosen to participate in this study had experience leading congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in mission to their local community, and one had additional experience as the denomination's Mission

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[254] Ibid., 8.
[255] Ibid., 61.
[256] Ibid.

Development Officer, thus providing the potential for "information-rich" participants. Since the purpose of the study was to understand the challenges facing Presbyterian congregations in particular, it was beneficial to limit the pool of research participants to ministers in that denomination. Although other denominations are involved in effective mission, and there is much to learn from their experience, focusing on ministers from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland benefited the study by reducing the number of variables, and keeping the focus on the experience of Presbyterians.

While the missional challenges facing urban and rural congregations will probably have many similarities, it is likely that there will also be some differences. Therefore to further reduce the number of variables, none of the ministers chosen to take part in the study were working in exclusively rural situations. However, two of the ministers were working in small towns, and while there are some differences between the missional challenges in small towns and those in the city, the difference was not judged to be a significant factor for the purposes of this study. Northern Ireland is very small and homogenous, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in towns and cities are similar enough that that the knowledge and insight gained in one context will be valid for the other.

To help ensure that the data gathered would have sufficient breadth and depth to be generally representative, the ministers chosen were at different stages of their ministerial service, and were serving in a variety of urban contexts. One participant was at the beginning of his ministry with two years' experience, one nearing the end of his ministry had thirty years' experience, and the others were at various stages in-between. The ministry contexts included cities, large towns, and small towns, as well as socially

deprived and more affluent situations. To ensure that data was as current as possible, the ministers were required to have been actively involved in leading a congregation in witness to its local community within the previous five years.

The ministers chosen were selected by the researcher in consultation with denominational officers from the Board of Mission in Ireland, the denominational body responsible for promoting effective mission in Ireland. The denomination-wide knowledge and experience of the Board officers helped to ensure that the study sample contained participants with the most potential to contribute usefully to the study.

Data Collection

The data was collected by means of a personal interview with each of the research participants, conducted by arrangement with them at their office or in their home. Time and attention were given by the researcher and the participants to ensure that the atmosphere was relaxed and unhurried, and as conducive to a comprehensive coverage of the issues as possible. The interview was preceded by an explanation of the purpose of the research, how the data would be used, and the steps to be taken to attain a degree of anonymity for the participants. Consent was formally requested according to the procedure required by Covenant Theological Seminary, and each participant signed a consent form.

This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with each participant. This type of interview consists of a number of set questions, but allows the researcher flexibility to respond to the interviewee's answers, to probe further on issues for greater clarity, and ultimately to gather the most comprehensive data possible. Merriam describes their purpose like this, "interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and

less structured. Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways. Your questions thus need to be more open-ended."[257]

The semi-structured interview protocol for this study, which was given to the research participants prior to their interview, included the following questions:

1. Tell me about some of the things you have been doing to develop mission in your local community.

2. How did your ideas for mission emerge?

3. What challenges to the development of effective mission did you experience from within the congregation?

4. What factors were important for you in responding to the challenges from within the church?

5. What helped your attempts to build connections between the church and the local community?

6. What hindered your attempts to build connections between the church and the local community?

7. What challenges to the development of effective mission did you experience in the local community outside the church?

8. What factors were important for you in responding to the challenges from the local community outside the church?

9. How do you understand and assess the effectiveness of mission?

Each interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder and then transcribed later for analysis. The transcription was carried out by an assistant, and hard copies were printed for by the researcher in the data analysis.

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[257] Ibid., 74.

Data Analysis

The researcher analysed the data using the constant comparative method.

According to Merriam,

> The basic strategy of the method is to do just what the name implies – constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview…and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set…Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualisation until a theory can be formulated.[258]

This method has the advantage of allowing the analysis to begin with the first interview and to shape the collection of further data. As the data from the first interview (and those following) is reviewed and considered, it can inform how the subsequent semi-structured interviews could be modified and improved to produce better data as the process unfolds. As Merriam says, "The final product is shaped by the data that are gathered and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed."[259] In this study, data analysis started with the first interview, continued throughout the course of all the interviews, and was finally completed after a period of sustained consideration.

Data analysis, says Merriam, "is the process of making sense out of the data" and it "is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation." [260] It involves basic descriptions of experience and the construction of categories and themes which capture any recurring patterns in the data. The analysis for this study was carried out using the constant comparative method, and a

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[258] Ibid., 159.
[259] Ibid., 162.
[260] Ibid., 178.

number of common themes and patterns were identified, along with rich descriptions of the experience of the research participants. Suitable categories were constructed from the data and arranged to feed into the four research questions which provided the framework for the study.

Researcher Position

Since the researcher is central to the process of data collection and analysis in qualitative studies, Merriam warns that care must be taken by the researcher and the reader to consider the potential impact of the researcher's worldview, perspectives, and values on the validity of the study.[261] The following information is offered to help the reader by clarifying important aspects of the researcher's position. The researcher is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with fifteen years' experience in a local congregation which has been seeking to develop effective mission in its local community. A long involvement in one context could result in pre-conceived ideas which might cloud the researcher's judgement in considering the data. However, it was anticipated that such relevant experience would instead be of benefit to the study, and would provide the researcher with a degree of insight that would facilitate a more comprehensive probing of the issues involved.

As a long-time member and minister in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with a love for the denomination, the researcher could have been inclined to minimise or gloss over failings and inadequacies in the Presbyterian Church's approach to, and practice of, mission. However the researcher is deeply concerned about the sustained numerical decline of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in recent decades and is passionately

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[261] Ibid., 225.

committed to the development of effective mission through its local congregations. This provided the motivation for an honest and searching examination of the existing situation. The researcher believes that profound changes in the wider culture have occurred, and he expected to find evidence that those engaging in effective mission were responding to those changes, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Study Limitations

This study does have a number of limitations which should be noted. First, since the focus of the study was on mission in the context of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, only ministers from this denomination were interviewed. Also, due to the limitation of time and resources, only a relatively small sample of nine ministers, all of whom minister in Northern Ireland, were interviewed. However, Merriam argues that generalisation from a small, non-random sample is possible. She says, "The general lies in the particular; that is, what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalise to similar situations subsequently encountered."[262] Since only ministers were interviewed for the study, it will therefore not benefit directly from the insight and understanding of elders, other leaders, or members of the congregations who are actively involved in, and making a significant contribution to, the work of mission in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. In addition, the researcher was male, and all of the ministers who were interviewed were male. Therefore the study does not provide any female perspective.

Despite these limitations, the study does provide useful data, and some of the findings may be generalised to other similar situations. Of course, suitable care must be taken. The researcher will aim to provide enough detailed description of the research

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[262] Ibid., 210.

participant's mission context (while maintaining a measure of anonymity) to help the reader compare the study context with their own, but the reader must take responsibility for determining what is applicable and what is not.[263]

Summary of the Project Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. A qualitative research methodology was adopted as the most appropriate means of conducting the study because it best facilitated learning from the experience of other practitioners, and provided the flexibility to respond to new and interesting data as the study developed. Nine research participants were chosen using the purposeful sampling method which provided a range of "information-rich" cases for interview. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured method, and the recorded interviews were transcribed by an assistant and made available in a hard copy format for immediate analysis. Analysis was carried out according to the constant comparative method, and themes, patterns, and areas of agreement or disagreement were identified, categorised, and arranged according to the appropriate research question.

The next chapter will report on the findings of the interviews conducted with the nine research participants.

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[263] Ibid., 211.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. The following four research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What are the characteristics of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

2. How does the development of effective mission in the local community become a priority for a congregation?

3. What factors hinder the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

4. What factors facilitate the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

To help gain a deeper understanding of the issues framed by the research questions, a range of competent practitioners were interviewed about their experience of leading a congregation in mission to its local community. Interviews were conducted with nine research participants, who were all Ordained Ministers in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Each of the ministers had recent personal experience of leading a congregation seeking to develop effective mission in its local community, and one also had additional subsequent experience as the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's officer

responsible for mission development. This chapter will briefly introduce the research

participants and report on those themes, patterns, and insights which emerged from an

analysis of the interview data and have a bearing on the research questions.

Introduction to the Research Participants

Nine Ordained Ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, all men, were

selected to participate in this study. Their names and other easily identifiable information

have been changed to preserve a measure of anonymity. However, enough information

about their ministry contexts has been given to help facilitate the making of useful

comparisons, conclusions and applications.

Barry is forty-eight years old and has been ordained for fifteen years. He

ministered as an associate in a large church, in an urban situation, in a large town, for

three years. His current congregation has around 150 families, and is in a large, socially-

deprived, public sector housing estate outside Belfast. He has been minister there for

twelve years. Around half of the congregation lives in the immediate local area, and this

percentage is increasing.

Brian is fifty-eight years old and has been ordained for thirty years. He ministered

in a rural setting for five years, and then in an urban congregation of two hundred and

fifty families, in a large town, for sixteen years. He is currently minister of an urban

congregation of around 350 families in a rapidly changing area of Belfast, and has been

there for seven years. He thinks the membership of the congregation is less connected to

the local area than it used to be.

Chris is thirty-six years old and has been ordained for two years. He is currently

ministering in an urban congregation of 180 families, in a socially deprived area of

Belfast, and has been there for two years. Most families in the congregation still live in the wider local area.

Donald is forty-seven years old and has been ordained for seven years. He has been ministering for seven years in two small congregations, one of which has around ninety families and is on the outskirts of a small town, the other is more rural and has about fifty families. Most of the families in the congregation live in the local area.

Edward is forty years old and has been ordained for ten years. He is currently ministering in an urban congregation of about two hundred and twenty families, in Belfast, and has been there for nine years. Most of the families in the congregation live in the local area, although the nature of the area has experienced considerable change and many of those families have moved into the area in the last ten years.

Larry is fifty-six years old and has been ordained for fifteen years. He ministered in a church of around four hundred families in a small town for three years, before moving to his current congregation of around 130 families, in an area of social deprivation in Belfast, where he has ministered for thirteen years. Most of the families in the church do not live in the immediate local area.

Michael is thirty-seven years old and has been ordained for six years. He ministers in a church of around 250 families on the edge of a large, socially deprived, public sector housing estate in a large town. Few families in the church live in the socially deprived estate, although some do live in other parts of the local area.

Trevor is forty-four years old and has been ordained for eighteen years. He ministered in a rural congregation of around 160 families for three years, before moving

to an urban congregation of around 130 families for eight years. He has been Mission

Development Officer for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for four years.

William is forty-five years old and has been ordained for six years. He is minister

of a congregation of around 120 families in what is becoming a commuter village, on the

outskirts of a large town. Most families in the congregation live locally.

The research participants represent a range of recent active leadership experience

in developing congregational mission in a local area, and their urban congregational

contexts are sufficiently diverse to give confidence that the common themes, patterns,

and insights emerging from the data will have a general applicability in other

congregations, if carefully and thoughtfully considered.

Having provided some background context on the research participants, the

interview data relating to the four research questions will now be presented.

The Characteristics of Effective Congregational Mission in a Local Community

The first research question, "What are the characteristics of effective mission by

congregations in their local community?" explored the nature of effective mission.

Responses from the research participants are grouped under three headings: What is

mission? What forms does mission take in practice? What constitutes effectiveness in

mission?

What Is Mission?

Trevor ministered for eight years in an urban congregation in Belfast before

taking up responsibility as the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Mission Development

Officer. He captures something of the changing spiritual climate in Ireland and the

response of congregational leaders in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in terms of their

missional thinking and practice, when he says,

> I think mission probably looks like something much larger than it used to look. I think for most Presbyterians in the past, mission at home really was evangelism. And there was an expectation that people knew the story, and really what you were trying to do was close the deal. Now I think we're starting much further back, and so it's, "What is the deal?" and, "Who is Jesus?" "What does it mean to talk about God?" Categories around sin, and all that sort of stuff, needs to be explained in a much wider framework, and part of that framework is not just what's said in proclamation, but actually what's shown. So in some senses the congregation's life itself becomes a public witness and that's all part of the mission in terms of how they relate to people, how they care for people, how they love people, and how they show in practical ways that they are interested in more than just themselves.

That sense that "mission seems to be much larger than it used to be," and is certainly

more than evangelism, is supported by the other research participants, in the accounts

they give of their own understanding and experience of leading congregational mission in

a local community. Six key ideas, giving shape to their understanding of mission, were

present in the data.

Biblical Balance

All of the research participants displayed a clear desire to have their

understanding of mission determined by the Bible and to aim for a biblical balance in

their practice of mission. Barry, ministering in a large socially deprived public sector

housing estate, explained how "the biblical need to be salt and light" influenced his

congregation's intentional involvement in the wider life of their community. As a result,

he encouraged members of the congregation to become involved in, and bring a Christian

presence to, a variety of community organisations and initiatives in the local area outside

the church.

Edward, ministering in an affluent urban situation in Belfast for ten years, said

mission is, "Biblically balanced in word and deed." He explained his reasoning like this,

> Word and deed matters to me…that's what Jesus did. As far as I can tell when the gospels writers summarised the ministry of Jesus they always tell us that he did two things. He preached "Repent for the Kingdom of God is near," so he preached a content, and then he brought healing to peoples' lives. Preached and healed. And I would be saying Jesus probably knew what he was doing so why don't we try doing that as well. Try to bring a content and to bring healing into peoples' lives.

He concluded, "There simply is no such thing as spiritual life, there's just life and all of it

needs to be redeemed for God."

Michael, ministering on the edge of a large, socially deprived, public sector

housing estate, in a large town, understands mission in terms of an outworking of the

desire expressed in the Lord's Prayer, as "Your kingdom come, your will be done on

earth as it is in heaven." He said mission is,

> Partnering with the Holy Spirit to bring God's kingdom to earth. And that includes whole-ism. It includes for me, most importantly, bringing somebody to Christ - faith in Christ - so that they become part of God's community and God's kingdom. But along with that, it's seeing broken lives restored. Seeing a broken community transformed. So it's seeing something of the wholeness, and the healing and the restoration that one day will be a reality on this earth - seeing part of that now and working and praying and speaking and serving to try and make that come about. So for me, what are the characteristics of that? That includes verbal proclamation, but it also includes acts of compassion, and getting alongside people and working towards restoration and rebuilding and those things.

All of the ministers, in describing their practice of mission, communicated a similar

concern for this kind of biblical balance of word and deed.

Proclamation

All of the ministers were firmly in agreement that proclamation of the gospel, the

verbal sharing of the good news of the love of God in Jesus Christ, was central to their

understanding and practice of mission. Chris, ordained for two years and working in a

socially deprived area of Belfast, said mission involves, "…a faithful statement, or re-statement of the gospel." He talked about his own ministry which included proclaiming the gospel, and teaching, encouraging, and modelling gospel-sharing to his congregation, so that they could get involved in proclaiming the gospel too.

Brian, ordained for thirty one years and working in a more affluent congregation, said mission is, "…to present the gospel to those who haven't heard it or who haven't responded to it." He said, "…we're there to present the gospel, so we have to find ways to do that. It's not enough to say we have sixty kids coming in with their parents, to Parent and Toddlers - job done. That's only got them there, now how do we bridge from that?" A central plank in Brian's understanding of mission, "…is the fact that you actually get to talk the gospel." He said, "I think all these side door ministries are very very important because by our love we are authenticating the gospel. But we... can't stop there and we must presume that we will get the opportunity to present the gospel, so we keep looking for ways to present the gospel."

Barry talked about the importance of evangelism in mission and described how, when preaching evangelistically to the congregation, part of his intention was to teach and encourage his congregation so that they could be equipped to fulfil their role in evangelism outside the church. Speaking of ordained ministers he says, "Maybe they should stop spending so much time and energy putting a gospel message across quite regularly to people who never hear it and spend more time educating the Christians who do, in how to present those simple truths, quite clearly, to the outside world."

Michael, Edward, Larry, Chris, and Donald described how they made use of courses like Christianity Explored and Alpha, or children's Holiday Clubs and youth

activities, and home visitation programmes to proclaim and explain the gospel verbally, in ways which were appropriate to the hearers.

Demonstration

While gospel proclamation is a crucial aspect of mission according to the research participants, they all agreed that the gospel should also be demonstrated practically. William, ministering for six years in a village on the outskirts of a large town, said that during the course of his ministry, his understanding of mission had changed. Coming out of college, he said, his view of mission was, "…the gospel being proclaimed at every opportunity." However he subsequently became convinced that mission is, "…not just the word, but it's the word and deed." He said his church's message to their community is, "We care about you spiritually, but actually we also care about what's going on physically. We care about you as individuals and we care about you as a whole village." Their goal was to show the love of God in practice as well as telling people about it.

Brian said that in today's society, where there is a lot of scepticism, having a church fellowship that sufficiently displays the grace of God helps to authenticate the gospel. "The truth is authenticated in the lives of the people because they are demonstrating love." Barry said, "We decided to engage in a variety of humanitarian programmes in order to demonstrate that we were interested in the whole person, not just any spiritual need they had."

Michael talked about the importance of showing the compassion of God for people outside the church and described a variety of ways in which his congregation seeks to do that. His congregation provides financial and emotional support for some people struggling with alcohol and drug abuse and runs a Celebrate Recovery

programme. Larry's congregation, situated in a socially deprived area of Belfast, seeks to show the love and compassion of God for outsiders by providing a range of caring ministries such as supporting children who are struggling educationally, facilitating Community Service Orders given to young people in the Youth Justice System, and providing a Christmas Dinner for people living in the immediate area around the church. Each of the other ministers shared a similar story of a wide range of programmes and activities provided by their congregations, specifically designed to express the love and compassion of God for people outside the church.

Outward Focus

All of the ministers were very conscious of the fact that mission requires a significant increase in the outward focus of their congregations. Donald said he took his model of mission, in part, from John's gospel chapter twenty, where the picture of the disciples locked away in the upper room, fearful, without hope and not sure what to do next, provides for him a helpful image of many present day congregations. When Jesus appeared in that passage, he reassured his disciples and then sent them out as he himself had been sent out. According to Donald, the church is still being sent out in the same way. Donald explained,

> [Jesus] proclaimed the good news but he also went as one who identified with the sinners. He ate with them, he partied with them, so to speak. He spent a lot of time with them, and he also was involved in their day to day lives. Whether it was healing people, whether it was encouraging people, whether it was engaging in theological debates whatever it was, the whole idea was this going… so for me the biggest characteristic [of mission] is sustained witness in the community.

Donald said he encourages his congregation to see mission as intentional living for Jesus in the community. He said, "We're not just here to live, but we're here to live as Jesus would have us live. So we're sharing, loving our neighbour, reaching out to others."

Larry agreed, explaining that mission involves, "making sure we are actually impacting the lives of those around us within the community." He said his congregation, which has been in the same place for almost 150 years, had lost touch with its local community and is now taking seriously the need to re-connect and re-identify with its community. Edward shared, "I'm not trying to catch people's eye with what we are doing. What I'm trying to see, is if I can lead our community here in the church, to go and live closer to the people in the street where they are."

One aspect of the increased outward focus mentioned by three of the ministers is a greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, the community context in which a congregation is working. Chris said mission is, "Where the gospel and context come together…it's a faithful restatement of the gospel that's for the community and understood by the community. That's shaped by the community, but it's still faithful to the gospel once given." Barry added,

> We wanted first of all to look at how we communicate our understanding of the gospel or faith to people and what they understand…so the gospel may be clarified within our community context. What do we mean by saying you need to become a Christian? You need to be saved? So we need to present a very clear understanding of that in terms that people understood.

Donald said, "As a congregation we sat down and looked at our community…who they were, where they're at, what the make-up of the community is. All those things really fed into and helped us to develop mission."

Relationships

All of the ministers mentioned the importance of relationships as a key element of mission to their local community, and they had developed a range of strategies for making contacts in the community and developing deeper relationships with those who

were willing. William was typical saying, "The key element [in mission] is the building of relationships…How can we go out and engage with the local community and establish the relationships which gives us then, the right to actually share the gospel message?"

Michael said, "For us, it's all about relationship. You can have programmes, projects, whatever, but unless you are getting beside people on the sofa and treating them, not just as contacts but treating them as friends, you'll never get anywhere." He talks of mission in terms of a "big picture" approach where members of his congregation "try to make contact with as many people as possible," are "actively seeking to build friendships with people," "demonstrate compassion" when they come across need, and try to create the kind of context in which there can be "some sort of meaningful communication about Christ."

Larry said he believed Christians have to earn the right to speak about Christ, and therefore many of his congregation's activities in the community are about earning the right to speak. "Really, it's a case of building relationships in and around the area as situations arise." Activities like Homework Club, Youth Club, and Men's Club, and Larry's own personal ministry at weddings and funerals for those outside the church, are intended to demonstrate the congregation's care for people, but are also intended to provide a relational context where friendships develop and conversations about Christ arise naturally and unforced.

Trevor, reflecting on what was happening in a number of congregations across the denomination, pointed out, "People are starting to have a whole set of relationships that they didn't used to have in their local community, but they are finding it quite difficult to

get their head round [developing] the evangelistic edge." He says the answer is not

looking to the latest evangelistic book or DVD programme. Rather,

> The people in your church who have the connections are the programme. They are God's programme for actually being evangelistic in people's lives. Nine times out of ten it's about genuinely loving people, without any strings attached, asking and praying that the Holy Spirit will open up opportunities for you to share your faith.

He said he thinks that mission in this generation will be "a lot more relational and a lot

more messy."

Long Term Perspective

Four ministers emphasised the need to place less reliance on the short term,

attractional events which were commonly employed in mission in Northern Ireland. They

argued that mission must be understood and approached with a longer term perspective

than had been typical in their experience. Edward said,

> We don't do an awful lot of events and probably won't. We'll do the odd thing but for us it's the long term, grass roots. The lower the level of engagement with the community, the better for me… So if I summarised the characteristics [of mission] it's balanced....biblically balanced in word and deed and its long term, low key. There no sense that it all depends on next month's event or that it depends on events at all. If we're not interested in living it day to day then it seems flimsy to me.

William said, "Effective mission is long term. It's got to be built on relationship,

be built on a care for the whole person, a care for the whole…city, the town, the village

that God has placed us in." He talked about the limited impact of a traditional two-week

"evangelistic mission" his congregation had organised prior to his being called to the

congregation. He supposed that it probably had some value, despite the fact that there had

been little preparation and limited follow up. However, his big concern was to help his

congregation develop a wider understanding of mission, seeing it as much more than

organising a two-week congregational mission every few years. Donald had a similar

desire to encourage the members of his congregation to develop an ongoing missional lifestyle. He reflected, "In a sense we are doing mission consistently rather than trying to get the church behind… one or two events a year." He added, "If our church is going to grow, it's going to take time. We're in this for the long haul."

In describing his mission approach, Larry pondered, "I think the key for us – everything has to be long term. Have the long vision, it can't always happen overnight. Especially when you are trying to turn… it's like turning round the Titanic, you know, it takes a long time." In summarising the understanding of mission articulated by the research participants, six key ideas were found to be important; biblical balance, proclamation, demonstration, outward focus, relationships, and a long term perspective.

What Forms Does Mission Take in Practice?

The mission practices of the research participants revealed a wide ranging approach to mission, which combined a range of word ministries with a wide variety of deed ministries. All of the ministers were actively involved in the public proclamation of the gospel, through preaching in their church services, and through pastoral visitation programmes bringing them into contact with people connected in some way to their congregations. In all of the congregations, there was a range of children's, youth, and adult groups, which combined recreational activities with exposure to the Bible through discussion groups or a presentation.

Barry encourages members of his congregation to get involved with local community groups and initiatives to provide a Christian input into the thinking which is shaping the local area. The congregation does not run its own youth club, but provides staff, who are Christians, for a community club. He plays an active role in supporting

local community leadership, linking with statutory agencies, and works hard to "walk alongside" members of the community who are outside the church, looking for ways to be a blessing. Barry focuses on helping the members of his congregation to do the same thing; focusing on developing links with those outside the church so that they can find ways to help and share the love of Jesus in a natural unforced way, and where appropriate, share the good news about Jesus.

Brian talked about the "side door ministries" such as youth groups, mothers and toddlers, walking groups, and others, which bring his congregation into contact with hundreds of people who are different from those regularly attending the church. The congregation has been actively involved in a number of cross-community initiatives aimed at improving community relations between Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist residents in their parish area, and they are also helping to staff and support the provision of street pastors in the area. They have sponsored a low key "re-neighbouring" project, designed to help young Christians who plan to live in a socially deprived part of the parish area, and develop a greater Christian influence there.

Chris's congregation has a long established community centre, (separate from the church building) with a full-time worker and plenty of volunteers from the congregation. They provide a variety of recreational, educational, and drop-in services, men's and women's breakfasts once per month, mums and tots, and they run a football team in a local league. They have been developing partnerships with Christians Against Poverty and a number of other local charities to help provide support in their socially deprived neighbourhood. They have encouraged members to visit people in the area, take a small

gift, and try to get to know them, looking for opportunities to show kindness or gently share something of the gospel when appropriate.

Donald said that following a period reflecting on the nature of their community, the congregation realised that there was an opportunity to develop a number of new outreach ministries. They established a football coaching programme with a Christian coach, gained access to the local schools, and tied in a number of special services at the church. They are also making tentative links with the local rugby club, arranging breakfasts and showing occasional televised rugby matches in a local hall. They started English classes for foreign nationals who came to work in the area, a Christians Against Poverty money management course, and a Fit For Life programme for women. They closed their traditional midweek service and started a number of "Go and Grow" groups which meet for Bible study, but they also have to devise and deliver an outreach initiative in the community, under the oversight of Kirk Session.

Edward is also working towards making his congregation's home groups a central plank of their outreach strategy. He wants them to become more actively involved in outreach in their immediate area, combining presence with intentional sharing through acts of kindness, literature distribution, and natural personal conversations. The congregation also has a large Mother and Toddler group, outreach in local nursing homes, and a Community Carol Service and dinner involving local traders. They have two Christianity courses per year in a local café, and they use the Alpha Marriage Course as preparation for anyone wanting to be married in the church. Edward is keen to move away from event-based mission and encourage individual members and small groups to be more intentional and creative in their personal relationships with non-Christians.

Larry said that he "stole" the Community Carol Service idea from Edward, and it has proven to be very effective in Larry's context too. They have a men's drop-in programme and lunch club, a "nearly new" clothes shop, and they provide a welcome pack for new residents in a local homeless hostel, which all bring them into contact with many people in the wider community. They developed a Homework Club for primary school children and an "Off the Street" programme for young people who had been involved in anti-social behaviour. Larry has also become involved in some local community leadership initiatives, and he and some of the members have been actively working to reduce inter-community tension and strife at a local interface area. During the summer, they have free tea and coffee available outside the church for people who want to stop and chat.

Michael developed a "Church Has Left the Building" eight-week programme during late spring, aimed at mobilising the whole congregation to go out into the community in a range of activities. This allows members of the congregation to make contact with new people, facilitate acts of compassion, build trusting relationships, and allow for meaningful communication of the gospel. They do low-key door-to-door visitation in the area to introduce the church, offer prayer support, and chat to people. They also opened a small drop-in café and offer several courses, including Christianity Explored, Alpha, and Celebrate Recovery.

William has focused his congregation's attention on developing a more active engagement with the local community by championing community development. They have encouraged their members to join the local community association and have made their new suite of halls available for wider community use, including a weekly Police

surgery, and a doctor's surgery, which is due to begin soon. They run a Christianity

Explored course in the premises of the local primary school and also help to staff and

organise a Scripture Union group in the school. William's aim is to have the congregation

demonstrate the love of Christ in action and to talk about it as opportunity arises.

What Constitutes Effectiveness in Mission?

The response of each of the research participants revealed a measure of struggle

and uncertainty in formulating a satisfactory explanation of the nature of effectiveness in

mission. A number of indicators of effectiveness were present in all of the responses, and

other indicators were mentioned by a few. However, there was also a clear awareness of

the limitations of individual indicators, and a sense that none was sufficient by itself to

gauge effectiveness. Trevor argued that the typical measures commonly used in the

denomination, money in the bank and people in church on Sunday, are becoming less and

less viable as a useful guide. Edward captured the general view about indicators of

effectiveness, conveyed by all the participants, when he said, "The truth is - it's probably

a blend." In the data gathered from the research participants, six indicators of

effectiveness in mission were found to be significant.

Professions of Faith

All of the participants referred to people coming to faith in Christ as an important

indicator of the effectiveness of their mission. Effective mission is "People trusting

Jesus" said Chris. "We will be successful when local people living right under our noses

come to saving faith in Jesus, and God used us," said Edward. Donald argued that

effectiveness in mission was about more than a simple decision for Christ, it was about

becoming a disciple of Christ and involved ongoing growth as well as initial

commitment. Larry pointed out that the journey to saving faith can involve a long process, and that he might only play one part in it. He said, "I think it's long term, and I might not see them [become members in his congregation], some might go somewhere else, but if we've been an influence for grace, that would be good." William referred to the importance of people coming to Christ, but he also highlighted the impact of the individual's response to mission. He said the Old Testament had many examples of people, "who were faithful in the mission God had given them, but the people didn't respond. So you can't judge effect purely on numbers. It's…great when it happens, but there's more to it." While all of the participants agreed that professions of faith provided an important indicator of effectiveness in mission, they also argued that more needed to be said.

Church Attendance

This was another popular indicator mentioned by all the participants, who hoped that their mission would result in increased attendance at their services and at the various ministries offered by their congregations. However, while recognising its almost universal use as an indicator, all of the participants were very conscious of its limitations as a useful measure. Larry said effective mission is, "In one sense, if folk start to come through the door and are happy to worship with us on a Sunday morning and be part of the fellowship." He added, "We've been thrilled with the number of folk who have come in recent years…and say, 'I'm really glad I found this place,'- that's good!" Edward said church attendance is "a poor indicator for mission; it may be an indicator of how effective I am for example, at mopping up disaffected Christians from other churches."

Donald illustrated the inadequacy of church attendance as an indicator, saying that the recent increase in the size of his congregation was due mainly to the number of transfers from the congregations of other denominations in the area. He also pointed out that some people they were working with in the community had made spiritual progress, in his view, but were not yet coming to church. Michael said seeing "bums on seats" is a false measure if it is the sole criterion. He said, "It can be a criterion, but it's not the only criterion. It depends what your understanding of mission is." He believes church attendance can be affected indirectly when a congregation is serious about effective mission, because Christians moving into an area and looking for a congregation to join are often attracted by their enthusiasm for mission. Barry talked about objective and subjective measures of effectiveness. He said of the objective statistical question, "Is my church growing numerically? It's not the only evidence, in fact it can be the most misleading of all." William said he did not like using attendance as a measure of effectiveness, but said that it was a measure nonetheless, and he was pleased that more people were now attending their services, and the number attending their Christianity Explored courses was increasing each year.

All of the research participants pay attention to the numbers attending church and want attendances to rise, but they are unwilling to place too much weight on this indicator when trying to assess the effectiveness of their mission.

Movement on the Spectrum of Life and Faith

Michael suggested that evidence of spiritual movement in the people he was working with outside the church was a helpful indicator of mission effectiveness. That could consist of, "People coming to faith in Christ, obviously that's what we're looking

for; people moving along the scale; people coming to something; people letting you into their home; you're on a door and someone says, 'Could you pray for me?' Dropping their guard a wee bit - those are all wee signs of progress." However, he also pointed to helping people deal with other problems in their lives as a positive movement, and therefore an indication that their mission was being effective. He pointed to participants in their Celebrate Recovery course who had not become Christians yet, but were addressing the problems of addiction in their lives.

Barry also understood mission effectiveness in terms of promoting positive movement in everyday life, as well as faith. He said, "I think measures of how effective we've been, can be misleading. It's very difficult to know how effective we're becoming, other than just assessing whether people are better equipped for life and death." He added, "For me, effective mission is quite simple. Are people better equipped to handle life and death?" He argues that if he is helping people to better housing, better education, and better mental health, then he is helping to equip them better for life. And if he is helping people to develop spiritually and pointing them to Jesus Christ, then he is helping prepare them for death in the light of eternity. Effectiveness for Barry is promoting movement in a positive direction in any area of the lives of those he is working with. His ultimate goal is to see spiritual movement, but any improvement is an indication of effectiveness, and no less a part of his mission.

Chris, referring to Tim Keller, differentiates between faithfulness, success, and fruitfulness. He argues that effectiveness is more than faithfulness, although faithfulness is important, and that success is measured by impersonal numbers and therefore potentially misleading. He suggests that the biblical approach is to focus on is

fruitfulness. "Fruitfulness is what it's about," fruitfulness is "organic, slow and seasonal." Fruitfulness is about growth or movement. Sometimes it looks like nothing is happening and at other times the change is obvious. At times the transformation that occurs from beginning to full flower is breath-taking. Chris tells the story of a boy who grew up in his congregation and was converted as a teenager. He was "a skinny wee twerp" from the back streets of Belfast who was anonymous in his ordinariness. In due course, God called him to serve as a missionary in Africa, and he was subsequently involved in gospel ministry in a number of countries thought of as "closed to the gospel." Chris says measuring effectiveness must involve recognising he is playing a small part in something much bigger than himself.

All of the participants referred to movement on the spectrum of life and faith as a helpful indicator of effectiveness in mission either directly or indirectly.

Positive Presence in the Community

Trevor suggests that rather than money and attendance, congregations should look to their relationship with the wider community as an indicator of effectiveness. He says congregations should look to raise their profile in the community where they can.

> The other thing that needs to go along with that is presence, which is a much much deeper thing. How is the church presencing itself and presencing God in the lives of people in the community and in the wider community as well. So if we take seriously what Jesus says, it's about being salt and light - that's a presence thing for me, salt is a presence thing. We are making a difference we are savouring a society and the light thing is a presence thing as well. People can see something different. So profile and presence are quite important I think, and maybe the score card is how we're being influential in a community rather than how many people do we have in the church.

Trevor differentiated between hard data and soft data for gauging effectiveness. Hard data includes statistics on attendance and finance, while soft data asks other questions.

> What are the stories that are being told in people's lives, who have been impacted by God through the work of this congregation? What is the story being told in the community of who these Christians are? Now those are quite hard to measure, but I think if we're serious about measuring any project or any churches life, then we have to get beyond that it's just about hard data.

Barry also touched on the idea of the church as salt and light in a community, noting that one measure of effectiveness would be whether a congregation's presence in an area was helping to transform the community. He said a congregation should be part of the process of positive transformation in a community, adding, "…transformed Christians transform the communities they live in." Donald agreed,

> Long term presence in the community, that's how we measure the effectiveness of our mission. We've been accepted in the community, been established, bedded in, to me that's one of the signs that things are going well. This wasn't here for a year and then gone - the likes of our Sport ministry, Christians Against Poverty course, Fit for Life - these things are established in our community and also at a congregational level. I've mentioned this before - everyone living Kingdom values in the community - to me again that's an effective sign of mission, that everybody in the congregation is coming to a place where they're living out kingdom values.

Larry also thinks that community perception of the congregation is very important. According to him, the congregation should be known in the community as a place where you are loved, not judged, and where people feel accepted and cared for. He says, "We have worked hard to raise the profile [of the congregation]. Folks identify that this where people care." He tells how after years building relationships, and serving in the community, people from outside the church increasingly feel comfortable coming to him in times of crisis to look for help and support. Loving care on these occasions often leads to him being welcomed him into their family networks, and it opens up all kinds of opportunities for sharing the love and hope of Christ.

Edward said the feedback he is receiving is that his congregation has a great reputation in the community because of the impact its members have in their relationships with people outside the church. He said,

> We're supposed to be the light of the world, people are supposed to see. Jesus says you are the light of the world. Do your good deeds before men and they see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven. We are supposed to live good lives that show people who Jesus is and then they come and want the same.

Brian offered a simple test to get a feel for a congregation's presence in the community. He said to walk around the local community and ask a local taxi driver or some of the residents if they know the church and where to find it. Their attitude and answers will provide a telling insight into the way the church is viewed in the community.

Five of the research participants referred directly to positive presence in the community as a useful indicator for assessing their effectiveness in mission.

Congregational Membership is Representative of the Local Community

Three of the participants suggested that effective mission in the local community will result in a congregational membership which is representative of the make-up of the local community. Barry said that one measure of effectiveness of mission in a local community is to estimate the ratio of the congregation's membership which belongs to the local community, and to look at how representative that group is of the wider community profile. Brian also highlighted the usefulness of this measure, arguing that the congregation should have three generations present in its membership. He added, "The people coming in should look like the highways and byways people. There should be something about them that says these people are not the same as each other…there should be a diversity about them if it's effective mission."

As an example, he described how he had noticed at a recent meeting for new people joining his congregation, a consultant working for IBM sitting next to a single mum who lives in a hostel, and people who had never been out of Northern Ireland together with others who travelled a lot. Edward said his congregation had picked up a lot of people who had moved into the community in recent years, but he would like to see a greater number of locals coming to faith in Christ, and into the life of the church. He believed that this would be a sign of the effectiveness of their mission.

Level of Engagement With Those Outside the Church

All of the participants were actively working to increase the level of their engagement with people outside the church, using a whole range of means to develop contacts. However, only one participant specifically mentioned using the level of engagement with those outside as an indicator of effectiveness. William said, "The other measure is the level of engagement out on the street. Folks have a relationship with church members, not just the minister…Members of the congregation are going out into the community and engaging…in the local shop, in the PTA…at the football club." Although none of the other participants mentioned this directly, the researcher had a clear sense that all of them paid attention to it, and probably did consider it an important indicator.

This section reported on the data gathered from the research participants in relation to the first research question, "What are the characteristics of effective mission by congregations in their local community?" The analysis explored the nature of effective mission under three headings: What is mission? What forms does mission take in practice? And what constitutes effectiveness in mission?

How Effective Congregational Mission in a Local Community Becomes a Priority

The second research question, "How does the development of effective mission in the local community become a priority for a congregation?" focused on the issues and processes involved in making effective mission a priority in a congregation. Analysis of the data revealed four key themes which were important to the participants in their efforts to see effective mission established as a priority in their own congregations.

The Leadership Challenge

All of the participants agreed that there was a significant leadership challenge involved in understanding and prioritising those things which would make mission in their particular context more effective. There was a belief among some participants that many people in church leadership positions were out of touch with the culture. Brian referred to an age gap which was a hindrance to him and many of his elders in understanding and coming to terms with the rapid changes in society which were rendering their existing mission strategies and practices increasingly ineffective. He said, "When you're my age, you know that you cannot understand the culture fully, so you are dependent on that young adult age group. You need to sit and listen to them; they are the bridge with the outside world because they are closer to it." He said they had a few elders in their forties, which helped, but there was a need to bring more, younger elders, onto the Kirk Session to address this issue.

Donald agreed that this was also a problem in his congregation. He explained, "I have a lot of older elders, who have kind of retired now. They realised themselves that things are moving at too fast a pace for them, and new elders have come on, younger guys, and I think they're able to handle and cope with these things a wee bit better."

Several of the participants mentioned the value of having younger elders, who were able to bring their experience of the changing situation outside the church to the discussions at Kirk Session.

There was also a belief that leaders in the church were used to managing familiar aspects of church life, and they were struggling to provide the visionary leadership needed in a rapidly changing environment. Michael considered, "I would say the difficulty in many Kirk Sessions, and I would include our Kirk Session, is that it's been about managing a church. And if you want to be really brutal, sometimes it's been about making sure that that which we have, and have had for years, is running ok, rather than providing visionary leadership." Chris agreed, "I think the natural thing to do is to manage the maintenance - maintenance has been the key, and that has come from a time when you could just maintain and it was ok." One of the ministers explained,

> They lack vision and they are almost locked in a time warp. So therefore they really don't give leadership in that sense..... and I'm not criticising them in that. Many of them are men who have worked tirelessly down through the years, but for them to look at the work differently is hard. They don't hinder it, they support it and pray for it, they give to it and when they can't give, they give their time and energy, but they are not leaders of the work. They manage what's going on, but in saying that, they are great men… in their day they would have been visionaries… many of them are faithful prayer warriors, but they have had their "day," you know?

William pointed out that many of his elders had been on Kirk Session for many years and had an, "it's always been that way" mind-set. He said since no one in the congregation was expecting visionary leadership from them, and they had received no training for that kind of leadership, it was very unrealistic to suddenly expect visionary leadership from them.

A number of the participants pointed out that most elders and church leaders had no experience with providing the kind of leadership now being asked of them. Michael said of his congregation,

> It isn't a church full of people who in their day jobs work at management level. They're not sitting on boards of directors; they are largely guys going to their work, who are told what to do, and who to do it. So they're not having to think much. Now there are some who are thinkers, but typically its guys who have a task to do and do it. So in the rest of their lives, certainly in their day jobs, they're not really thinking too much in visionary terms.

Even when church leaders do have experience in strategic thinking outside the church, it may not necessarily be helpful in the church. Trevor warns,

> I think the minister's expectation is, these guys are strategic thinkers in their work and so they'll bring that into the church. But maybe what the minister misses is the fact that they are thinking about the church twenty-four seven, whereas their elders come to the meeting already tired, not having read the paper, maybe trying to translate some stuff over from the business world, into the church, that needs a wee bit more translation as to where it really fits.

Donald argued that one of the weaknesses at denominational, Presbytery, and local congregational level is, "We don't equip and train leaders well…We've equipped them for pastoral situations, maybe, but not for leadership in missional situations." His view was that many leaders felt out of their depth, and needed to be equipped, encouraged, and reminded that God is at work through them.

Ensuring Effective Mission Is on the Agenda

The participants were all conscious of the need to make sure that effective mission was put on their congregation's agenda, and stayed prominent. All of the participants referred to the importance of casting a biblical vision to ensure that mission was firmly on their congregation's agenda, and to help them wrestle with the challenge of what it means to be effective in their mission. Edward explained his approach, "The main

way for me to build vision in our church is in our Sunday Morning service – I know that!

Everything else can only contribute. That's when our whole family gathers, so I decided

to preach a whole term just to get it started." He added,

> I talk about real church life. I think there's a lot of preaching that doesn't connect
> with people and their lives and it doesn't even connect with the church life. So I
> would often say you know, because we've seen this in God's word we're going to
> do this or we're trying to do this. Or this stuff we do, remember we're doing it
> because of this, because we saw God call us to it in his word.

William agreed,

> So in terms of making the mission happen, the motivation for that and the driving
> force for that largely came from me in the first instance, because that was my
> heart and my passion. And so I began what I would call a "drip, drip" approach,
> you know. I wasn't expecting immediate results. I preached it, but I also created
> time in my diary to talk to folks outside the church, and I created time with my
> elders to say, "Look here's what I'm doing, and here's why I'm doing it. Are you
> happy with this?" And slowly with that drip, drip approach, members of the
> congregation and the eldership have bought into that and they see the benefits of
> it.

Donald added,

> There's not a Sunday goes by when I don't talk about the mission in some way…
> Even if it's not directly linked in the sermons I'll say it in between parts, maybe
> before prayers or even at the start of the service. And folks we've come from the
> community here, and you know, as we leave here today, how are we going to go
> back? It's all of that. You've got to keep it before the people you know. And
> really it's this idea that we're missional, that we're not just here for this one hour
> on a Sunday. It's changing a mind-set, giving people a bigger vision, an
> understanding of who God is and who they are, and all of that. In everything we
> say and do that comes out.

Casting a biblical vision of effective mission was a priority for the participants as they

sought to put effective mission on the congregation's agenda, and they used a variety of

means to achieve that goal.

The challenge of declining attendance also helped to put effective mission on the

agenda. Barry described how when he first came to his congregation, he brought them

face to face with the reality of their steady decline over a period of ten years and the disparity between the make-up of the surrounding community and the membership of the congregation. He said that a period of reflection on their situation, "opened the floodgates for discussion on the best way to reach people in our community." The result was a radical shift in the way his own ministry was envisaged by the congregation, and a radical realignment of the congregation's approach to mission in their community. Although not specifically mentioned by them, the researcher is aware that decline in attendance was a reason for some of the other participants, in getting the challenge of effective mission onto their congregation's agenda.

The other important factor in promoting the importance of effective mission in the life of a congregation, mentioned by several of the participants, was the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's mission planning process. Donald said the requirement to produce a mission plan for the congregation provided a great spur for mission. He recalled, "It was one of the best things that happened in the sense that, as a congregation, we sat down and looked at our community… who they were, where they're at, what the make-up of the community is. All those things really fed into, and helped us to develop mission."

William said preparing the mission plan helped his elders see greater opportunities for mission in the community, but it also forced them to re-examine some programmes they were offering, in the light of the limitation of available resources. He said, "If you're wanting to do XYZ, then we've got to drop ABC, and they haven't yet. They are still very good at voting new stuff in, but not good at dropping some of the other stuff." Brian said, "We also have our mission plan as part of our Kirk Session meetings. The time line is part of the agenda, so that on a regular basis we have to consult our

mission time line to see where we are on it. Are we getting behind? Are we getting stalled?" Clearly, in his view, the mission plan plays a valuable role in keeping effective mission on the congregation's agenda.

Discerning God's Purposes

When effective mission becomes part of the congregation's agenda, the task is then to try to develop a realistic strategy to enable the congregation to respond to the missional challenges of their specific context.

Several of the participants described a process with common elements which helped them to discern what the Lord was calling them specifically to do. Trevor summarised it like this,

> You've got to take time and patiently try to discern what the Spirit is saying. And sometimes I think - John Stott says its double listening, listening to the word and listening to the world - I think there's a third element to that, and it's listening to what's going on in the church, because I think when God is really at work the Holy Spirit raises these things up from a listening congregation. The knack to that, it seems to me, is to equip leaders to facilitate a conversation. It's a bit messy, a bit edgy and maybe sometimes it comes to the end of the night and there's no particular resolution, but you're just willing to say all right, we need to let this hang out there a wee bit, and then let the Holy Spirit bring together a consensus of what it is we want to do. But that's slow, and awkward, and it relies on the Spirit speaking to the congregation corporately.

The process, as outlined by Trevor, takes time and effort, and involves a fair degree of uncertainty and discomfort, before practical steps forward begin to clarify. That was certainly Donald's experience. He said, "The mission plan really helped us focus our thinking." His leaders and congregation spent time thinking about the nature of their congregation and the nature of the local community, and tried to identify existing links between the two. They also realised they would have to move outside their comfort zone to be able to improve their connections with some sections of the community. Donald

tried to create a context where both leaders and members of the congregation could contribute to the discussion and initiate ideas for mission. The end result was a new, clear, strategic approach to mission in their community, and a range of practical ideas to be implemented. Edward and William reported a similar kind of experience, and Barry and Michael described a comparable process which took place in their congregations before the denomination's mission plan process became a requirement for congregations.

Resistance to Change

While many people in their congregations responded favourably to changes in the congregation's engagement with the community, all of the participants reported some resistance to change and discussed their response to it. Trevor suggested that while resistance to change is sometimes expressed quite aggressively, passive resistance is much more typical in his experience. He said passive resistance often takes the form of verbal assent to a course of action, which is not followed by appropriate actions. For example, all the leaders agree to a change in some aspect of the church's mission, but then do not get involved in implementing their decision, and the minister finds he is left doing the work by himself or with just a few helpers.

Several of the participants argued that a "consumer mind-set" lay at the back of some resistance to change. According to Barry, consumerism causes people to "make their preferences their principles," and to prioritise their own, and their family's needs at the expense of the church's mission. Edward said, "Some people show up because they are consumers. So they're not coming asking the question, 'What can I do? How can I contribute to the mission of this church?' It's, 'What can I get here?'" His response to consumerism, like Barry's, was to make the biblical mandate for change clear and

recognise that some people may choose to move on to a different congregation which suits them better. Brian described his approach to the consumer mentality in an issue which arose in his congregation,

> I kept with the same argument - you're the family of God - we are a family. If your grandchild comes in and you're watching the news, you turn over to the Teletubbies [a children's TV programme]. That's all I'm asking you to do, and I just kept hammering that and hammering that, keeping the argument simple and riding through it.

Brian was using an instantly recognisable family situation to illustrate the congregation's responsibilities to one another as members of the family of God, and then calling them to make a sensible compromise.

Chris suggested that fear was often a cause of resistance to change. In his experience, there was a fear of being unfaithful to the past, and particularly to revered leaders in a congregation's past. He tried to give those past leaders a new voice by using them as an illustration to encourage the congregation to rise to their new missional challenges. He said, "We're being unfaithful to them by doing nothing; by using their models, by worshipping their methods, when we should be doing what they did - doing gutsy things and making changes - being creative." Chris was also aware of resistance to change due to a fear of failure. "People are really cautious. They're frightened to fail, fear of failure is massive." He added,

> I worked in a lab so for me failure was just a regular occurrence. One of the products that I worked on - the one that worked was on the one hundred and thirty-ninth attempt; so you could say that I failed one hundred and thirty-eight times. No one in the lab would have said that but that's how people in the church might have said it. I said, "Guys we've got to fail, and fail, and fail and fail, but every time we're learning, learning new things."

Trevor and Michael also highlighted fear of the unknown as a cause of resistance to change. Trevor shared,

The truth is, for generations in the church we didn't need to go to anybody else. They came to us and they came on our terms, and it was on our terms and on our turf. But now we need to go in their terms and on their turf, not in terms of changing the gospel, but recognising that the dynamic. The other way about is going, not waiting for them to come to us, and that's just scary for everyone - having to step out of your comfort zone.

Donald said, "I think the resistance is a lack of trust, you know. Can we trust this person? Can we trust him with us? You know, with what he's doing?" Trevor took a similar vein, arguing that ministers and other leaders need to build trust and be aware of the importance of subtle relational dynamics which can be difficult to read when leading a change process. He said,

> My guess is that for leaders that's about being more relationally aware and more emotionally aware and invested in people's lives. Were you can sit down and have a conversation about what change looks like, rather than produce a paper at a session meeting which says strategic plan one, two, three - do we pass this? Yes? And then everybody carries on. So yes, there's a lot going on there, which is often under the surface and really hard to track. My guess is as well, that all leaders work on a bank of relational trust and sometimes that's quite high and it's usually high when you've met people's expectation. But the more you try to change things, the more you're running down your relational bank balance, and it's being wise enough, and probably having people round you who are able to say, this next step that you need to take is really important, we know we need to go there but, we need to get your bank balance up again before we think about that.

According to Trevor, leaders need to be doing the relational work which prepares the way for, and oils the wheels of, change, and they must remember that the church is different from other organisations, in that its members are there in a voluntary capacity. They cannot be ordered to accept changes; they must be persuaded, and persuasion is about more than facts and figures. There is an emotional dimension which must also be taken into account. Trevor said,

> I think the other reason people get a bit itsy about change is - it's not a rational response you are getting, it's a heart response. So they might hear in their head, we are changing the hymns because the language needs to be modern, it needs to engage with people, and they get all that in their head. But in their heart they still

want to sing the songs that formed them spiritually, and that are important to them, and maybe reflect a spirituality that isn't fully developed in terms of where we are today. But it's where they are safe, and where they are comfortable, and it's quite hard to move on.

The place of emotions is often overlooked by leaders, and when missed or ignored can add considerable strength to resistance.

William voiced a belief of several of the participants when he argued that people resist change when it makes them feel uncomfortable, or when they feel they are losing out in some way. He described two situations in his congregation which produced resistance to change. One was a change in the style of worship intended to make it more accessible for people currently outside the church. According to William, a number of people felt strongly that they had to give up what they like for the sake of others, who had little or no connection to the church, and on top of that, they were uncomfortable with the new elements being introduced into worship. The second situation was a reduction in the minister's pastoral visitation programme to free him up for greater involvement in the community outside the church. Some members of the congregation expressed clear resistance because they argued they were receiving less care and attention from the minister for the sake of others who made no contribution to the church.

Michael also recognised this kind of response, and suggested it was "a grace issue." He said,

> I don't think we've understood grace enough for ourselves and one of the issues that I am constantly talking to our people about, and council our people about in pastoral situations, is that they're saved by grace, and they are kept by grace. Not just that they're saved by grace and they're kept by their goodness, so that's an issue for them in their lives, and then an offshoot of that is, it's also how they view other people. So [when they think about] those people [outside the church] whose lives are messed up and messed up the most - they struggle to see them through the lens of grace.

Michael argued that when members of the congregation do not understand grace, they cannot understand God's heart for the lost and will be unwilling to make personal sacrifices for the sake of those outside the church.

This section reported the data gathered from the research participants in relation to the second research question, "How does the development of effective mission in the local community become a priority for a congregation?" The analysis explored the issues and processes involved in making effective mission a priority in a congregation. Analysis of the data revealed four key themes which were important to the participants in their efforts to see effective mission established as a priority in their congregations. These themes included the leadership challenge, ensuring effective mission is on the agenda, discerning God's purposes, and resistance to change.

Factors Which Hinder Effective Congregational Mission in a Local Community

The third research question, "What factors hinder the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?" focused on identifying from the experience of the research participants those common practical issues and concerns which can get in the way of the development of effective mission. Analysis of the data revealed seven key factors which need to be taken into account.

Underestimating the Need for Change

Several of the participants referred to the fact that many people in the church fail to appreciate the challenge the church is facing as it seeks to develop effective mission in its local community. Brian underlined the scale of the rapid changes in society with increasing scepticism, individualism, technological advances, secularisation, and consumerism, saying, "Everybody's a god in their own eyes, and it's rampant. It's all

about me, and I'm right. You have got your truth, and I've got mine." Yet Trevor said people in the church want to think, "If we just tweak a few things, that will fix it." He argued, "They really need to realise that we are not living in the sort of culture that easily engages with how we do church."

Edward said he had not experienced much resistance to change when he began to prioritise mission, because his "church was quite dead" when he first arrived. He believed that the seriousness of the challenge they faced could no longer be denied, but that other congregations were deluding themselves. He expressed, "I think churches that have any signs of residual strength - times are hard a few people have left, but we're still grand - they're not even ready to ask the questions yet! They think the answer lies in getting more people back to what they were doing in the 1950's." Larry also suggested that uncertainty about the future viability of his congregation, raised by denominational administrators before he arrived, helped people to realise the seriousness of the situation they were in, and made them more willing to consider some important and necessary changes to their mission strategy.

The Busyness of Church Life

All of the participants were convinced that the busyness of church life actually hinders the development of effective mission, and the busyness affects both ministers and members alike. Michael said, "Personally speaking, there has been a time challenge." He described the demands of pastoring a congregation of three hundred families, preaching twice per week, and being the driving force behind the push to develop more effective mission. He said, "There is only so much energy you have to keep driving, driving, driving…there's only so many ideas and so much creativity and visionary thinking you

can come up with." William and Donald both agreed, and described how their elders had chosen to free them up from systematic pastoral visitation in the congregation so that they could devote more time to engaging with the community. They underlined the value of small groups for sharing the responsibilities of pastoring the congregation.

Donald and Michael also described how they, with the Kirk Session's blessing, brought guest preachers in on a more regular basis to reduce the preaching workload so that they could develop mission outside the congregation. Donald referred to the time pressures on members of the congregation, "People live busy lives, and there's a sense that we've got to be careful that we don't overstretch the people and get the people into situations where this becomes their life - reaching the community - rather than being part of their whole life. William agreed, "One of the things we have tried to avoid in terms of making effective mission is trying to run too many programmes. We are trying to create time for people to build relationships and say, 'Look we're not necessarily going to run as a church, but go out there and be involved in what's already happening.'" He has encouraged members of his congregation to work in partnership with other groups in the community as one way of reducing the number of church groups to be staffed.

Barry did the same thing, arguing that it also increased the congregation's gospel influence and impact in wider community life. Edward takes an even more radical line,

> So what we need to do is get rid of some of our "churchy" activities, and that's what we're doing at the moment. We're still at two services every Sunday, I don't think we will be for much longer - and it's not because we couldn't run an evening service and attract a crowd. What we're doing is very counter cultural, we're saying as a church who could easily attract a crowd on a Sunday evening, we're not going do that because we don't want to "mop up" churchy people from other churches, we want to spend more time having meals with our neighbours.

He continued,

> Anybody who's been running a reasonably active church is currently running a model that is totally prohibitive in terms of connecting with non-Christian people. We've got a machine running here that needs all of us, all hands to the deck, all of the time, to keep it running. So a big part of my vision for my work at the moment is dismantling. I'm taking a lot of stuff apart, and I'm having to say, "No let's not do that."

Edward is convinced that the busyness of church life is such a major hindrance to the development of effective mission, and that nothing less than major re-structuring around the priority of connecting with those outside the church will suffice.

People Who Are Not Like Us

Most of the participants highlighted barriers created by social or political differences between members of their congregations and people in the local community as a significant hindrance in developing effective mission. Trevor said,

> I think in the culture, we don't quite know how to relate to people who are not like us and I think that takes such a wide variety of forms. People who are not like us, it's around class, it's about background, it's about education, it's about language, it's about worldview and it's about culture in terms of …high culture …what you might call popular culture …and folk culture which happens locally.

He added,

> We have congregations for example, who are now a decreasing Protestant presence in a largely Roman Catholic area, or Nationalist area, or however you want to describe it, and it seems to me, to concentrate on a smaller and smaller fringe in those situation is pretty dangerous. You need to step out and beyond, but equally that's difficult because of the post-troubles legacy. So that's something that affects a lot of congregations in Ireland.

Michael described his congregational situation in exactly those terms. He said,

> For us there are some basic issues, political and social issues. Our community is seventy-five per cent Catholic/Nationalist, we're a Presbyterian church, there is immediately a political suspicion there. I'm talking about both sides, including the church. There's also a huge social gulf. Probably about ninety per cent of our congregation on a Sunday are travellers; I mean they drive in their cars to church. They're coming from very middle-class or working backgrounds, "protestant

work ethic" kind of folk. You also have folk from a very nominal kind of catholic background who aren't working and who have a whole raft of social problems, and so there is an immediate kind of contrast there in those two people groups.

Both Trevor and Michael argue that the political or social background of church members is often different from those in the surrounding community, and this can create difficulties in making connections and developing ongoing relationships.

Larry described how he did not feel comfortable encouraging the young woman from the community to attend the woman's group in his church. He said, "We sent one girl along, and they didn't embrace her. Their little cosy club was rocked. It's changing slowly in some areas, but it's not changing fast enough." Donald also believed that his largely middle-class congregation found it difficult to bridge the social and political differences with others in their town. He admitted,

Whether we're proud of it or not, there is a "gulf" there, and the only way that that can be bridged is relational. And it's to help people to see that people in the community are not to be feared, and they're not to be seen as a target either you know. And also the community need to see that these people are Christians but they're not to be feared either, because there is a sense in which we can relate well to one another and again that's the challenge.

Barry said those members of his congregation who did not live in the local community found it difficult to understand and empathise with the issues and concerns of that community. He and Larry also said that some parents in the congregation did not want their children spending time in company with children from the local community because of the danger of bad influence. This attitude made it difficult to reach out effectively to the young people in the community outside the church.

Clinging to the Comfort Zone

Several of the participants mentioned fear of the unknown and the avoidance of discomfort as a hindrance to the greater involvement of the congregation in mission. Donald said,

> I think it was a lack of confidence amongst the people and there was a sense in which people become comfortable and they didn't want to be uncomfortable. And truth be known, I think that's a part of us all, we do get comfortable - and particularly with folk at a certain age - and I think it was helping people to see – yes this may be uncomfortable - but not uncomfortable to the point where it is unbearable. And again it was helping people to see that a little discomfort can be positive and helpful.

Donald's view was that it is important to recognise that congregations feel uncomfortable when asked to leave their comfort zone, but that they must be encouraged and supported to do just that if they are to develop effective mission.

Trevor suggested that fear of the unknown and an avoidance of discomfort lay behind the desire to focus on fringe members, which always surfaces when mission is being discussed. Trevor said,

> There's also the whole argument about the fringe of the congregation. What are you going away out here for these people who are away out on the margins, whenever we've got one hundred people who never come, but are on the books? ...People use the fringe as an excuse, I think because they think that it's comfortable and safer, whenever really it's casting your pearl before swine.

Trevor argues that in a bid to reduce fear and discomfort, congregations can focus their mission on people who have already heard the gospel and decided to remain at a distance, while ignoring those outside the church who have had no meaningful engagement with the gospel.

William agreed, referring to research quoted in Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*, which argues that focusing attention on fringe members produces a poor return

for the effort invested and is therefore missionally ineffective. Michael said members of his congregation are being pushed out of their comfort zone and are learning how to cope with people who are different.

> It's been our experience that we are learning to become, not un-shockable, but less easily shocked. You've got to be prepared for people coming in and openly discussing a life style that we don't agree with, remembering that we're not calling them to change their lifestyle before they come to Christ, but that Christ will change their lifestyle once they come to him. It's being comfortable being with people, communicating with people, working with people, whose lifestyles aren't what we'd have them be. It's not that we agree with it, it's just that we work with people where they're at and not where you think they should be.

Chris talked about the challenge of coping with people who come to faith in Christ, but whose lives and domestic situations are really messy. He referred to a man who had been involved in relationships with several women and had children with each of them, and then was converted. He said missionaries in parts of Africa have to deal with this all the time, but the church is well outside its comfort zone, "We never in the church had these sorts of problems before... a real person who has, effectively, three wives. How do we deal with that? We don't know."

Inadequate Theology

Some of the participants said theological misunderstanding in the congregation can hinder the development of effective mission. Chris mentioned two specific areas of theological misunderstanding, separatism and revivalism, which hindered effective mission in his congregation. He said separatism is a "come ye out and be ye separate" definition of the church, which understands holiness in terms of maintaining a separation from those outside the church. In that view, being a Christian is understood as, "Staying away from a whole heap of stuff. It wasn't doing kindness, doing certain things; it was

staying away and not getting involved… Goodness is separating yourself out of things - it's about what you don't do, rather than what you do."

Clearly, according to Chris, such a view will reduce a person's contact with those outside the church and therefore hinder their ability to share the good news in word and deed. He also referred to what he calls "revivalism," which he believes is also very damaging.

> I think revivalism is, if we pray hard enough and if we do good enough then God will bless us as a people and the pagans will want to hear the gospel. They'll come to us you know. I think that's really, really damaging. I think that idea of the wrong picture of revival is really damaging, because it's a matter of just sitting and waiting for God to pour his blessing, when he already has.

Chris argues that the church should be out creatively doing whatever can be done to share the blessing of God which has already been poured out, rather than sitting around waiting for some additional blessing.

Donald pointed to a misunderstanding of the nature of mission and how the body of Christ is gifted for mission as a hindrance to the development of effective mission in his congregation. He said,

> I thought a lot of it was fear, but I think that behind that was misunderstanding of what mission is, and that's why we use the word mission. It's not that we want to ditch the word evangelism, but when I was using the word evangelism, the people thought this wasn't for them, this was for the person gifted in evangelism. And then when we started to use the word mission, and helped people to see that they could be involved in this, then before they realised it, they were doing evangelism under a different name. And so it was a misunderstanding. People thought this was something that particular people do, whether it was overseas or those who were more spiritual, or the leadership team, or whatever it was. They didn't fully realise that everyone has a part to play, and it doesn't necessarily mean you'll stand on the street corner handing out tracts, but that you can be intentional in sharing the Good News in some way. So I teach the people, or help them to see, that mission is just as natural as living out, and breathing, and being amongst the community, but in a way that shows Jesus to the people - and everybody can do that.

According to Donald, as members of his congregation began to understand what mission is, and the part they had to play in it, they started to become more effective in reaching out to their local community.

Communication Issues

Several of the participants suggested that biblical illiteracy in the culture and methods of communication employed by the church combined to hinder effective mission. Larry referred to the decline of Sunday schools and church attendance in his local community and the legacy left by that, saying, "There is no understanding of the gospel, or bedrock of any Bible knowledge." He argued that this made it more difficult to communicate gospel truth because commonly understood ideas of sin and salvation had disappeared from society. Chris said, "We could be as far as fourth generation where there is no church connection… when I talk about the gospel, it means different things, my terms are gone, there is no clear reference point" Edward agreed, but questioned how well the culture had really understood the gospel. He suggested that while there was a common language, biblical concepts were so misunderstood that they often hindered rather than helped the church's mission. He said, in a sense, the fact that the culture no longer knows the biblical story means there is a new freshness and openness for gospel communication.

Michael explained, "You have to re-work your whole language…The communication has to be different, and the language has to be much more straightforward and earthy and real." He talked about people coming to their Discover Groups, "The folks just didn't know how to behave. They would be sitting and their phone would be ringing, and they just answered the phone in the middle of the group." He wondered how realistic

it is to expect people from the community to be able to sit through a church service including a twenty-five minute sermon. He emphasised the need to experiment, and to create additional opportunities where the methods of communicating the gospel were much more appropriate for the people he wanted to reach. He suggested that even after someone had come to faith in Christ, the Sunday service might not be the most appropriate way to encourage them in the faith, at least initially.

Edward, working in a more affluent, middle-class context, said he did not think the barriers for an un-churched person coming into their church were sky-high, but they were real. He said that in church services, he was being very careful about language, and employing an informal dress code and a communication style which did not sound like lecturing, to try to reduce the barriers. However, he acknowledged that there is a culture gap, and it may not be appropriate for a Christian to say to someone they have just met at the school gate, "Why don't you come to church?" It might be wiser to invite them to something much more low key in the life of the church, or to their home for a meal.

Suspicion of the Church

The final practical hindrance to the development of effective mission in the local community, mentioned by most of the participants, was the increasing level of suspicion many people had of the church. Michael highlighted the growing mistrust of all institutions and authorities in society, which is one of the distinguishing features of postmodernism. He elaborated, "People's trust of institutions has greatly diminished in the past number of years, whether it's been the police force, whether it's been politicians, whether it's been teachers or whatever. The trust level has gone down; it's not just church, it is a mark of society." He also drew attention to the child abuse scandals in the

Roman Catholic Church and the impact that it had in the local community where his

congregation is situated. He said, "A significant population of that community comes

from a Roman Catholic background. Now there's huge suspicion there in terms of how

people are viewing institutional religion, with all the goings on and scandals that have

taken place."

Brian suggested that there are very high levels of scepticism in society about the

church,

> I think to be honest we've got to that point where they say the church will
> indoctrinate you and you won't be able to think for yourself. The church will turn
> you into a bigot, you know. I actually think that's how far the negativity has got. I
> think we're in serious trouble and we've got to address the deep underlying
> issues.

Barry believed that people in the local community were suspicious of the church because

of "bad experiences of the church before." He said, "Some people have had horrendous

experiences of lack of Christian integrity and grace." Or they have been evangelised in

inappropriate ways by other churches and then abandoned "leaving a very sour taste in

their mouth." Speaking of encounters they had with people in their community, he said,

"Quite often these bad experiences were coming out, and it was almost as if [they were

saying] 'I don't want to be loved by you, because if I am I'll be hurt again. So I'll keep

you at arm's length....I can't afford to trust you for my trust been broken before, and

you'll be no different.'"

He also mentioned the common feeling expressed in "loyalist communities" that

they had been abandoned by the church during "the troubles," a charge he believes is

correct and has caused deep hurt and produced a deep mistrust of the church. Chris, also

working in a "loyalist community," encountered the same feeling and added two further

causes of suspicion. People who made a false claim to be converted as a way of getting out of a paramilitary group, reduced the church's credibility, and that together with a lack of positive role models living in the community, leads people to suspect that Christianity is either fake or does not work in their context.

Donald said there is a suspicion in the community that the church is against progress. He said,

> They perceive the church as saying no – no to shopping on Sunday, women being ordained, same sex marriage or homosexuality or any of those sorts of things. It's always no, no, no, and they see a church that hasn't moved with the times. It's a misperception – if they would take time to dialogue, time to try and understand why the church is maybe saying no in some areas - but there seems to be an unwillingness to do that at great depth.

Donald says the agenda is driven by the media at a superficial level, and it feeds a growing suspicion of the church in society which hinders the development of effective mission.

This section reported on the data gathered from the research participants in relation to the third research question, "What factors hinder the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?" It sought to identify from the experience of the research participants those common practical issues and concerns which can get in the way of the development of effective mission. The analysis highlighted seven key factors which were important to the participants, including underestimating the need for change, the busyness of church life, people who are not like us, clinging to the comfort zone, inadequate theology, communication issues, and suspicion of the church.

Factors Which Facilitate Effective Congregational Mission in a Local Community

The final research question, "What factors facilitate the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?" sought to identify, from the experience of the research participants, practical ideas and approaches which promote the development of effective mission. Analysis of the data revealed nine factors which were significant for the participants.

Prioritising Mission

All of the participants emphasised the importance of making mission the main priority in the life of the congregation and consistently bringing the challenges of mission to the congregation's attention. Trevor pointed to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's use of Saddleback's purpose driven model of organising church life, during the past number of years, and suggested that, despite its benefits, it had a serious downside. He argued,

> For a long time, we have measured church life or congregational life around the five areas that came out of Saddleback: worship, ministry, fellowship, discipleship, and mission. It seems to me, and to other people who have done Natural Church Development, that the thing that always comes last is mission. So you try to develop the life of your congregation, but mission is always the Cinderella, the one that's left behind. I think we need to reconfigure that so that mission comes at the front and out of that, looking through the mission lens, you then say, "Well what's our worship like? What's our ministry like?" and so on.

Trevor suggested that there is a need for a mind-set shift in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, so that congregations begin to think of themselves in terms of pioneer missionaries on the mission field. He said that missionaries do not travel overseas to preach to decreasing numbers of people in church or to visit those already connected to the church; they go to break new ground. He argued that, "Realistically we're in a

missional situation. If we're going to be a missional church, then we need to organise our priorities missionally."

Several of the participants highlighted the importance of consistently communicating the vision for mission, using different means. Michael told how he seeks to feed the vision for mission through his preaching. He said he was regularly,

> Preaching on heart issues and grace issues; preaching on the root issues. So not so much preaching on the – "now here's what we're going to do, and why are you not doing it?" - but preaching on God's heart for the lost, the grace you have received, and here's what it really means for you. And then hopefully creating in them, the heart [for mission], obviously with God's help.

Brian takes a similar line, keeping the congregation envisioned for mission through his preaching. He said, "Part of a minister's role is probably to be the vision keeper. So there is a need to keep doing that and there is a need to take a Sunday from time to time to keep doing that and that would be part of my ministry." However, he also prioritises spending personal time with his elders and leaders, so that in conversations, he can underline the priority of mission and respond to questions and issues that arise.

Donald preaches on mission themes, but he also finds other opportunities in the service to emphasise the priority of mission, perhaps through prayers, when introducing hymns, or when dismissing the congregation at the end of the service. He enthused,

> There's not a Sunday goes by when I don't talk about mission in some way. I encourage people to reach out to those outside. I just help them to see who they are and help them to see that God has called them into a relationship with himself through Christ, but that's only part of it. The other part is the goal - as the Father has sent me so I send you - because that's who they are; they're missional people, people who have a message to share.

Michael highlighted the importance of telling the stories emerging from the congregation's involvement in new ventures in mission. He noted, "The other thing that has really helped us move forward is stories of success." He described how as part of a

morning service, they set up a "chat show" where they interviewed four people whose lives had been touched or changed through the congregation's involvement in the community. He said, "When people see the stuff we are doing is actually paying off, then it's not just me promoting it." Donald also sought to prioritise mission by giving members the opportunity at a morning service to tell the story of how they had been active in some aspect of the congregation's mission. He said, "I give them voice. These folk are established in the congregation and recognised. For instance the sports ministry there - every six to eight weeks there's a slot to update about it and just speak in general about in-roads into the community and that sort of thing. The best thing was and is, to see things up and running."

Larry seeks to prioritise mission through his preaching, but he supplements that with an annual conference for all his leaders in September each year. He explained,

> It's an opportunity to envision our leadership, and we've something like seventy plus leaders right across the organisations. We start the year with an evening when somebody comes to again cast the vision… [To remind us] that this work is not about the organisation it's about people, it's about young people, it's about impacting the community.

Larry has been organising the conference for a number of years now and believes it is very helpful in keeping mission as a priority in the congregation.

Modelling Mission

Six of the participants believed it was important for the minister to model mission in the community in addition to preaching about it. William described a journey he had made from talking about mission to demonstrating it for his elders and the congregation. He said "I can teach the stuff, but I need my elders to take that and make it happen, and then when things weren't happening, it dawned on me that they had never seen it

modelled." He described his approach in terms of Jesus not only telling the disciples, but showing them too, and walking with them as they tried to put his teaching into practice for themselves. He said, "I had to invest a huge amount of time and effort 'taking them by the hand,'" but that was what was required to make progress. William's experience resonated with Trevor's sense of what is happening in the wider church. He said, in his view, in the churches which are making progress, "the minister pioneers it, and the minister has to model it." He suggested that for many ministers, the assumption is that equipping the saints for ministry means preaching to them, and then the saints go and put what they have heard into practice. Trevor argued that ministers in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland needed to be informed by biblical models of leadership, like that of Moses and Joshua, who led very visibly from the front and modelled what it is to walk into the new place. He argued that, "The minister can't always be in house preparing sermons, delivering midweek's, visiting the sick in the congregation; they actually have to be released to do some stuff in the community."

Barry described his congregation's approach which, after a period of prayerful reflection, was to deliberately set him as free as possible to lead and model mission in their community. He said, "We then looked at my role within the church and they said well if you're to be a pastor to the whole community, which we want you to be, then we have to release you from district visitation, and we'll take up the pastoral concerns." Emergency pastoral situations were referred to Barry, but general pastoral care was provided by the elders. He spent the first year making contacts and developing relationships in the community and then started to bring other leaders and church

members into the networks he had built up, modelling the relational approach he wanted

them to take.

Chris described a short programme he organised for his congregation, which

included some teaching on mission, and then some "hands on" practical experience going

into the community to meet people with whom the church already had a relationship. His

aim was to teach from the Bible and then to model in practice what he wanted the

congregation to do. He said those involved really enjoyed and benefitted from the

programme and were better equipped for mission as a result. However, even in that very

practical context, communicating the priority of mission was not without its problems. He

referred to an elder who said he could hardly wait until the programme ran again the

following year so that he could be involved in mission again! Chris said he gently

suggested that perhaps the elder could continue to put into practice from then on, what

they had been learning to do, rather than waiting until the programme ran again the

following year.

Trevor, having argued strongly that ministers should be leading mission in the

community from the front, emphasised how important it is to get others involved as

quickly as possible. He described his experience like this,

> Most ministers think, "Ok, I've got to step out first and make this happen and be
> the model," but then once they get a wee bit of momentum behind them and a few
> people following, they do seem to hit a wall. All of a sudden they get tired and
> weary, and they don't see enough people coming with them, and that's where I'm
> beginning to notice that the very best people, who are pioneers, are really
> struggling.

Trevor said the initial phase of developing mission in the community probably has to be

the minister pushing ahead, perhaps with a few people helping, however very quickly the

minister needs to bring others in to share the burden. According to Trevor, this is the

approach modelled by Jesus in his work with the twelve disciples. It also reflected the experience of Larry, who talked about the discouragement he experienced, when, initially, very few of his elders actively involved themselves in new efforts to engage with their local community.

Encouraging Every Member Involvement

While recognising the leadership role the minister has in modelling mission in the community, the participants also underlined the importance of helping the congregation to see that each member has a role to play in that mission. Trevor said, "You're probably trying to teach the congregation to buy into an every member ministry, although I think that's pretty tough, because we've had generations of, 'it all depends on the person at the front,' or 'the person that we pay,' or 'the person who is trained.'" He suggests that it is better to start with the few people who are willing, and try to create some momentum. He argued,

> It's definitely about starting momentum. It is often about the leaders stepping out and moving it, because if they don't move it, it's not going to shift. But then probably getting those people who've got a taste for it, to open up and talk about it; how they felt, how they saw it, then that builds a bit of momentum in them as well. I do think it's always about moving off with what you can move off with, rather than waiting for everyone to get on board, that's just not going to happen.

Several of the others took a similar line, including Larry, who said he tries to work with those who are willing, and so long as some of the key elders are positive, he will press ahead with new initiatives.

Donald said one of the biggest things that helped their efforts to connect with their local community was a gradual change in the mind-set of the congregation. He said he tried to help the congregation understand who they were in Christ as kingdom people who have something important to share with their neighbours. He said as they began to

understand that, they were willing to become more involved, to cope with a certain amount of discomfort and to try new things. As they experienced God at work through them and their efforts, they developed a taste for more. He also tried to involve people as part of their small group programme. He said, "These are folks who never ever did things like this before. Maybe I didn't fully realise it's such a big step. I realised I couldn't mobilise the whole church, but I could these small groups." He asked individual small groups to look after various aspects of a mission initiative, and he discovered that individuals were much more willing to take on responsibilities in that context, than to volunteer in response to a church announcement.

Michael said he tried to encourage greater involvement in mission by creating short-term opportunities each year for groups of people. He argued that working closely with others provided some mutual encouragement, and the short-term nature of the opportunity made the challenge more manageable for most people, because there was a clearly defined end in sight. Chris took a similar approach, suggesting that small steps were more manageable for people, and the small successes gave them some confidence to take further steps. He hoped that the "artificial" opportunities he created would help people to see how they could make mission part of their everyday lives and give them the confidence to share their hope in Christ in their networks of family and friends. Donald said the same; his aim was to help people live intentionally as Christians in the community, and the church based initiatives were partly a means to that end.

Encouraging Prayer for Mission in the Community

The participants were committed to the importance of prayer in their attempts to develop more effective ministry in the local community. Brian said effective mission

depends on God's activity, therefore there must be a focus on prayer which brings God into it. He said, "It's not about our effort… What we do is hopeless if we don't pause to pray." They have twenty-four/seven prayer events three times per year, and set aside a weekend for forty hours of continuous prayer seeking God's blessing on various aspects of their mission as well as their weekly prayer meeting.

Larry was concerned about the low commitment to prayer among some leaders and most of the young people in his congregation. He introduced twenty-four hour prayer cycles, nights of prayer, days of prayer, prayer walks, and prayer exhibitions in an effort to encourage a greater commitment to prayer, but was disappointed to discover the same small core of people at each one. He said, "We're constantly reminding ourselves that what we do, we don't do in our own strength, it has to be owned of God, and it has to be covered in prayer, otherwise we will be totally ineffective."

Donald said they arrange three prayer days per year and times of special prayer before new mission initiatives and their summer outreach programme. They also developed an ongoing prayer-triplets ministry and a monthly prayer time, which receive regular prayer updates related to their mission activities in the community. He also encourages people to pray as they are out in the community, as they meet people, and go into the shops, telling his congregants, "Don't just go into the butchers to buy your pound of mince, go in and pray for the guy." He said, "They're whole life becomes a thing of prayer and that changes their attitude. As you begin to pray for people in your community whether you realise it or not, and they are beginning to realise it, something moves in your heart, more of a passion, more of a love, more of an understanding."

Michael has a prayer team that operates in the community, calling at homes and offering to pray with people about their situations. They also have a prayer team praying each evening when their "Church Has Left The Building" teams are out in the community engaging in mission activities. Edward said the move to make small groups the centre of their strategy to develop effective mission in the community included a prayer dimension. Local groups working in a local area would be well placed to pray insightfully for local needs.

Encouraging Flexibility

Most of the participants referred to the need to respond with greater flexibility to the challenge of developing effective mission in their local community. William captured the sense of most of the participants when he said,

> I suppose the phrase that I've been using a lot recently is gracious flexibility. That nothing is set in stone. That we're not going to take a particular route and say this is it forever and a day. We're having the courage to say we think this is where God is taking us, let's give it a go and if it works, great we pursue it. If it doesn't work, well what lessons have we learnt from it? If we'd done it slightly differently would it have been better that way? Or actually, were we so totally off beat that we drop this and bury it.

Michael takes a similar approach. He said churches use pilot schemes to try out new initiatives, keeping those that work and ditching those that don't. They are not afraid to experiment and try things. Speaking about developing and providing groups such as Alpha and Christianity Explored for people interested in finding out more about Christianity, he said,

> It's much more flexible and you're constantly experimenting… We've tried different wee groups, the one thing that I've learned about it is this - you have this ideal in your mind before you have the course, but it's never that straightforward. It's messy… it seems that we're always experimenting, we never reach the point when we say we've got it licked.

Michael, along with some of the others, also advocated the use of action teams with members drawn from the elders and the wider congregation, to initiate and drive a variety of ideas to help make mission more effective. Michael said there are a number of benefits of using action teams. Recruiting people who are passionate about mission brings energy and commitment. Drawing more people into the work of mission also shares the workload and tends to produce more creativity in responding to the challenges of mission.

Donald said to his congregation, "If we feel this is where God's leading, let's step out and let's give this a go." He said his job was to, "help them to see that if it doesn't work that's nobody's failure, and that's nobody's fault. It's not the end of the world." He added, "I feel comfortable 'mopping up' things afterwards you know, in terms of it just hasn't worked well. Encouraging people and saying let's look again to see what God is doing." In other words, Donald encouraged the congregation to follow where they believed God was leading them to go in mission. He held up the possibility that they might make mistakes, but argued that it is better to move forward while making some mistakes than to remain static for fear of making a mistake. He did not offer a guarantee, but held out a rich possibility of more effective mission. That willingness to take risks and experience some failure on a journey to develop more effective mission characterised the approach of all of the participants.

Focusing on God's Kingdom

Two of the participants referred to having a "kingdom mentality," a focus on what is good for the kingdom of God, rather than simply focusing on what is of benefit to an individual congregation. Michael explained,

> It's just about the whole kingdom mind-set. I suppose I quickly came to understand that if you're expecting to see bums on the pews on Sunday you'll probably be disappointed… When it comes to the local community, I think your level of expectation has got to be wound down a wee bit. That's probably because of the different culture of the folks in our church from the folks in the community. So we've got to be prepared to take the hit, investing the money, investing people, and investing resources, working for the kingdom. Being prepared - that if someone becomes a Christian, if we can help them in a way as well, to see restoration and a rebuilding of their lives - we have got to be prepared for the fact that they might actually join another church, and they would do that with our blessing.

Michael referred to a common response in his own congregation and in others, which interpreted the value of their mission in terms of how it affected attendance at Sunday services. He argued that a kingdom perspective, which was concerned with much more than Sunday service attendances was crucial if effective mission was to develop in a local community.

Donald made a similar point. Speaking about their sports ministry in the community he said,

> We have got to go to them realising that it may be many years, and the church may be in the community and we may never get these folk into our congregation, but we may. And they may come to faith and we may have to disciple them in the community and where do you go from there? Well that's God's responsibility. So again it was helping them [the Kirk Session] to see that it wasn't just about getting people in, it was getting out there and remaining out there, and if the church develops out there then that's God's work. I think they wanted to see a return, but I think they've realised that the people we're working with, they're maybe never going to come to the established Presbyterian Church. But what they will do, is link in with the people in the community from our church, they will make friends with them, and establish relationships. They will listen to them and we trust that they will come to faith and we'll disciple them in there if needs be, if they never come [to our church] you know that's not our biggest thing. So I suppose it is helping the Session to see it's about Kingdom work.

Donald also encountered that idea of a return on the investment of the congregation expressed in terms of increased congregational membership and Sunday service attendances. His response was the same as Michael's, to focus attention on being

involved in the extension of God's Kingdom as the priority in mission, rather than on the growth of an individual congregation, recognising, of course, that the two are not incompatible.

Developing Genuine Relationships

All of the participants believed that genuine relationships with people in the community were the key to effective mission, and opportunities to show the love of God, or to talk about it, occurred most naturally and were most credible, in the context of ongoing relationships. Michael said one of the aims of their "The Church Has Left The Building" programme was to help bring the members of his congregation into contact with people in the local community. Once connections were made, relationships were then able to develop and deepen on the basis of ordinary affinities and circumstances, and opportunities to show Christian love and compassion and talk about matters of faith came naturally. Chris said, "My predecessor just spent his time on the streets, in and out of places, and everybody knew him." Chris shared that he wanted to do the same, and he wanted the members of the congregation to do that, too. He affirmed, "Presence is utterly important," because people can see up close what Christians are like, and they become known for who they really are.

Donald said that while he encourages his congregation to be intentional in their relationships and look for opportunities to share the love of God in word and deed, their friendship must be genuine. They are not to view people in the community as "targets," but as real people with real needs. The key ingredient in relationship building, according to Barry, is to be "normal." He said,

> I had problems just like they had, because I had a family just like they had a family. Things that concerned me, concerned them, and things that concerned

them inevitably concerned me. I think being able to weep with the community when hard things have happened, without offering pious simplistic solutions that were being offered by others, that certainly helped build bridges of trust and understanding.

It is also important to be non-judgemental, he said, "and that doesn't mean that I don't have valuation judgements about the lifestyle that someone chooses, but I'm not prepared to make that my first point of contact." Barry's approach was to take people as he found them and get to know them, showing genuine friendship and respect, and then wait for natural opportunities to share the love of God. He said they might never show any spiritual interest, but it was not up to him to produce it or force the issue. Nor was it about manipulating them into coming to church. "I do not have any ulterior motive when I'm working with them," he said. Rather, the goal is to express friendship and leave the rest up to God.

Expressing Genuine Practical Love and Care

All of the participants were convinced that effective mission includes demonstrating the love of God as well as declaring it, and they said that it was important to find ways to express genuine love and care for people in their local community. They all had a variety of programmes and methods designed to create a context for expressing practical Christian kindness and care, and they encouraged individual members of their congregations to try to do the same. Larry talked about going outside his comfort zone into social situations, to meet people from the community "on their turf," as a way of demonstrating care and commitment to them and their families. His congregation gave food parcels to people moving into a nearby homeless hostel, and they provided a Christmas dinner for people who were living alone to express compassion and care. Michael mentioned his congregation's Celebrate Recovery programme for people with

hurts, habits, and hang ups, explaining, "That's just offering compassion to people. Just trying to show the love of God to them, but trying in some way to not just pray that their lives will be restored, but actually try to do something practical to help that process as well." He also talked about members of his congregation who gave work to some people who were unemployed and had been in prison. "There would be a couple of folks in the church who are taking a wee risk on them, and maybe not paying them loads of money, but giving them a new start." It was a simple and practical way of showing the love and compassion of God, but required willingness from those in the church to take a risk and move outside their comfort zone.

Barry insists that love and care offered in Jesus' name must be genuine. He said, "We do not engage with people to create a platform to ask them to church, because it's not about church. It's about our relationship with God." He maintained there must be, "No manipulation, no coercing, no engaging in their crisis so that we can add another bum on a seat, or another couple of children in a Sunday School. I couldn't think of a more horrendous reason for helping somebody and a more unloving engagement in that person's life." He argued, "The reason why Jesus was so appealing to the marginalised was that they could see that he cared; that he was less concerned about his outward respectability." He said the sense of care, openness, honesty, and transparency displayed by Jesus, which was so appealing to people, was motivated by genuine love.

Genuine love therefore, must be the church's motivation, too. Brian agreed wholeheartedly with Barry's approach but nuanced it slightly when he said,

> Where it's right and proper to befriend this person because I want to befriend them, and I love them, it doesn't matter if I never get the chance to present the gospel with them. I affirm that. That's right. But it's also wrong in terms of the big picture. I love that person so much that, somewhere God, you've got to give

me the opportunity to present this gospel, because until I get that opportunity, I haven't loved them enough you know. The gospel is not poison to this person, the gospel is blessing, the gospel is life changing.

Brian was keen to agree with the point that there must be no manipulation and that befriending people is valuable in its own right, however he also wanted to make the point that sharing the gospel in an appropriate way is a loving thing to do and is not to be overlooked. It is the motive of the heart which determines whether a person is being loving or manipulative in these situations.

Understanding Evangelism as a Process

All of the participants described their approach to evangelism in terms of a process which normally involves multiple encounters with a person over a period of time. There was a conviction among the participants that most people outside the church now have a low level of Bible knowledge and a limited understanding of biblical concepts. Therefore evangelism can take little knowledge for granted, and requires patient sowing of truth, before there can be a harvest. Trevor elaborated,

> What we're talking about here is evangelism as a process rather than a crisis. I don't think we're terribly comfortable with that in Northern Ireland. We have imported an evangelism, probably from the last century, which was very crisis. And crisis evangelism works when people know what the deal is, because then you're bringing them to the point, "Well what do you do with this?" But when people don't know what the deal is, then it's going to be a process to get them to a place where they can say yes.

Brian and Donald agreed. They talked about starting further back in evangelism than they had been accustomed to doing, assuming less knowledge and understanding, and proceeding at a slower pace. Brian said,

> I think for instance Alpha, or the other "breeds" of it, at least now recognises that people aren't sitting a few yards away from the kingdom of God. That there are barriers to hearing the gospel and one of the ways to break down those barriers is

to listen to them and to listen to their questions and begin to try to give reasoned answers to those questions.

Brian and Donald both suggested that in the current spiritual climate, perhaps even Alpha and Christianity Explored assumed too much in their presentation of the gospel.

Trevor suggested that a lot of evangelism needs to be "looser," "more flexible," more "conversational," and might well be "far, far less than a full blown explanation of the gospel." Rather, according to Trevor, it will involve trying to give a Christian perspective on some current issue in the course of a normal conversation, or asking questions which cause people to doubt and question the accepted wisdom of their worldview. Of course there will be situations where a full blown explanation of the gospel is exactly what is required, but this will tend to be less common, and normally preceded by many more conversations which have prepared the way.

Donald said his congregation had organised a conference recently with Rebecca Manley Pippert to help the congregation learn how to share their faith more effectively. The emphasis was on sharing naturally in everyday conversations, recognising that "you don't have to 'go for the jugular' every time, so it is a bit more of a build-up." He said,

> A lot of our evangelism would be on a relational level, but again I encourage people to be intentional about that. "This is what Jesus has done in my life." People talk about issues or problems or kids or marriages and what we're saying is "God can help you in this situation," and so be ready for the opportunity of people coming to faith. In my time there - the people who have come to faith from within the congregation and community - it has all been relational, it has been over a period of time. And they have come to make a commitment, a clear commitment at some point, but it has been over a period of time.

He continued, explaining that what is needed is,

> Patience and a sense of the bigger picture. God is involved in someone's whole life over a period of time... God is always at work, we may not just see where he's at work... So it's happening at a much slower pace. For me, that is probably my biggest challenge, accepting that and recognising that change will take place, but

at a much slower pace. So it's working within that framework - setting that for the people and for yourself as your framework.

In other words, Donald's model for evangelism is intentional sharing of faith, but in a natural and unforced way, in the context of discussions about everyday concerns. It requires patient sowing of gospel truth and a commitment to wait for God's timing. Barry was also very clear about the importance of patient gospel sharing, which allows opportunity for God to act, and people to respond, in their own time. He said,

> One of the things that I taught the congregation very early on was that they are not responsible for anybody's conversion. That's a sovereign act of God. If, you manipulate that, you fabricate that, you pressurise people into making decisions that they're not ready to make, then you do a disservice to God's Kingdom and a disservice to the gospel. What you are required to do is to go in and care for people in spite of any response or lack of it that they might make. If they do not make a response you still continue to care for them on a regular basis because that's what you're called to do.

Barry's aim was to take pressure off his congregation by helping them see they were part of God's plan of salvation in the lives of other people, but that they were not responsible for it. The responsibility was God's, and they simply had to play their part by genuine and consistent caring and sharing in Jesus' name.

This section reported on the data gathered from the research participants in relation to the fourth research question, "What factors facilitate the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?" It sought to identify from the experience of the research participants, the practical ideas and approaches which promote the development of effective mission. Analysis of the data revealed nine factors which the participants believed were important in facilitating effective mission in their local community. They were, prioritising mission, modelling mission, encouraging every member involvement, encouraging prayer for mission in the community, encouraging

flexibility, focusing on God's kingdom, developing genuine relationships, expressing genuine love and care, and thinking of evangelism as a process.

Summary of Findings

In seeking to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community, this chapter presented an analysis of data obtained by interviewing nine of its competent and experienced ministers about their experience of leading a congregation in mission to its local community. The various themes, patterns, and insights emerging from the data were grouped together under appropriate headings and presented in terms of how they related to the four research questions. This chapter is therefore a presentation of the views of the research participants on the characteristics of effective mission in a local community, how the development of effective mission becomes a priority in the life of a congregation, and the factors which either hinder or facilitate the development of effective mission in a local community. In the final chapter, the study will be brought to a conclusion as insights from the literature study and the research participants are brought together for consideration and deductions drawn by the researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their local community. The assumption of the study was that competent and experienced ministers in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, who have been actively involved in leading congregations in mission to their local community, will have been wrestling with the theological and practical challenges involved. As a result, they will undoubtedly have gained insights, developed strategies, and honed ways of approaching opportunities, problems, and situations that that would benefit others in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who are seeking to develop effective mission in their context. A deeper understanding of the issues involved and a sharing of good practice will be helpful for anyone engaging in mission and wanting it to be as effective as possible.

Four research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What are the characteristics of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

2. How does the development of effective mission in the local community become a priority for a congregation?

3. What factors hinder the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

4. What factors facilitate the development of effective mission by congregations in their local community?

In chapter two, a review of literature was presented, giving consideration to three major areas of literature relevant to the research questions. The first area of literature examined characteristics of mission and various definitions, and established the central importance of mission for the life of the church. The second area of literature focused on the challenges of providing appropriate leadership in a rapidly and radically changing environment. The third literature area identified useful, real-world guidance for developing more effective mission on the ground. Chapter three described and explained the research methodology underlying and directing the study. A qualitative research methodology was adopted, and nine research participants were selected using purposeful sampling. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured method, and the recorded interviews were transcribed to provide data which were analysed according to the constant comparative method. In chapter four, the research participants were introduced and the interview findings were presented in terms of the themes which emerged in relation to the four research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Chapter five now brings together the insights from the literature review and the findings from the research participants in order to draw conclusions and make appropriate recommendations.

Sharpening Our Focus on the Nature of the Mission of the Church

The alarming decline in church attendance in Ireland and the threat to the future viability of many of its congregations have brought an increased urgency to discussions

about mission among many leaders and members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

However, while falling membership and unsustainable congregations are a real problem

for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, in common with most established churches in

Western Europe, it is crucially important that our practice of mission be driven by a fully

orbed biblical understanding of mission rather than by a desire to increase attendance at

Sunday services and keep congregations open.

What Is the Mission of the Church?

It would seem like a straightforward matter to define the mission of the church,

since there has been so much discussion on the subject, and most people in the church are

familiar with the concept. However, according to DeYoung and Gilbert, "The question is

deceptively complex and potentially divisive,"[264] and it seems to me that there is

undoubtedly a degree of confusion in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

about the nature and importance of mission. There are those in congregations of the

Presbyterian Church in Ireland who, like Wright, understand the mission of the church in

terms of "a broad range of biblically sanctioned activities that people may be sent by God

to do, including famine relief, action for social justice, preaching, evangelism, teaching,

healing and administration."[265] Others understand the mission of the church purely in

terms of evangelism, and are concerned like DeYoung and Gilbert[266] that congregational

engagement with the community, which focuses on social needs and is low key on

evangelism, is in danger of slipping away from the church's primary commission to go

into all the world and make disciples.

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[264] Kevin DeYoung, and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 16.
[265] Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 24.
[266] Kevin DeYoung, and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 62.

Tim Keller points out that the fear of an unbiblical imbalance in one direction, away from the importance of evangelism, must not be allowed to create an unbiblical imbalance in the other direction, away from God's command to do justice and love mercy.[267] Keller said, "Evangelism, in principle, is the most important ministry, but in practice it must always exist in an inseparable weave with deed ministry"[268] because the New Testament condemns faith and love which have words but no deeds. Stott agreed, in his view, "Authentic mission is a comprehensive activity which embraces evangelism and social action and refuses to let them be divorced."[269]

This understanding of mission, as a broadly conceived combination of word and deed, characterized the approach of all of the research participants in their practice of mission in their own local community. Edward summarized the view which each of them expressed when he described mission as, "biblically balanced in word and deed." Brian who said, "We're there to present the gospel," and then added, "The truth is authenticated in the lives of the people because they are demonstrating love." Trevor said,

> In lots of the literature that's been written everybody's looking for the way to describe how evangelism and social action… fit together and there's lots of different people out there saying, well it's like this or it's like that, and they're all arguing from the scriptures. From what I can see the two things are there all over the scriptures, and we probably need to just be doing them both, rather than trying to figure out how they merge together.

All of the research participants offered programmes, activities, and ministries which were designed to communicate the love and compassion of God through practical care for people in the community, as well as providing opportunities where the gospel could be proclaimed, explained, and discussed.

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[267] Keller, 'Church and Culture', 8.
[268] Keller, 'Contextual and Missional', 2.
[269] Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening*, 337.

It is the conclusion of this study, in light of the literature and the interview data, that the church's mission is to bear witness to God's love and redeeming purposes in Christ, to people who do not know God. The content of the church's message is the love of God and his redeeming purposes in Christ. Bearing witness is the communication of that message, a communication achieved by proclamation and demonstration, by what we do as well as what we say. The message is to be communicated to people who do not know Christ, which will require church members to move from the familiar and comfortable confines of the church, to go to the people outside the church in the wider community.

The Centrality of Mission

Mission is often misunderstood in terms of a congregational recruiting drive, a way of maintaining numbers and keeping the doors of the congregation open, and some congregations are in danger of being little more than a private club, completely focused on the needs of the club and its own members.[270] Robinson and Smith argue that this misunderstanding of mission, as a response to the needs of the congregation rather than cooperation with God's saving purposes in a lost world, is a hangover from Christendom. During that period, they said, mission gradually stopped shaping the church. Rather, the church began to shape mission, to see it just as one of a number of functions the church had to perform, and mission's priority was lost.

The sense given by the research participants was that many people in their congregations were much more concerned about the decline of the church than about God's command to go into all the world and make disciples. Many were more concerned about how church life catered for their needs than about how suitable it was to facilitate

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[270] Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*, 53.

mission. Donald said, "I was amazed at how many people [thought]… this is my church, this is for me," and had no sense that the church was there as much for the community as for the members. Michael referred to an elder in another congregation who said to him, "All this work you are doing – is it making a difference to your Sunday morning attendance?"

These concerns are typical of a lack of appreciation of the church's central task, which is to be Christ's witnesses in the immediate locality and to the ends of the earth. John Stott said, "Christian mission is rooted in the nature of God himself. The Bible reveals him as a missionary God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), who creates a missionary people, and is working towards a missionary consummation."[271] The importance of mission is neatly summed up by Andrew Kirk's phrase, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission."[272] All of the research participants reported that more needed to be done to develop a biblical understanding of mission and give it a greater priority at the centre of their congregation's life. Each of them was actively working toward that goal, through their preaching, their personal modelling of missional involvement in the community, and in structural changes they were advocating in their congregation's programming.

It is the conclusion of this study that a biblical understanding of mission makes a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the servant of mission rather than vice versa, and leaves no doubt that outward looking mission belongs firmly at the heart of every congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

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[271] Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening*, 325.
[272] Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 62.

What Will Mission Look Like on the Ground?

As congregations seek to develop effective mission in their own communities, there will be similarities and differences in what they do. Since mission involves communicating God's love and redeeming purposes in Christ in words and deeds, no matter what the context, there will be common themes, activities, and methods shared in every congregation. The research participants reported a fair degree of overlap in terms of programmes for children, youth and adults, and for proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. However, because each context is different, there will be a certain amount of variation in what happens, to enable mission to be as effective as possible in any particular situation. As Chris said, mission is, "where the gospel and context come together…it's a faithful restatement of the gospel that's for the community and understood by the community… [and] shaped by the community, but it's still faithful to the gospel once given."

Congregations must seek to discern the purposes of God for their own specific mission, as they, in conscious dependence on God, look at their own strengths, weakness, and gifts and consider the people, needs, and opportunities in their local community. Andrew Baughen describes a very balanced and effective approach to developing mission which identifies key elements he says should be present in any congregation's programme. These include mission planning, activities which facilitate relationship building, activities which build respect through the provision of practical care in the community, activities which help people see the relevance of the Christian message, and activities which facilitate response to the love of God. Michael describes a similar kind of strategic overview in the approach of his congregation to mission in the community. He

said that members of his congregation, "try to make contact with as many people as possible," are "actively seeking to build friendships with people," "demonstrate compassion" when they come across need, and try to create the kind of context in which there can be "some sort of meaningful communication about Christ."

It is the conclusion of this study that while mission on the ground will take different outward forms from congregation to congregation, depending on local challenges and opportunities, the various elements will have common goals, such as moving beyond the confines of the church to develop relationships with a greater number of people and bringing those people into meaningful contact with the love of God as it is proclaimed and demonstrated by members of the congregation.

Sharpening Our Focus on Leading the Mission of the Church

In the context of the volatile, discontinuous change now being experienced in Ireland, congregational leaders are under sustained and extraordinary pressure as never before. According to Roxburgh and Romanuk, leaders are discovering that, "Working harder with one's habitual skills and ways of working does not address the challenges being faced."[273] Fresh consideration, therefore, needs to be given to how congregational leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland fulfils its responsibility in relation to the development of effective mission.

Leaders Or Managers?

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things" according to Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis.[274] Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in

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[273] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 7.

[274] Stephen R Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 101.

Ireland, like most other organisations, are more focused on and more comfortable with managing what they currently do, rather than adapting to the new challenges and opportunities created by a rapidly and radically changing context. However, in the context of the pervasive change currently sweeping through Ireland and all of Western society, the need of the moment in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is for more leaders rather than managers; those who can influence congregations and help them adjust to the new realities. The Panel on Leadership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Board of Christian Training said, "There is an urgent need to re-examine how we lead."[275]

The research participants were acutely aware of a leadership deficit in congregations, not least at the Kirk Session level, and had great sympathy for their leaders. William said congregations had never expected elders to do anything other than manage the work. Most elders had no experience of providing the kind of visionary leadership now being asked of them, and they have received little or no training in this type of work. Donald said, "We don't equip and train leaders well…We've equipped them for pastoral situations, maybe, but not for leadership in missional situations." There was a suggestion from the research participants that many leadership teams, including ministers, were out of touch with the culture because their average age was high. Brian said he felt his own age was a barrier to keeping pace with the changing culture, and another research participant said of his Kirk Session, "They lack vision and they are almost locked in a time warp… they are great men… in their day they would have been visionaries… many of them are faithful prayer warriors, but they have had their day"

The fact that many leaders were brought up in the church and live most of their lives immersed in church activities also adds to their cultural isolation. There was a clear

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[275] Savage, *Board of Christian Training: Panel On Leadership Report*, 195.

sense among the participants that many leaders were out of their depth, unable, and sometimes unwilling, to face up to the challenges facing their congregation. John Kotter said, "The combination of cultures that resist change and managers who have not been taught how to create change is lethal… the only rational solution is to learn more about what creates successful change and to pass it on to increasingly larger groups of people."[276] Ministers, elders, and other congregational leaders need much more guidance, support, and encouragement if they are going to be able to provide the kind of visionary leadership that is required to develop effective mission. Good work is being done by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Board of Mission and its Board of Christian Training to introduce appropriate training, and some of the research participants were also providing training for their own congregations, but clearly more needs to be done.

It is the conclusion of this study that in our rapidly changing context in Ireland, congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland need visionary leadership rather than the inward focused management which is currently typical. Leaders need more support and encouragement to help them understand and respond to the changing nature of their leadership role if they are to develop effective mission in their local community.

The Leadership Challenge

The primary task of leadership in a changing environment is to mobilise people, "to confront reality and change values, habits, practices and priorities in order to deal with the real threat or the real opportunity the people face,"[277] said Dean Williams. The challenge for leaders is not to do the work themselves, but to initiate a process which helps the congregation take responsibility for doing whatever it takes to overcome the

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[276] Kotter, *Leading Change*, 104–105.
[277] Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, ix.

problems and seize the opportunities for mission in its community. Those leading the

process should seek to include as many people as is realistic in diagnosing the issues and

problems around mission, and in identifying the actions needed to respond effectively.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Mission Planning Process provides an

excellent tool which can help leaders with this work. The research participants referred to

its value and that of similar approaches, as they sought to discern God's specific mission

purposes for their congregation. The process of confronting reality can be very

challenging, Trevor said,

> You've got to take time and patiently try to discern what the Spirit is saying…
> The knack to that, it seems to me, is to equip leaders to facilitate a conversation.
> It's a bit messy, a bit edgy and maybe sometimes it comes to the end of the night
> and there's no particular resolution, but you're just willing to say all right, we
> need to let this hang out there a wee bit, and then let the Holy Spirit bring together
> a consensus of what it is we want to do. But that's slow, and awkward, and it
> relies on the Spirit speaking to the congregation corporately.

However, Donald's experience was that, "The Mission Plan really helped us focus

our thinking," and in common with the other research participants, giving serious,

sustained, and prayerful consideration to the nature of their community and the strengths

and weaknesses in the congregation, enabled them to develop a clearer idea of the

challenges and opportunities, and how to respond positively and effectively to them. As

well as working through a "conversational process" with the congregation, the research

participants also sought to envision and mobilise people using a variety of other means.

They preached and used aspects of Sunday services to impart a biblical understanding of

mission and the implications of grace, made time for conversations about mission with

key people, disseminated useful literature on mission among their leaders and members,

and sought to draw the congregation's attention to unpalatable facts and statistics regarding church life.

"As individuals and in groups, people tend to shy away from addressing tough, complex, painful problems that are caused by their own values, habits, and priorities" said Williams,[278] who suggests that the difficulty of getting people to face painful reality can cause leaders to provide what he calls counterfeit leadership. Counterfeit leadership, whether intentionally or not, allows people to avoid facing reality by focusing attention and effort on false tasks which keep everyone busy, but do not contribute towards real progress. False tasks affecting mission might be an undue focus on fringe members at the expense of those outside the church, or a "need" to reorganise and improve church activities before starting to reach out beyond the church.

It is the conclusion of this study that the leadership challenge in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, is to avoid false tasks and to mobilise the congregation to face the changing realities of our culture, making whatever changes are necessary to ensure that mission is the central priority of the congregation, and that effective mission is developed in the local community.

Resistance to Change?

Many leaders are taken by surprise when they propose changes in congregational life and practice, which offer many "obvious" potential benefits for the good of a congregation and its mission in the community. Instead of embracing the proposed changes enthusiastically, members of the congregation express a great deal of, sometimes, very heated resistance. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky point out helpfully

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[278] Ibid., 10–11.

that "exercising leadership can get you into a lot of trouble."[279] Trevor said that in his experience, while resistance could be expressed quite aggressively, it was more often passive – a verbal acceptance of change, but with no commitment to the actions necessary to implement the change. However, Heifetz and Linsky warn that in some situations, leaders may experience personal attack or marginalisation.[280] Therefore leaders must be aware and prepared so that the personal pressure that they can face does not derail the introduction of necessary change. Trevor said that leaders need to be much more relationally and emotionally aware when introducing and managing change. He said that they need to pay much more attention to the "relational bank balance" they hold with the congregation, doing the relational work necessary to win the trust and confidence of other leaders and members in the congregation.

Heifetz and Linsky identified a very important insight when they said, "People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss."[281] People experience pain and loss when they have to leave behind what is familiar and comfortable, and they must develop new ways of thinking and new methods and techniques and behaviours. Suddenly, they are uncertain about what they are supposed to do, uncomfortable with what is new and unfamiliar, and afraid of failing because they feel less competent. The experience of the research participants when introducing new approaches to mission confirmed this view. Chris said of his congregation, "They're frightened to fail, fear of failure is massive." Donald said, "I think it was a lack of confidence amongst the people… and they didn't want to be uncomfortable."

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[279] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, 2.
[280] Ibid., 31–45.
[281] Ibid., 11.

Trevor suggested that it is also important to remember that the response to change is often emotional rather than purely rational. He elaborated, "They might hear in their head, we are changing the hymns because the language needs to be modern, it needs to engage with people, and they get all that in their head. But in their heart they still want to sing the songs that formed them spiritually." Edward said the key to making progress was to keep the focus on obedience to the Bible's clear commands rather than simply promoting change.

Heifetz and Linsky said proposed changes can also create a sense of being disloyal and disrespectful to esteemed and much loved leaders of the past, a cause of resistance which was reported by Chris when he proposed some mission-motivated changes in his congregation. The other factor which produces resistance according to Heifetz and Linsky is the fact that people are being asked to trade the comfortable certainties of the present for the hope of a better future, which is still very distant and uncertain. Sadly the conclusion of some of the research participants was that it took decline and the threat of closure before some congregations were willing to accept necessary change.

It is the conclusion of this study that congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland introducing changes in order to develop effective mission in their community should recognise the loss, discomfort, and uncertainty those changes may produce for many of the people involved. Leaders should not be surprised or derailed by the resistance which often emerges, but should respond with sensitivity and understanding. Leaders will also need courage, skill, and love for those inside and outside the church, if they are to guide their congregation to prioritise mission.

Sharpening Our Focus on the Practice of the Mission of the Church

There are factors which can either help or hinder the development of effective

mission in practice; therefore an examination of the relevant literature and the data from

the research participants has been conducted to try to identify the most significant issues

and influences.

Factors Which Hinder Effective Mission

If factors which commonly hinder effective mission can be identified, they can

then be addressed and their impact reduced.

The Busyness of Church Life

A busy church programme, with lots going on during the week and plenty of

people attending various activities, is often viewed as a positive measure of the health of

a congregation. However, it can result in a very unhealthy busy-ness, which actually

hinders the development of effective mission. Church members can be so tied up and

worn out with their involvement in church based activities that they have no time or

energy left for those outside the church. Alistair Brown sums it up with his funny/tragic

description of a busy Christian woman, "She hasn't time for neighbours. They'd get in

the way of her doing her Christian work. Besides, she's still searching for the right way to

witness."[282] She has no time to be a witness because of the many church activities she is

involved in, and despite those many activities, she is still not properly equipped for her

primary role as a witness. All of the research participants mentioned the busyness of

church life as a real hindrance to the development of effective mission. Edward said,

"Anybody who's been running a reasonably active church is currently running a model

that is totally prohibitive in terms of connecting with non-Christian people. We've got a

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[282] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 137.

machine running here that needs all of us, all hands to the deck, all of the time, to keep it running." Michael Green blamed two culprits for the problem, church leaders and comfort loving Christians. He said, "Pastors ask lay people to go to far too many church mid-week meetings," and for many people in the church, "It is so much easier to spend our time and make our friends among those who share our Christian faith."

It is not just church members who are tied up with activities inside the church, ministers also experience that pressure. Most of the research participants said that the demands of pastoring their congregation made it difficult to engage as fully with their community as they believed was necessary. Michael summed up the prevailing view when he shared, "Personally speaking there has been a time challenge… seven hundred people to pastorally care for, and I preach twice a week, and I write our small group material – all those things limit the amount of time I have to give."

Facing similar challenges, Donald said he and his Kirk Session had recognised the need to re-prioritise church life in favour of mission in the community. His preaching and pastoral visitation responsibilities were reduced to allow him greater time and opportunity for engagement in the community, and other research participants reported similar changes. William reported that his Kirk Session were better at adding new programmes than closing existing ones, but were having to face some painful choices in order to reduce overload for him and for some of the other leaders. He and Barry also reported their philosophy of trying to work in partnership with other groups in the community, rather than starting church-based programmes, so as to reduce the leadership burden on church members. Edward said that he and his Kirk Session were actively reducing the number of activities offered by the church during the week. They

experimented with using the Sunday evening service slot to run Christianity Explored and other courses on occasions, and were now considering stopping the Sunday evening service completely, even though it was still well attended, to increase the time available to connect with people outside the church.

It is the conclusion of this study that if congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are to develop effective mission in their local community, they will have to find ways to re-prioritise aspects of church life, so that leaders and members have enough time and energy to engage realistically with those in the community outside the church.

Clinging to the Comfort Zone

John Stott said, "It comes more natural to us to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives."[283] Being involved in people's lives can be "awkward, inconvenient, costly, risky. There's pain, sacrifice, weariness, sometimes even death," according to Alistair Brown,[284] but effective mission cannot be done at a distance, it requires real involvement between people. Bill Hybels said, "Let's be honest. The whole enterprise of developing friendships of integrity with un-churched people takes significant amounts of time and effort, not to mention some occasional discomfort."[285]Although people have a natural inclination to try to protect themselves, the incarnation of Jesus is the church's example. Andrew Baughen said, "If we're going to influence our area with the gospel we'll need the energy to break out of our comfort zones."[286]

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[283] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 25.
[284] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 138.
[285] Hybels and Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 125.
[286] Baughen, *Innovating Church for All*, 81.

The research participants reported a general reluctance among the members of their congregations to move too far outside their comfort zones. Members tended to prioritise their own comfort over going out of their way to develop relationships with people from different social, educational, spiritual, or political backgrounds. They preferred to stay within the familiar confines of church life, rather than going outside into the community, "onto their turf," to engage in mission. Barry and William had to resist the desire of members to set up "Christian versions" of community activities, encouraging them instead to work in partnership with existing groups in the community.

Finally, members tended to prioritise personal preferences over the requirement to reasonably accommodate those from non-church backgrounds into the life of the church. Donald said, "It was helping people to see – yes this may be uncomfortable - but not uncomfortable to the point where it is unbearable… a little discomfort can be positive and helpful." John Stott argues that Christ's incarnation is to be the model for the church's involvement in mission. "He sends us into the world to identify with others as he identified with us… to become vulnerable as he did."[287] Tim Downs pointed to the example of the Apostle Paul, who shared his life as well as the gospel, in Thessalonica. Downs said, "In a busy world, the extent to which we're willing to invest our own life tells a person a lot about how much we really care – and a lot about the reality of the gospel."[288]

It is the conclusion of this study that congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seeking to develop effective ministry in their local community must be willing to

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[287] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 25.
[288] Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can*, 140.

endure the discomfort, and make the sacrifices necessary, to become truly involved with people in the community.

Factors Which Facilitate Effective Mission

If factors which facilitate effective mission can be identified, then they can be shared as good practice, which will help to promote more effective mission in other congregations.

Genuine Dependence on the Lord

When thinking about mission, it is all too easy to focus entirely on what congregations must do to adapt and improve, and the new initiatives they must introduce to become more effective, and to forget the most important truth about mission – that it is Christ who builds his church. John Stott said,

> There is an urgent need for us to humble ourselves before the sovereign Holy Spirit today. Sociological knowledge and communications expertise are important. Indeed they are gifts of God to be used in evangelism. But we have to beware lest they diminish our reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit… The Holy Spirit is the chief witness; without his witness ours is futile.[289]

I think there are few people in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who would disagree with Stott on this point, in theory. However, the reality is that in practice, many people in our congregations are not prepared to give themselves to prayer, which is God's appointed means of expressing dependence on him. Packer said, "Prayer …is a confessing of impotence and need, an acknowledging of helplessness and dependence, and an invoking of the mighty power of God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves." Larry voiced a concern which most ministers will identify with when he talked about the low commitment to prayer among many in his congregation, including leaders and elders. Brian represented the views of a number of the research participants

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[289] Stott, *The Contemporary Christian : An Urgent Plea for Double-Listening*, 371.

when he said that effective mission depends on God's activity, therefore there must be a focus on prayer which brings God into it. He said, "It's not about our effort… What we do is hopeless if we don't pause to pray."

If congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are to develop effective mission in their local community, they must be willing to humble themselves before the Lord in genuine, dependant prayer and seek the blessing that only he can give.

Developing Genuine Relationships

Genuine relationships with people outside the church are an indispensable context for effective mission, because that is where opportunities to talk about the love of God and show it in practice arise in a natural and authentic manner. Bill Hybels said, "As people in our culture have grown further and further from their Christian roots and heritage, they've become less and less comfortable talking to anyone – especially people they don't know – about matters of faith."[290] He added, "If we are going to impact our world for Christ, the most effective approach will be through friendships with those who need to be reached."[291] Alistair Brown said, "It'll mean real involvement between people. It can't be done at a distance. It means getting close to others."[292]

All of the research participants displayed a clear commitment to developing relationships with people in their community. William said, "The key element [in mission] is the building of relationships." Michael described his congregation's excellent four-stage strategy for mission as "making contacts, building trusting relationships… offering compassion" and "some sort of meaningful communication about Christ." The congregation then offered a range of programmes to further the aims of each of the

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[290] Hybels and Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 123.
[291] Ibid., 124.
[292] Brown, *I Believe in Mission*, 138.

stages. Of course the participants also encouraged their congregations to be intentional in their existing relationships, Donald expressed it as, "sustained witness in the community; people living out their Christian lives, but in an effective and intentional way… loving your neighbour… reaching out to others."

Some Christians are very uncomfortable with the suggestion that they should spend a lot of time with people from outside the church, because they misunderstand holiness in terms of separation from the people of the world, rather than in terms of separation from the sin and evil of the world. Chris reported this separation theology as a hindrance to mission for some of the members of his congregation. Bill Hybels said, "It's amazing how often we overlook the fact that He [Jesus] spent the majority of his time with those outside the religious establishment… Time, however, tends to soften history, and the sinners Christ hung out with may seem to us more safe and sanitized than the ones who so recklessly rebel against Him today."[293]

While recognising that relationships are crucial for effective mission, care must be taken to ensure that the friendship offered is genuine; relationships should not be developed with the intention of manipulating people. There is no place for "Scalp-hunting zeal in evangelism,"[294] according to Packer, "because it reflects, not love and care, nor the desire to be of help, but arrogance, and conceit, and pleasure in having power over the lives of others." Barry added, "I do not have any ulterior motive when I'm working with [people in the community]." Rather, it is about expressing friendship and leaving the rest up to God.

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[293] Hybels and Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 127–128.
[294] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 80.

It is the conclusion of this study that if congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are to be effective in mission, they must find ways to help their members get to know people in their community, and to develop the kinds of relationships which enable people in the community to feel comfortable enough for real communication to take place.

Expressing Genuine Practical Love and Care

There appears to be a fairly clear connection between church growth and a congregation's practice of compassionate care for the people in its community, according to the American researcher, Loren Mead, who said, "The single biggest factor in determining whether or not people come to church resides in what they think of the church. In short, those who live in our community are significantly influenced by whether or not the church has a social value."[295] According to Tim Keller, that connection has support in scripture, church history, and his own personal experience.[296] He pointed out that compassionate ministries support gospel proclamation by creating a positive image of the church in the community, and by bringing the church into positive contact with more people than would otherwise have been the case.[297] Michael Baughen said the church counters suspicion and hostility and earns respect by "demonstrating genuine interest, long term, in the lives of others."[298] That was certainly the impression given by the research participants as they described their various experiences of loving and caring for people outside the church, and the community's response to it.

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[295] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 60.
[296] Keller, 'Contextual and Missional', 3.
[297] Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 211–214.
[298] Baughen, *Innovating Church for All*, 84.

However, while recognising that engaging in practical acts of kindness and care in the community will probably result in positive church growth, the motivation behind any expression of practical love and care must be genuine compassion, not self-interest. John Stott argued that if the church's social action is simply the bait on an evangelistic hook, then "the smell of hypocrisy hangs around our philanthropy."[299] He argued that social action must be a response of love for its own sake, offered with no expectation of anything in return. This view was expressed by several of the research participants, including Barry, who said there must be, "…no manipulation, no coercing, no engaging in their crisis so that we can add another bum on a seat, or another couple of children in a Sunday school. I couldn't think of a more horrendous reason for helping somebody and a more unloving engagement in that person's life."

When genuine love and compassion are offered by the church to those outside in the wider community, there is a real demonstration of the love and compassion of God, and according to Keller, this acts as a visual aid and serves as a means of communicating the gospel.[300] Michael summed up the purpose of his congregation's love and care for people outside the church when he noted, "That's just offering compassion to people. Just trying to show the love of God to them, but trying in some way to not just pray that their lives will be restored, but actually try to do something practical to help that process as well." Tim Keller added, "A truly evangelistic church will dispense diaconal aid to non-Christians with boldness, as freely as it spreads the gospel itself."[301]

It is the conclusion of this study that since mission is bearing witness to the love and redeeming purposes of God in deeds as well as words, congregations of the

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[299] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 26.
[300] Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 214–215.
[301] Ibid., 102.

Presbyterian Church in Ireland will have to find a variety of ways to express genuine practical love and care in the local community.

Encouraging Flexibility

In a fast changing and uncertain environment, flexibility in the church's response is a key to effective mission. Robinson and Smith expressed, "Good leaders are not afraid to begin something. While many can be frozen by the fear of failure, good leaders are risk takers… If we wait until we understand everything, it will probably be too late to take action."[302] An attitude of responsible risk-taking, and a willingness to experiment and perhaps fail occasionally, marked the efforts of all the research participants. They displayed creativity in starting new initiatives, and courage in bringing once useful, but no longer effective ministries to an end. William said, "I suppose the phrase that I've been using a lot recently is gracious flexibility. That nothing is set in stone." Michael, speaking about providing groups for non-church people who are thinking about Christianity, said, "It seems that we're always experimenting. We never reach the point when we say we've got it licked." Donald encouraged his congregation to approach new initiatives with the attitude, "If it doesn't work, that's nobody's failure, and that's nobody's fault. It's not the end of the world."

Several of the research participants referred to their increasing use of short term programmes and initiatives, which were intended to seize a moment and respond to an opportunity while it was beneficial, without any intention of making a long term commitment. The preference for order and tidiness in church life is usually a good thing, but it can become a hindrance if it leads to inflexibly. The research participants were of the opinion that it is better to start some initiatives when you can, with even a small

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[302] Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, 158.

number of interested people, rather than wait until the majority are willing to commit. The prevailing view was that making even limited progress can help to create the momentum that is necessary to introduce wider change. However, it may mean that important changes are initially a bit untidy and disjointed. Conversely, waiting until the ideal scenario has been created usually means that leaders end up frustrated and worn out, with nothing actually achieved.

In a context where leadership in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland tends to be conservative and risk-averse, it is the conclusion of this study that congregations wanting to develop effective mission in their local community will refuse to be stifled by the fear of failure. Instead they will embrace responsible risk-taking, and will cultivate greater flexibility in response to opportunities for mission.

Being Patient and Respectful in Evangelism

Evangelism is best understood as a process rather than a crisis, an ongoing communication of the good news which patiently seeks to persuade individuals, while treating them with the dignity and respect they deserve as people made in the image of God. Patience is required because it takes time for a person to develop an understanding of biblical concepts such as sin, judgement, and salvation, and to count the cost of following Jesus. Packer said the idea of a person being converted through one sermon or conversation "is really silly;" there is always "a good deal of Christian teaching and exercise of spirit" before someone is converted to Christ.[303] Most of the research participants were of the opinion that the current lack of biblical knowledge and understanding in the wider community meant that evangelism had to "start further back" than had previously been typical. More time needed to be given to explanation of the

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[303] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 120.

gospel before people were called to make a commitment to Christ. Trevor said, "When people don't know what 'the deal' is, then it's going to be a process to get them to a place where they can say yes."

Patience in evangelism is also required to treat people as individuals, listening to their questions and engaging in a genuine process of communication with them. Jerram Barrs elaborated, "There is, then, an obligation to understand what others believe if we are going to communicate God's truth effectively."[304] Brian continued, "There are barriers to hearing the gospel and one of the ways to break down those barriers is to listen to them and to listen to their questions and begin to try to give reasoned answers to those questions." Trevor summed up the general approach of the research participants when he asserted that effective evangelism in Ireland today would probably be more often conversational, providing a biblical world-view on issues as they arise and asking questions which prompt thinking about God; and much less like offering a full explanation of the gospel on every possible occasion. There will be occasions when a full explanation of the gospel is what is appropriate, but as Tim Downs said, "Sometimes not telling someone everything you know about Jesus and the bible is an act of faith, love and courage"[305] because it would be spiritually inappropriate to do more, and the motivation would be to meet some need of the speaker, rather than the spiritual needs of the hearer. The foundation for this patient approach to evangelism, according to Packer and Barrs, is trust in the sovereignty of God in salvation. God will ensure that his word accomplishes the purpose he has for it, and he will not permit it to return to him void.

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[304] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 212.
[305] Downs, *Finding Common Ground: How to Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While We Still Can*, 12.

Packer wrote that an unrealistic expectation of quick results, which are never promised by God, can lead Christians to become discouraged and give up on evangelism, or alternatively, to try to pressurise people into making a decision to follow Christ, when they are not ready to make that choice freely. He explained,

> If we truly care for them, and if our heart truly loves and fears God, then we shall seek to present Christ to them in a way that is both honouring to Him and respectful to them. We shall not try to violate their personalities, or exploit their weaknesses, or ride roughshod over their feelings. What we shall be trying to do, rather, is to show them the reality of our friendship and concern by sharing with them our most valuable possession.[306]

Jerram Barrs said, "Non-Christians are to be treated with 'grace' and 'respect,'"[307] because that is how Jesus and Paul treated people when they were communicating the gospel. Barrs said all people are worthy of respect because they are created in God's image, and all people, whether inside or outside the church, are sinners in need of grace. Barry and Larry also emphasised the importance of accepting people outside the church the way that they are, and maintaining a non-judgemental attitude in relationships with them.

The literature, while recognising many of the benefits of evangelism training courses, also highlighted the danger of using pre-learned presentations of the gospel in a programmatic manner. This kind of approach fails to show proper respect because it does not treat people as individuals or take their ideas seriously. It also undermines authentic communication, and therefore actually hinders evangelism, rather than contributing to it.

It is the conclusion of this study that congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seeking to develop effective mission in their local communities will engage in evangelism which is characterised by patience and respect.

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[306] Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty Of God*, 80.
[307] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 192.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study sought to develop a clearer understanding of the challenges facing urban congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which are seeking to develop effective mission in their local communities, and it has helped in some measure to advance that goal. There are a number of possibilities for further research which could add to our knowledge and understanding and bring greater clarity to the issues related to effective mission. One possibility would be to extend the research base to include a greater number of ministers, or to include elders or other congregational leaders and members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, to benefit from a wider perspective. It might also be beneficial to compare and contrast the experience of Christian leaders from other denominations, seeking to identify common features which impact mission, regardless of denominational affiliation.

The issues surrounding the challenges of congregational leadership in a time of rapid and radical change would also provide a very fruitful area for further specific and more detailed research. The insights offered by secular studies considered in this research, and their application to leadership in the church, would benefit from a more rigorous and detailed critique than was possible within the scope of this study.

A Final Word

Effective mission is a fully orbed biblical witness which demonstrates God's love by practical acts of compassion and kindness, and patiently proclaims and explains God's redeeming purposes in Christ to people who do not know him. Since words and deeds are both necessary for authentic witness, any attempt to separate them must be rejected as counter-productive. It should also be recognised that long-term, genuine relationships

with people who do not know Christ, provide the best context for sharing the love of God in word and deed.

Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland must prioritise and commit themselves wholeheartedly to the development of effective mission in their local community, not because Sunday service attendances are falling or because congregations are closing, but because the Bible proclaims from beginning to end, that mission is at the centre of the Lord's will for his church. Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[308]

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[308] Acts 1:8

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