Becoming 21st Century Disciples

A study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District

Ministerial Focussed Study

Doctorate in Theology and Ministry

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Discipleship is emerging as a central theme for the Methodist Church, raising the question as to how disciples are made and nurtured for faithful witness to Jesus Christ in an increasingly secular 21st century. In this missiological context, the practice of intentional Christian formation becomes an imperative for the Church.

The post-liberal theologian, George Lindbeck, provides the theological starting point for an examination of Christian formation through the work of a number of its exponents. Christian formation is an intentional, communal, and transformational process that begins and ends with God, and in which we are called to participate as we follow the call of Jesus Christ into a relationship and way of life that is world transforming. Christian formation takes place in a church culture where it is clearly articulated and valued, and through engaging with others in intentional formational activities and practices.

Consequently, the research seeks to discover the place of Christian formation within the Methodist Church, by exploring empirically how, and to what extent, churches in one Methodist District are engaged in intentional faith development and discipleship training. The methodology of a qualitative and quantitative survey is chosen to answer this question, and the method of an online questionnaire is employed, inviting the participation of the ministers of the District concerned.

The research concludes that intentional Christian formation has yet to become an established part of Methodist Church life and culture, and suggests that the Christian tradition, and in particular the intentional, communal and formational practices of the early Methodists offer renewed direction for a Church that seeks to be ‘a discipleship movement shaped for mission.’
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Introduction

An emerging theme
Discipleship is emerging as a central theme for the Methodist Church and its mission in the 21st century. Addressing the Methodist Conference in July 2011, the General Secretary, Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, outlined the direction of travel for the Church in his strategic report, 'Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission.' In reframing Methodist ecclesiology around the concept of ‘a discipleship movement shaped for mission,’ Atkins proposes to set the Church on a course that will enable it to face the challenges of the 21st century with renewed focus and vigour. This is no small task given the pattern of decline that has seen membership decrease by two-thirds since 1960, from 728,000 to the current

![Membership of the Methodist Church 1900 - 2010](image)

Figure 1: Membership of the Methodist Church of Great Britain 1900 - 2010

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238,000 (see Fig. 1). In commending the report to the Methodist people for study, response and action,3 the Conference placed discipleship at the centre of the Church’s agenda – a discipleship that is to be understood as ‘whole life, lifelong and world transforming.’4

But how are ‘whole life, lifelong and world transforming’ disciples made? This is the question to be addressed if the aspirational language of ‘a discipleship movement shaped for mission’ is to be translated into the everyday life and practice of the Methodist people, let alone result in the ‘turnaround’ that Atkins anticipates in hope.5 How do we become 21st century disciples, and what are the implications for the local church in making and nurturing such disciples? To answer this question, we are drawn to consider ‘Christian formation.’ Whilst the language of formation has been used in the context of the training of Methodist presbyters and deacons in recent years, it has not, as far as I am aware, been applied to the formation of the Methodist people as a whole. And yet, it is the Christian formation of the whole people of God that demands serious attention if the prospect of the Church as ‘a discipleship movement shaped for mission’ is to be realised. It is in this context that ‘Becoming 21st Century Disciples: A study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District’ is offered to inform discussion of Christian formation within the Methodist Church at this time.

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Christian Formation: a missiological imperative

This research arises out of my conviction that the practice of intentional Christian formation is of paramount importance in our contemporary mission context, so graphically described by Callum Brown, in his book, ‘The Death of Christian Britain.’

‘In unprecedented numbers, the British people since the 1960s have stopped going to church... Since then, a formerly religious people have entirely forsaken organised Christianity in a sudden plunge into a truly secular condition.’

Brown’s analysis goes some way to explain the steep decline in Methodist membership since the 1960s that we have already noted (see Fig. 1). Concluding that ‘the culture of Christianity has gone in Britain of the new millennium,’ Brown’s final verdict is brutally frank,

‘Britain is showing the world how religion as we have known it can die.’

Clearly, there is little room for optimism in Brown’s view, although the philosopher, Charles Taylor, noting the persistence of a belief in the transcendent, argues that ‘Our age is very far from settling into a comfortable unbelief.’ Whichever view one takes, both Brown and Taylor describe the changing landscape that the Church is called to traverse at this time. It is an unfamiliar and destabilising world for many of us, yet at least one thing is becoming clear: in our increasingly post-Christian society, a knowledge and understanding of the Christian story and of what it is to live as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth can no longer be taken for granted. This

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7 Ibid. p 1.
8 Ibid. p 198.
9 Ibid. p 198.
presents the Christian community with the same missiological question that Bishop Lesslie Newbigin raised nearly three decades ago, namely, how can the Gospel be made credible for our age? Newbigin’s response is clear:

I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the Gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”

Everything comes back, in the end, to the ‘believing community.’ There are no quick fixes, easy options, shortcuts or smooth pathways; there is only the ‘believing community’ and the quality and depth of its discipleship. In this ‘brave new world’ Christian formation becomes all-important and the responsibility for ensuring that ‘the one short tale we feel to be true’ is known, understood, practiced and expressed in the everyday lives of Christians and would-be followers of Jesus Christ, now firmly rests on the Christian community and particularly on local churches and their leaders.

George Lindbeck provides me with the theological framework to substantiate this key conviction. Reading Lindbeck’s book, ‘The Nature of Doctrine,’ for the first time, I was struck by the missiological outworkings of his cultural-linguistic approach. Answering the question, as to how one is to ‘preach the gospel in a dechristianized world,’ Lindbeck resists the liberal method of translation and suggests that the task of the church is not to ‘redescribe’ the faith for our time but to teach the language and practices that constitute the Christian faith to would-be

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12 Ibid. p 227
adherents, a practice that ‘resembles ancient catechesis more than modern translation.’

Lindbeck’s postliberal theology, challenging Christians ‘to cultivate their native tongue and learn to act accordingly,’ struck a chord with my own experience in ministry. Lindbeck enabled me to grasp the central place of Christian formation in the current and foreseeable mission context of the Church. I am aware that he and others like Stanley Hauerwas, who again has been hugely influential, draw the criticism that they are in danger of advocating a sect-like church, ‘concerned entirely with its own inner life’ to quote Roger Walton in his recent book, ‘The Reflective Disciple.’ However, I see no contradiction between a deep cultivation of the church’s ‘native tongue’ and its engagement with the society in which it is embedded; the two are not mutually exclusive. It is in becoming more faithful to its core identity that the church has anything to offer the world. Faithful witness enables credible apologetic.

But Lindbeck’s cultural/linguistic approach, in which he argues that ‘a religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought,’ alerts us to the fact that it is not only the Christian community that plays a formative role in our lives. We are open to many other influences, set as we are within contemporary culture and its many sub-cultures, which similarly shape us – they are not neutral; their beliefs, values, practices and ways of life are quietly, constantly and insistently involved in moulding us as persons. Would that it were, as Lindbeck states, that our Christian faith ‘shapes the

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entirety’ of our lives. That may be the ideal but the reality is more complex. We are situated betwixt and between overlapping cultures, which can no longer be viewed as ‘self-contained and clearly bounded units,’ as Kathryn Tanner argues, but have porous boundaries across which much traffic flows.\(^\text{18}\) It is surely the case that in the complexity and fragmentation of the contemporary world, we are being formed as people within this diverse cultural setting, subject to many pressures and influences. No wonder Bishop Graham Cray entitles a recent book, ‘Who’s Shaping You?’ and asserts, ‘If you are not a part of a mutually discipling community, the culture will disciple you.’\(^\text{19}\) Acutely aware of these cultural realities that shape us, Alan Kreider insists we must ask ourselves, ‘what kinds of teaching, what alternative means of socialisation, can the churches use to form people who want to be Christians?’\(^\text{20}\) In asking this question, Kreider is inviting the Church to be more intentional in the practice of Christian formation, and it is this intentional approach that I believe needs to be rediscovered. Forming Christians in faith and discipleship is not only a primary task but is also a missiological imperative for the Christian Church in 21\(^{st}\) century Britain.

The purpose of this research is to discover what it is that churches are doing with the specific intention of developing faith and informing discipleship. In pursuing this objective, we move on to consider what is meant by Christian formation,


before turning to the methodology employed in the research. We will then consider the conduct of the research and analyse the data before concluding with theological reflection and suggestions for revised practice.
Chapter 1:
Intentional Christian Formation

‘...until Christ is formed in you’

Christian formation begins and ends with God. It names the process by which we are ‘conformed to the image of his Son.’ It is an intentional process, but that intention originates not with us but in the very heart of God. It is a communal process, because we are called with others to share in the life of the Trinitarian God whose gifts are given, as St Paul reminds us,

to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Christian formation is transformational. The goal is to become like Christ. But as we journey into Christ-likeness, graced by the Spirit, we are directed to serve a yet greater purpose: the life of the kingdom, as we share, through transformational living, in God’s mission to the world. No wonder Maria Harris refers to it as ‘holy work’ and reminds us ‘that God dwells with us as we do it, in the midst of each of the human processes we choose.’ This work of the Spirit is also our work; we are both recipients of and participants in this transformational process. In responding to the gracious activity of God we set out on the path of discipleship, which is a path of learning and growing, serving and living in relationship with Jesus Christ.

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21 Galatians 4:19, NRSV.
22 Romans 8:29, NRSV.
23 Ephesians 4:13, NRSV.
The Methodist report, ‘Time to Talk of God’ puts it well:

The term "discipleship" designates the whole life response of Christians to Jesus Christ. Everything a Christian believes and does is an aspect of discipleship; the goal of discipleship is to grow ever more Christ-like in every aspect of life.25

Here we begin to clarify the use of the terms ‘discipleship’ and ‘Christian formation.’ Whereas ‘discipleship’ quite properly emphasises the human response to the call of God, ‘Christian formation’ points to the transformational activity of God in which the disciple is called to participate as s/he makes that response; both, however, have as their goal the Christ-like life. And both include ‘Everything a Christian believes and does.’26 This is underscored by educationalist, John Westerhoff, who refers to Christian formation as:

an intentional process of initiation and incorporation into a Christian faith community with distinctive understandings and ways of life which differentiate it from the general culture.27

In so doing, Westerhoff confirms the importance of both a distinctive set of beliefs and their outworking in the everyday lives of would-be disciples, thus resonating with Newbigin’s claim that for the Gospel to be intelligible it requires ‘a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.’28 Christian formation, therefore, is about belief and praxis, spirituality and action, interior life

26 Ibid. p 19.
and its outward expression, faith and discipleship. It is with this duality in mind that I describe this research as ‘a study of intentional faith development and discipleship training’ so as to encompass both aspects. By drawing this distinction, however, I am not suggesting that Christian formation is anything other than an holistic enterprise, concerning individuals who both believe and act as whole persons. And whilst I appreciate that the terminology of ‘faith development and discipleship training’ is perhaps rather awkward, I trust, nonetheless, that it conveys for the purposes of this research that belief and praxis are both vital elements of Christian formation.

**A matter of intention**

Christian formation is an intentional process. Whilst that intentionality springs ultimately from God’s purposes for us, it is something that we are called to wholeheartedly embrace. To become disciples of Jesus Christ and to set our hearts – and those of others – on becoming like him, in word and deed, is a matter of intention. To quote John Stott, ‘Holiness is not a condition into which we drift.’

For this reason ‘Becoming 21st century disciples’ is a piece of research undertaken to understand how, and to what extent, churches in one particular Methodist District are intentionally engaged in faith development and discipleship training.

If Dallas Willard is correct, we should expect to find very little intentional activity. In his view, ‘the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a

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condition of being a Christian.' In fact, he bluntly states, ‘the governing assumption today, among professing Christians, is that we can be “Christians” forever and never become disciples.’ The goal of lifelong discipleship and becoming more like Christ is no longer articulated. Instead, in our churches:

One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship...

His conclusion is stark and hard-hitting:

So far as the visible institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional.' Willard reminds us of the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 to ‘Go…and make disciples.’ He points out that churches have neglected to make disciples, opting instead to ‘Make converts…and baptize them into church membership.’ Consequently, he notes ‘two great omissions from the Great Commission:

we start by omitting the making of disciples and enrolling people as Christ’s students... Then we also omit, of necessity, the step of taking our converts through training that will bring them ever-increasingly to do what Jesus directed.

I quote Willard extensively here, because, whilst he may be provocative in his assertions, he gets to the heart of the matter and challenges us to reflect on the
goals and intentions that we hold and pursue within our church communities. Translated into the terms of this research, we might say that Willard poses the question as to whether or not our churches are focussed on making, becoming and nurturing 21st century disciples through intentional activities of faith development and discipleship training. This is a question that we seek to answer in the research. But in order to answer it, we need to be a little clearer as to how the process of formation takes place and the part that we are called to play in it.

**Understanding Christian formation**

Christian formation is a complex, multifaceted, and elusive concept. As we have noted, it is, in the end, not something that we do but that God does. It is a work of grace, an activity of the Spirit. It is not something within our control, but neither is it something that is imposed upon us, over which we have no control. Christian formation is about unique human beings in particular contexts responding to the love and grace of God at work in their lives as they participate in the life, fellowship ministry and mission of the Christian community. It is both invitation and gift: the invitation to an intentional following of Christ in discipleship, and the gift of growing more like him – and becoming more truly ourselves – as we take up that invitation. It is, as Carkuff Williams remarks, ‘about opening ourselves up to a relationship that transforms our very being and thereby changes how we live.’37 James Fowler prefers the language of vocation, or ‘finding a purpose for one’s life that is part of the purposes of God’.38 But again, it is a matter of transformation and that for

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Fowler, means more than a steady process of development, but requires *conversion*, described as:39

an *ongoing process* – with, of course, a series of important moments of perspective-altering convictions and illuminations – *through which people (or a group) gradually bring the lived story of their lives into congruence with the core story of the Christian faith.*40

This means ‘a recentering of our passion’ around the passion of Jesus and growing ‘in partnership with God’s work in the world.’41

In order to understand how churches are engaging in this ‘recentering’ process, I suggest that it is helpful to pay attention to two essential aspects of intentional Christian formation: the culture of the church community and specific intentional activities. Though the two are clearly interwoven and mutually inform each other, I trust that this distinction offers a useful framework for looking at what is going on in our churches.

**Church culture**

George Lindbeck reminds us that belonging to a Christian community is to participate in a culture that forms and shapes us.42 Therefore, any study in Christian formation draws attention to the culture of the church. Maria Harris, a Catholic educationalist, famously stated that ‘the church does not have an

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40 Ibid. p 115.
41 Ibid. p 115.
The important point she makes is that everything that goes to make up the life of a church is educating and forming those who belong to it; and that means that it is not just the minister, Sunday School teacher or youth leader who has a key role to play, but each of us is responsible – individually and collectively – for the formation of one another. It is the quality and the activity of our life together as a community of disciples that helps determine the extent and depth of our Christian formation. We are called to be intentional together in developing faith and discipleship. And this means paying attention to ‘the set of forms “traditioned” to us through the centuries by the Christian church’ which ‘comprise the curriculum of the church.’ These forms are outlined in Acts 2:42, 44-47, where Harris finds:

the most detailed description of the first Christian community doing what will in time become the classical activities of ecclesial ministry: kerygma, proclaiming the word of Jesus’ resurrection; didache, the activity of teaching; leiturgia, coming together to pray and to re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread; koinonia, or community; and diakonia, caring for those in need.

This is the material that we are given to fashion and refashion in each generation and context, as Harris contends:

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43 Harris, Fashion Me A People, 1989. p 47.
44 Ibid. pp 46-47.
46 Ibid. p 17.
47 Ibid. p 16.
in fashioning these forms we fashion the church. And because we are the church, the fashioning of the forms becomes the fashioning of us.\textsuperscript{48}

In other words, our Christian formation takes place as we speak and share the gospel in evangelism; learn and teach the living tradition of our faith; worship, pray and grow in our relationship with God; build genuine community within our churches; and serve our neighbours and wider world, especially the needy. This is the culture of the church that shapes us, and which we ourselves shape through our participation.

In paying attention to our church communities, Harris (along with Carkuff Williams\textsuperscript{49}), draws on the work of Elliot Eisner to point out that ‘that all institutions teach not one but three curricula.’\textsuperscript{50} These are the explicit curriculum, the implicit curriculum and the null curriculum. ‘The explicit curriculum refers to what is actually presented, consciously and with intention.’ The implicit curriculum, according to Carkuff Williams, is ‘hidden’ in the church community and is ‘found in its structure and routines and in the behaviours, attitudes, and relationships of its members.’\textsuperscript{51} And the null curriculum refers to what is left out, to those things that churches choose not to engage in.\textsuperscript{52} By reflecting on these three types of curricula, we may discover the nature of the Christian formation taking place. As Roger Walton reminds us:

\textsuperscript{48} Harris, \textit{Fashion Me A People}, 1989. p 17.  
\textsuperscript{49} Carkuff Williams, \textit{Learning the Way}, 2009. p 94.  
\textsuperscript{50} Harris, \textit{Fashion Me A People}, 1989. p 69.  
\textsuperscript{51} Carkuff Williams, \textit{Learning the Way}, 2009. p 94.  
\textsuperscript{52} Harris, \textit{Fashion Me A People}, 1989. p 69.
Before any Alpha course is put on, before any small group is formed, or Lent programme devised, Christian education is operating in a church, either attracting, forming and transforming people or leaving them untouched, unengaged or even driven away.\textsuperscript{53}

**Specific Intentional Activities**

As we consider specific intentional activities in Christian formation, we turn our attention, to quote James Wilhoit, to ‘what is taught and sought’ rather than ‘merely caught’ by simply belonging to a church.\textsuperscript{54} And what probably first comes to mind are those activities, groups, fellowships, programmes, courses, events and training opportunities that churches offer to develop faith and discipleship among their members. These are particularly open to empirical study and form an important part of this research. Less easily accessible to us, however, is the extent to which the two aspects of Christian formation – faith and discipleship – are held together in the intentional activities that take place. The Bible study group may faithfully meet, but that does not necessarily result in faithful discipleship – indeed, those who attend the Bible study may find themselves puzzled by the disconnect between the world of the Bible and the world in which they live. As Dorothy Bass observes, ‘many contemporary Christians wonder whether and how what they are supposed to believe really connects to the realities of their lives.’\textsuperscript{55} This is something that Roger Walton takes very seriously, advocating that:


\textsuperscript{54} Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, p 23.

the calling of discipleship is to engage with our daily problems and challenges and bring them into a conversation with our faith tradition to find fresh ways of living out our faith. This clearly requires specific intentional activities with a dual focus: immersion in the Christian tradition, and the everyday practice of lived faith i.e. knowing and living the Christian story.

**Knowing the story**
The Christian tradition is centred on a particular story, which requires intentional teaching, especially in our increasingly secular world. Stanley Hauerwas is surely right to assert that ‘religious education has as its first task the initiation of a people into a story.’ The purpose and value of that initiation, as George Lindbeck reminds us, is ‘learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its terms.’ Perhaps one of the reasons that we find discipleship so perplexing is that we lack those skills through insufficient rooting in the Biblical story. An example of a Biblical resource aimed at a firmer rooting in the Biblical story is *Disciple.* In an intensive 34 week programme, participants commit to read 70% of the Bible, coming together weekly to discuss what they are learning. Its significance for Christian formation is that

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58 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* p 34.
‘Disciple aims at transformation, not just information.’ Christian doctrine too is also important, as Ellen Charry reminds us:

The theologians who shaped the tradition believed that God was working with us to teach us something, to get our attention through the Christian story... They were interested in forming us as excellent persons...with God as the model.  

Intentional teaching of the Christian story is vital for Christian formation.

**Living the story**
Belief and action go hand in hand. Through acting we come to understand and through knowing we are motivated to act. In doing both we grow as disciples. That is why attention is turning to an emphasis on specific Christian practices in Christian formation, as Craig Dykstra makes clear:

Growth in faith involves...action in which we engage together in the context of the community of faith. It involves active engagement in certain practices which are central to and constitutive of the church’s life. By engaging in these practices with others, we both lay ourselves open to what God is doing redemptively in the world and participate in that activity ourselves.  

But Christian practices require intentional teaching. Dykstra gives the example of prayer, pointing out that while many adults cannot pray, some children can – the

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difference being that the children have been taught and the adults have not.\textsuperscript{63} Dykstra consequently calls for the ‘direct, intentional teaching’ of Christian practices.\textsuperscript{64} These practices range from ‘praying together’ to ‘performing faithful acts of service,’ from confessing, forgiving and being reconciled to one another to offering hospitality, especially to strangers – everything that constitutes life as a Christian disciple in the church and world.\textsuperscript{65} It is by engaging in such practices that Dykstra and Bass suggest ‘we come to perceive how are daily lives are all tangled up with the things God is doing in the world.’\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid. pp106 - 118 (116).
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid. pp106 - 118 (116).
Chapter 2: Methodology & Method

The Research Question:
How and to what extent are Methodist churches in one Methodist District engaged in intentional faith development and discipleship training?

Methodology
The methodology chosen to answer the research question combines both quantitative and qualitative elements and takes the form of a survey conducted among the ordained ministers of one Methodist District. The decision to confine the scope of the survey to one District was made in order to provide a well-defined unit of sufficient size to offer meaningful results. I also decided, for the sake of manageability, to restrict the scope of the survey to adults and teenagers.

My reasons for adopting this methodology are several:

1. Ministers have pastoral oversight of churches and thereby have overall responsibility for Christian formation and are aware of what is happening in their churches.

2. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative elements ensures a good balance of data, noting Swinton and Mowat’s view that they ‘are not

67 The more usual term minister is used, although presbyter is technically correct since deacons are also ordained ministers, though without pastoral oversight of churches.
bipolar opposites and, in fact, in practice need each other for the development of thorough understanding.\textsuperscript{68}

3. A quantitative element enables a general overview of what is taking place to be gained by gathering data for analysis, comparison and reflection.

4. A qualitative element delivers a richer account of what is happening by affording ministers the opportunity to share their thinking and practice, offer self-evaluation of the effectiveness of that practice, and provide suggestions as to what may be helpful in further assisting them, particularly in the way of resources.

5. By using this methodology, it was also hoped that examples of good practice, and of particular interest, might be identified and followed up through a small number of semi-structured interviews to obtain further qualitative data.

In seeking to answer the research question, it is important to acknowledge my own place within the research process. This is to raise the question of ‘reflexivity’ which, according to Swinton and Mowat, is ‘a mode of knowing which accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field and seeks to incorporate that knowledge creatively and effectively.’\textsuperscript{69} As is already evident, I approach this research as someone who strongly believes that there is a need to rediscover the importance of Christian formation in the life and mission of today’s Church. For this reason I have sought to guard myself from unduly influencing the

\textsuperscript{68} John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, \textit{Practical Theology and Qualitative Research}. London: SCM Press, 2006.  p 44.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.  p 59.
outcome simply because I cannot step outside of the reflexive circle. Similarly, I also acknowledge that whilst I have not generated a clearly defined hypothesis, my expectation has been that the research will reveal that intentional faith development and discipleship training is not given as high a priority in the churches as it warrants. However, I have sought to remain open to being pleasantly surprised and to discovering that there are indeed creative and resourceful practices quietly taking place that deserve to be more widely known and shared.

**Method**
My chosen method to conduct the research was a questionnaire, combining both quantitative and qualitative elements, followed up by a very small number of semi-structured interviews. I also decided to use an online survey program, ‘Survey Monkey,’ in place of a paper-based questionnaire. The reasons for this were threefold. Firstly, the internet and electronic communication have become the principle means by which the Methodist Church communicates with its ministers; secondly, I took the view that ministers might be more attracted to complete an online questionnaire, thus giving the potential for a higher response rate; and thirdly, because ‘Survey Monkey’ has several helpful features, including assistance in creating, circulating, collecting and analysing, that make it valuable as a research tool. My only reservation was that, having no experience of ‘Survey Monkey,’ I might find it difficult to master. However, I decided the benefits outweighed the risk, and this certainly proved to be the case.

70 See Survey Monkey website at http://www.surveymonkey.com
The design of an appropriate questionnaire to obtain the necessary data to answer the research question was always going to be a vital part of the research process. It required clarity of purpose, and so I aimed to find out:

- What is going on in the way of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches and circuits of the District?
- Who is participating (e.g. teenagers, newcomers, those new to faith, those seeking confirmation, long-standing members)?
- Who is leading or facilitating (whilst the ministers may have the overall responsibility, there are likely to be others involved)?
- What resources are being used and how satisfactory are they? Are there gaps that need to be filled or further resources required?
- General information about the ministers, including their own formation, and their personal views about faith development and discipleship training and its importance for them and for the wider church.

I planned from the outset to pilot a draft of the questionnaire to test its suitability and refine it further before circulating it to participants. It was also my hope that the questionnaire would yield some interesting examples of good practice, creative initiatives, and the use of interesting resources, which would be worthy of follow up in a small number of interviews.

The final stages of the research process require the data to be analysed and considered within an ‘overarching methodological framework.’ To do this I seek

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71 Swinton & Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, p 76.
to be guided by Swinton and Mowat’s approach of ‘critical faithfulness,’ in which they outline four stages that bring together ‘situations, theology and qualitative research.’ (To which I would add quantitative research). These four stages are:

**Stage 1: The situation**

Identifying a practice or a situation that requires reflection and critical challenge: what appears to be going on pre-reflectively?

**Stage 2: Cultural/contextual analysis**

Application of qualitative research methods – asking new questions: What is actually going on here?

**Stage 3: Theological**

Critical reflection on the practices of the church in the light of scripture and tradition: How are we to understand this situation from the perspective of critical faithfulness?

**Stage 4: Formulating Revised Practice**

Revised forms of faithful practice

In choosing to follow the method of ‘critical faithfulness,’ the data and understandings of current practice, gathered in Stages 1 and 2 through the questionnaire and interviews, may then be brought into dialogue with the theological understandings of Christian formation discussed earlier, leading to revised practice, and thereby ensuring:

that the practices of the Church remain faithful to the practices and mission of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his continuing redemptive practices.

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72 Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p 93.
73 Ibid. p 95.
Chapter 3:  
The Conduct of the Research

**Ethical Approval**  
The first task to be addressed after the research proposal was agreed was to gain ethical approval from King’s College, under whose auspices the research was conducted. In considering the ethical matters raised by my chosen methodology and methods, particularly as they involved a questionnaire, I was cautioned by Cohen, Manion & Morrison:

> The questionnaire will always be an intrusion into the life of the respondent, be it in terms of time taken to complete the instrument, the level of threat or sensitivity of the questions, or the possible invasion of privacy. Questionnaire respondents are not passive data providers for researchers; they are subjects not objects of research.\(^{75}\)

This note of caution led me to proceed on the basis that participants would be made fully aware that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time, even after submitting their data. I was also concerned to avoid engendering a sense of obligation among any would-be participants who might know me and who might feel obliged to take part. Whilst acknowledging the difficulty of entirely ruling this out, I endeavoured to make it clear that participation was entirely voluntary and that no one should feel under any obligation to participate.

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\(^{74}\) Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p 24.  
Another concern was to reassure participants of the confidential nature of the process and that anonymity would be maintained. In addition, given that responses would be made by ministers on behalf of churches, it was vital that data should not be traceable to an individual or church. For this reason, I decided that the District should also remain anonymous.

Concerning the small number of follow-up interviews envisaged, I decided to use the questionnaire to enable respondents to express whether or not they were willing to be interviewed and to make it clear that this was again entirely voluntary. In respect of location, I indicated that interviews would take place at venues convenient to participants, whether their office or study, at their church or home, or wherever was most comfortable for them.

Ethical approval was subsequently granted by the University and most matters referred to above featured in my communications with participants, and in particular were set out on the Information Sheet sent to all potential participants, and on the additional Information Sheet and Consent Form given to those who were subsequently interviewed (see Appendix 3). (Consent forms were unnecessary in respect of the questionnaire, since consent is deemed to be given by completing the survey).
Selection of Participants
The first decision to be taken prior to the selection of participants was the choice of District in which the research would be conducted. An approach was made to a Chair of District and the nature of the research made known. Permission to conduct the research was readily given, access to the District directory of circuits and ministers provided, and assistance obtained in clarifying which ministers had pastoral charge of churches. The latter required some careful consideration, because not all Methodist ministers serve in appointments where they have pastoral charge, and likewise there are ministers of other denominations who do have pastoral charge of Methodist members, either because they serve in a Methodist appointment or because they minister in a Local Ecumenical Project (or LEP). This led to 66 ministers being identified and subsequently invited to participate in the research.

The design of the questionnaire
The design of the questionnaire proved to be the most challenging part of the whole research process. Even though I had a clear idea of what I wanted to find out, designing a questionnaire that would elicit that information and answer the research question was more difficult than I had anticipated. I worked through eight drafts of the questionnaire, including the pilot, before arriving at the final version (Appendix 1). At a particularly low point in the design process, I was greatly encouraged by Dr Matthew Guest, who in a presentation entitled, ‘The Trials and Tribulations of using Social Scientific Methods,’ spoke of the challenge he and colleagues faced in designing an appropriate questionnaire for a major piece of
I realised that the difficulties lay not only in my inexperience, but were inherent in the design process itself, and this prompted me to renewed effort.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison’s reference to ‘a staged sequence for planning a questionnaire,’ proved a good guide. Having established a clear aim, and selected the participant population, I followed their advice and began to generate ‘the topics / constructs / concepts / issues to be addressed and data required in order to meet the objectives of the research.’ Then using ‘Survey Monkey,’ I began to develop the questionnaire. Deciding which type of question best served each matter under consideration required considerable thought. Question types on offer include multiple choice questions, rating scales, a matrix of choices that offer either single or multiple answers or use of a drop down box, and comment / essay boxes. Considerable time was given to working on each draft of the questionnaire and to refining the questions, and question types with their various options, and revisiting them again and again in order to eventually arrive at the finished result. In general, following Cohen, Manion and Morrison, I sought to obtain a good balance between open and closed questions, and to give as much opportunity to obtain qualitative information by providing comment boxes for most questions and, in some instances by offering a comment / essay box as the means of answering.

Matthew Guest was speaking at a CTRC Research Day at King’s College, London, on 09 February 2011.


Ibid. p 318.

Ibid. p 329-330.
Attention to the overall flow of the questionnaire was also important in order to ensure that respondents would be encouraged to complete it and not give up in the process. Guided by Cohen, Manion & Morrison, I began with ‘unthreatening factual questions’ providing basic data about the sample e.g. age, gender, years in ministry, number of churches etc; I then moved on to more closed questions to gain the factual data that I was seeking, whilst adding opportunities for additional comments and evaluative answers; finally, I included a series of more open-ended questions so as to ‘seek responses on opinions, attitudes, perceptions and views,’ in the hope that they ‘might contain the ‘gems’ of information that otherwise might not be caught in the questionnaire.’

One of the revisions that I made to earlier drafts of the survey was to preface the questions concerning intentional activities with two questions inviting respondents to mention and evaluate any activities ‘that have an element of faith development and discipleship training’ (i.e. had a dimension of Christian formation without a specific intention). The reason for doing so was that I felt uncomfortable confronting respondents with questions on intentional formation that some might find threatening, particularly if there was little intentional activity taking place. By including the more general questions, I hoped to enable respondents to get into the questionnaire by considering activities that commonly take place and evaluating them in terms of their formational benefit.

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Ibid. p 330.
By the eighth draft, the questionnaire was ready to be piloted. It consisted of five sections, prefaced with an introductory page giving respondents a ‘map’ of what would follow and the suggestion that it would take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Each section was introduced by a brief statement outlining the purpose of the section, as advised by Cohen, Manion & Morrison.\(^2\) The sections were:

1. You and your ministry
2. What is going on?
3. Who is participating?
4. What resources are being used?
5. Your views on developing faith and discipleship

**The Pilot**

Before piloting the questionnaire, I gave thought to the manner in which it would be circulated to participants. I decided to send an introductory email addressed personally to each participant two days prior to generating the main email (again personally addressed) containing the link to the online survey (see Appendix 1). It seemed important that the ministers piloting the survey should receive it with the same introductory information as participants.

As anticipated, the piloting of the questionnaire proved to be extremely helpful. I approached six ministers, serving in different parts of the country and a variety of settings, four of whom agreed to test the questionnaire and provide feedback. Several comments were made about the ambiguity of certain questions, leading me

to clarify those instances in the final version. I also received confirmation that 20 minutes was a realistic completion time, and the helpful comment that ‘I did not get bored or lose interest.’ A material change was made following the query of one person who wondered whether there was ‘too much focus on structured learning...at the expense of spiritual / faith development’ such as quiet days and book clubs. As a result book / reading groups, quiet days and retreats were included in the questionnaire.

The emails and link to the survey were sent out to participants in early March 2011. One minister not on email was sent a printed copy of the survey with a stamped addressed envelope. This data could be inputted manually once returned.

**Collecting Responses**

Of the initial 66 ministers invited to take part in the survey, one was quickly established to be on sabbatical, and another on maternity leave, reducing the total number of potential participants to 64. One of the benefits of using ‘Survey Monkey’ is that it provides you with the data as soon as respondents enter it in the online questionnaire, providing a helpful gauge of how it is being received and level of interest generated. Despite an initial flurry of activity, only 16 responses out of a possible 64 had been received within the first two weeks, which was somewhat disappointing. A reminder email (Appendix 2) and link to the online survey was then sent to non-respondents which resulted in a further 19 responses, bringing the total number of respondents to 35 by the 31 March cut-off date. However, of the
there were 3 respondents who had not fully completed the questionnaire and this required a decision as to whether these should be included in the data. On closer examination, one had dropped out after section 1 and another at section 2. After careful consideration, it was decided to delete these from the database so as not to skew the results. In the case of the third incomplete questionnaire, the respondent left only the final section incomplete and so was retained in the database, because it was judged that the substantive part of the questionnaire had been answered. After making these adjustments, there were 33 respondents left in the database, i.e. half of the 66 ministers having pastoral charge within the District.
Chapter 4: Results & Analysis

In presenting, analysing and discussing the results of survey, it will be helpful to consider each section of the questionnaire in turn. Bearing in mind that the sample population is 33 ministers, data will be presented in actual numbers rather than percentages, which are best suited to sample populations greater than 100.

**Section 2: You and Your Ministry**

This initial section of the questionnaire was designed to find out basic information about the ministers in our sample. This is important for two reasons: firstly, it helps establish whether the sample reflects the wider population of ministers in the Church; and secondly, it provides a means to determine whether any of these factors, e.g. gender, age, time in ministry etc., have any significance in faith development and discipleship training.

In order to establish whether our sample was normative, I contacted the Research Team at Methodist Church House. Unfortunately, I discovered that the Methodist Church, does not gather such data about its ministers, but the Research Team Leader was able to indicate that the sample:

- was roughly representative of ministers…The only question mark would be on the balanced gender, as the anecdotal evidence is that men still appear to outnumber women.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) As mentioned in an email to the author from Christopher Stephens, Research Team Leader, The Methodist Church, sent 17 August 2011.
Whilst such confirmation is not based on clear statistical evidence, it does suggest that our sample of 33 ministers comprising 17 women and 16 men appears to be normative, allowing for a slightly larger proportion of women ministers. (Fig. 3).

Of the 33 ministers, 26 are aged between 45 and 64 (Fig. 2), in line with what we would expect when people are entering the ministry later in life. If we cross-tab to consider age by gender (see Fig. 4), we find that men are predominantly in the 55+ age groups, with women more evenly spread.
Are you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question* 33

*skipped question* 0

Figure 3: Gender of ministers

Figure 4: Age of ministers by gender
In considering the theological education of respondents (Fig. 5), it is interesting that a significantly higher number of women have a theological degree (10) compared to men (2). This contrasts with a relatively equal distribution of those with a college based course (10 in each instance) or a postgraduate degree (6 women and 5 men).

As we turn to consider the current appointments of the ministers in our sample, we find that there are 6 ministers of other denominations in pastoral charge of Methodist members, and 1 minister of another denomination who is serving in a Methodist appointment (Fig. 6). We can also see, by deduction from Fig. 7, that there are a total number of 76 Methodist churches and 15 Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs) represented in our sample, making a total of 91 churches in the care
of 33 ministers, which tallies with the average number of 3 churches per Methodist minister across the connexion.

### What best describes your current ministry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a Methodist minister</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a minister of another denomination serving in a Methodist appointment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a minister of another denomination serving in an LEP with pastoral charge of Methodist members</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Answered question: 33, Skipped question: 0*

*Figure 6: Methodist minister or minister of another denomination*

### How many Churches are in your pastoral care?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Churches</th>
<th>Methodist Churches</th>
<th>LEPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer Options</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Answered question: 28, Skipped question: 14*

*Figure 7: Numbers and types of churches (Methodist or LEP) in the care of ministers*
The majority of ministers in our sample have served for less than 30 years, and 13 of these are in their first ten years of ministry (Fig. 8). Cross-tabulating by gender (Fig. 9) reveals a striking picture: of those 13 who have served less than 10 years, 11 are women, confirming again, that it is women who are coming newly into ministry, whilst men have generally served longer.

Figure 8: Time in ministry
Lastly we find that 25 of the ministers in our sample are in the first five years of their current appointment, and only 3 ministers have served more than eight years (Fig. 10). Given that initial appointments in the Methodist Church are for five years, this would seem to be consistent. However, with the often-used provision for extensions to appointments, there appear to be a higher number of ministers in the first five years than might have been anticipated.
In general, however, we find a sample that appears reasonably consistent with the wider pattern within the connexion, as confirmed by the Methodist Research Team.

**Section 3: What is going on?**
The first two questions in this section are concerned with activities that have a *dimension* of faith development and discipleship training, whether intentional or not. As can be seen in Fig. 11, a large number of ministers indicated that such activities are very much part of the life of their churches, with the most common being Bible Study groups, housegroups, prayer meetings, and opportunities to serve others.
The answers reveal that Quiet days occur in the churches of 11 respondents, and spiritual direction and retreats occur in the churches of two respondents, indicating a concern for spiritual life and development. Cell groups (5), though relatively new, are also shown to feature, and fellowship meetings and young people’s groups remain significant.

The second question, following on, invited respondents to evaluate the activities in terms of their effectiveness in developing faith and discipleship (Fig. 12).
What is significant here is that some of the more common activities, such as fellowship meetings, have a low rating (3.83-3.96) whereas some activities that are less common are rated highly; for example spiritual direction, which is mentioned in Fig. 11 by only 2 ministers, receives a mean score of 4.73, second only to Bible Study groups (4.81), suggesting that whilst it may feature less prominently in our churches this is not indicative of the value placed upon it. The same also applies to Quiet days, which are less common than housegroups yet score the same (4.71).

Commenting on the effectiveness of groups, one respondent made a valuable point:

*All the groups are only as helpful as the content allows them to be. If groups are effectively social clubs then although the fellowship may be*
wonderful there may not be enough to challenge people to move forward and grow as disciples. If Bible study always follows the same pattern and has the same theological emphasis it may affirm people in where they are rather than encouraging growth. So much depends on the leaders of the groups. However having said that I think that they can encourage people to become more embedded in the community of faith, and from this there can be growth.

Another respondent, who had conducted empirical research into the value of groups, had concluded that:

people's understanding of God, themselves and others was greatly increased if they attended any regular study, fellowship or housegroup.

A significant set of activities that are given a low mean score are the opportunities to serve others through the various community activities of the church; these only receive a rating of 3.86, indicating that they are not perceived as being of great significance in developing faith and discipleship, something to which we will return later. The figure for young people’s groups (4.32) also indicates some ambivalence as to their effectiveness. There were other activities listed by respondents which included the use of film, Godly play, and Messy Church. Overall, we may conclude that the most common activities which have a dimension of faith development and discipleship training are Bible study groups, housegroups, cell groups and prayer meetings. Other key activities, such as spiritual direction, quiet days and retreats are seen to be effective, but are much less commonly found in our churches.
We now turn to the question at the heart of this research: to the intentional activities that are taking place to develop faith and discipleship. As Fig. 13 reveals, the most commonly found intentional activities are those for young people, with a mean rating of 3.38. Short term courses follow, though well behind (2.58). Longer term courses and courses for those seeking or coming new to faith bring up the rear with low scores of 1.35 and 1.25 respectively. This suggests that intentional faith formation and discipleship training does not feature significantly in the structured courses and programmes that are being offered to adults in the churches in our sample.
In looking more closely at the data (see Fig. 14), and at the frequency of intentional activities, we can see that the only significant ongoing intentional activity is among young people. When we consider intentional activities that take place at least once a year, it is encouraging to note that 18 ministers refer to Short-term courses and 9 to Confirmation or Membership courses, although neither offer sustained opportunities for Christian formation. Courses that take place occasionally or as the need arises include longer term courses and courses for those new to faith, with 11 ministers referring to these. This gives a slightly more hopeful cast on the mean ratings in Fig. 13 although still presents a picture of intentional faith development and discipleship training that has still to find its place in the everyday life of churches, especially among adults.
Probing a little deeper, and seeking to discover if the theological training of the minister has any bearing on whether or not churches are intentionally engaged in these activities, we turn to Fig. 15. By cross-tabulating in this way, we discover that a minister with a postgraduate degree prompts more intentional activity in each category. However, it appears that there is no major difference between ministers who have degrees and those with a college diploma or certificate.

![Intentional activities by theological education of the minister](image)

Figure 15: Intentional activities according to the theological education of the minister

A cross-tab to consider whether gender has any impact, reveals that churches with women ministers have a higher incidence of intentional activities for young people (3.76 women / 2.93 for men) and of short-term courses (2.82 / 2.29).
When we seek to discover the number of churches engaged in intentional faith development and discipleship training, as opposed to the number of ministers who have churches that do so – an important distinction – the data appears incomplete. As Fig. 17 reveals, the questionnaire results suggest that of the 91 churches identified as being in the pastoral care of ministers, only 57 feature in the respondents’ answers; there are clearly 34 churches unaccounted for – a figure that, even when the two respondents who skipped the question are taken into account, is clearly inaccurate. We are probably best to assume that the positive answers are correct. This reveals that 26 churches are engaged in ongoing activities, 13 in activities that take place at least annually, and 12 further churches who do so either less than once a year or as the need arises. This makes a total of

![Intentional activities by gender](image-url)
51 churches who participate in intentional activities, leaving 40 where no such activity appears to be taking place. If this is correct, this is a matter of real concern.

**How many of the churches in your pastoral care engage in activities and practices that have as their primary purpose faith development and discipleship training?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of churches</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so on an ongoing basis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so at least once a year</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so regularly but less than once a year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so when the need arises</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do not</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of churches of whom I am unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 17: Number of Churches engaged in intentional faith development and discipleship training*

When the question is asked as to the importance attached in each of the churches in a minister’s pastoral care to intentional faith development and discipleship training, we find a clear picture emerging of a decrease in intentional activity as the number of churches a minister has in his or her pastoral care increases (Fig. 18). The number of ministers identifying such activity as either very or fairly important drops from 25 in the case of the first church, to 22, and then dramatically to 10, 5 and none at all, as the number of churches increases. This suggests that a focus on
a single church – or as few churches as possible – best serves the encouragement of intentional activity. This has strategic implications for the Church, and may well support the notion of a pastor for every church, providing that pastor is sufficiently trained and equipped.

Figure 18: Level of importance that churches attach to intentional faith development and discipleship training

The overall picture that emerges is one of a church that is involved in the intentional Christian formation of young people, but much less so in that of adults, and where that occurs it is generally in either one or two churches within a ministers pastoral care; it also reveals that in just under a half of churches there is no intentional Christian formation taking place at all.
Section 4: Who is participating?
The purpose of this section is to find out which categories of people are participating in intentional Christian formation. Again a clear picture begins to emerge, although not without posing a question (Fig. 19). The results reveal that it is those who have been Christians for some years that form the largest group. We noted earlier, however, that young people were the main focus of intentional activities. This disparity may be explained by the fact that not all churches have young people but they do have adults, so that when intentional activities take place there are usually mature Christians involved. The results also suggest that there are fewer 20-25 year olds than there are either teenagers or the 26-40 age group; though this may be because we lack that age group in many of our churches.

Figure 19: Those participating in intentional faith development and discipleship training
When asking ministers directly about the level of interest that they discern within each of the categories, we notice that there appears to be less interest expressed by the early twenties age group, who score only 3.56 (Fig. 20). However, we also find that it is not mature Christians who express the highest interest in learning about faith and discipleship, but those who are new to faith (4.67) or are exploring or seeking faith (4.4). This makes sense, and is something that we would expect to find. The interest among mature Christians is there, but not quite as intense. And whilst the main focus of intentional activity is directed at teenagers, we discover that it is not matched by the level of interest shown, which is just above that of the early twenties at 3.84.
When we turn to the reasons that deter engagement in intentional activities, we find on analysis that they come down to two: busy lives and little perceived benefit. This is well summed up by one respondent:

Lack of time in a hectic schedule to be able to share in a group which is engaging in faith development, or the difficulty of finding a time which is convenient for taking part. Perhaps a sense among the regular worshipping community that this is what we do on a Sunday, so why do we need to give more time to it during the week?

Or in the words of another:

Time and comfortable Christianity, being happy where we are.

These are both issues that the Church needs to address if people are to be encouraged to take their discipleship more seriously. I suspect the largest challenge is not in fact time pressure, but encouraging people to see discipleship as a way of life with a goal of conformity to Christ and loving service in the world that requires of each of us an intentional commitment undergirded by God’s grace. Seen in that light, I suggest individuals will find the time.

The final question in this section, seeks to find out who is leading intentional activities (Fig. 21). Here, our results show that in most cases, apart from work with young people, where youth workers take the lead, it is the minister who is most involved. Lay workers, housegroup leaders, suitably gifted church members and Local Preachers are also used, particularly with the more mature members but also with those exploring or new to faith. This suggests that there are suitable people other than the minister who can be encouraged to give greater commitment to
leading intentional activities. In fact the time pressures on ministers are such that if there is to be growth in intentional activity, it will certainly require the involvement of others, who have been suitably empowered, trained and equipped.

**Table: Who leads or facilitates intentional faith development and discipleship training for the following groups?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Those aged 13-25</th>
<th>Those exploring or new to faith</th>
<th>Those seeking Confirmation / Church Membership</th>
<th>Those who have been Christian for some time</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I facilitate and lead</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Presbyter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Deacon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Lay Worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Local Preacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A housegroup / cell group leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An employed circuit or church youth worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Volunteer youth worker</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A suitably gifted church member</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 21: Who leads or facilitates intentional faith development and discipleship training**

**Section 5: What resources are being used?**

An open question was first used to find out which resources are being used to develop faith and discipleship. Respondents mentioned a range of resources from a variety of sources: Scripture Union, Bible Society, IBRA, Nooma DVDs, URC Vision4Life, Diocesan study materials, a course on science and faith, York courses, and 6 respondents referred to home-made courses.
The next question listed specific intentional resources and asked if any of these were taking place. Here respondents revealed that *Alpha* is the most commonly used with 13 ministers indicating its usage (Fig. 22). *Come as you are* – a Church membership / confirmation course – is used in the churches of a quarter of our respondents. Longer term courses, however, do not fare well, confirming previous results. *Disciple*, a 34 week group Bible study course, is only used in the churches of four respondents, and *Emmaus* in the churches of two, suggesting that longer term courses are more difficult to promote and run, perhaps because of the time commitment required for both leaders and participants.

![Figure 22: Resources used to develop faith and discipleship](image)

At this point, it is interesting to look at the results by gender (see Fig. 23). And what is striking is the apparent gender preference: *Alpha* is used in the churches of
significantly more male respondents than female (9 to 4 respectively), and the same is true of *Youth Alpha* (3 to 1). By contrast, *Come as you are, Christianity Explored* and *Emmaus* have a higher presence in the churches of women respondents.

![Resources by gender](image)

**Figure 23: Resources used to develop faith and discipleship according to the gender of the minister**

When asked to evaluate the listed resources, we also have an interesting result (Fig. 24). Whilst *Alpha* is the most commonly used, it does not score as highly as other resources (4.15). *Disciple*, for example, emerges as the most valued resource with a mean score of 5. *Come as you are* achieves the next highest rating (4.6), commensurate with its place as second most commonly used resource. *Emmaus*, though little used, also scores well (4.43 & 4.42). That both *Disciple* and *Emmaus* gain higher mean scores than *Alpha* may reflect the fact that Alpha is very much an introductory course for those exploring faith, whilst certainly *Disciple*, and to some
extent *Emmaus*, are more intensive courses concerned with the longer term development of faith and discipleship, leading respondents to place a higher value upon them.

Although we noted earlier a gender preference among male ministers for *Alpha*, it is interesting to note that when we cross-tab and evaluate the resources by gender, we find that there is little difference between the valuation placed on *Alpha* by men and women, despite the expectation we might have, given the low usage of *Alpha* in the churches of women respondents (Fig. 25).
The final question in this section was an open one in which respondents were asked if they would find any additional resources helpful. Two respondents highlighted the need for courses based on contemporary issues e.g. money, war, terrorism and other such matters. Two respondents also mentioned the usefulness of having a list of available resources with indications given by those who had experience of them as to their usefulness. Several respondents mentioned materials that would take people beyond the basic introductions to faith, such as Alpha and Youth Alpha. And one respondent expressed an interest in being trained to lead Step Forward, a new Methodist year-long group discipleship course. Here I admit to an error in the questionnaire by which I inadvertently missed it out of the initial resource list though it was included in the evaluation list. As it happens no respondents
indicated that they are using it in the initial open question, and this no doubt leads to the low score (3.67).

**Section 6: Your views on Faith Development & Discipleship Training**

In the final section of the questionnaire, we turn to the views of the ministers themselves rather than on what is taking place in their churches. The first question asked how important a variety of activities had been in their own journeys of faith (Fig. 26).

![Figure 26: Activities important in the faith journeys of ministers](image)

Surprisingly, the two highest scores were given to Fellowship meetings (4.56) and Opportunities to serve (4.5). This is in marked contrast to the low ratings that both
of these were given by respondents when asked about their effectiveness in the local church (see Fig. 12). This is a welcome finding, particularly in relation to Opportunities to serve, because it confirms, as argued in Chapter 1, that whilst the respondents may not appreciate the value of such practical discipleship as a means of formation in others, clearly they have found it to be significantly important in their own journeys; by bringing this disparity to light it is to be hoped that it will encourage a greater emphasis on practice as a means of formation. Turning to Fellowship groups, and taking account of the high scores attributed to house groups (4.48), Bible Study groups (4.47), prayer meetings (4.41) student and youth groups (4.33 & 4.32), we have confirmation of the value of belonging to a group in growing in faith and discipleship.

The lower scores given to the structured courses and cell groups is not surprising given that those mentioned are all relatively recent and fall outside the formative years of most of our respondents. The fact that Confirmation and Church membership courses score so poorly is of concern, because this is the time when many Christians engage in intentional faith formation; it may reflect a time when insufficient attention was paid to this opportunity in formation, and suggests that we can and should do better in the future.

The next question seeks to find out the importance ministers attach to intentional faith development and discipleship training, and this is followed by a subsequent question asking whether the theoretical priority they have corresponds to what they are able to deliver in practice. It is clear from Fig. 27 that respondents believe
that this is an important priority for them. We need to be aware, however, that respondents might feel obliged to answer in this way and be disinclined to give a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly important</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
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</tbody>
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answered question 31
skipped question 2

Figure 27: Priority attached to intentional faith development and discipleship training in current ministry

contrary indication – after all, ministers are meant to be helping their congregations grow in faith and it would be strange to answer otherwise. Yet, the fact that 17 respondents answered ‘very important’ suggests that we have here a firm indication of its importance to the majority of respondents and this is very encouraging to note.
If we consider this from the perspective of gender (see Fig. 28), we find that women ministers give a higher priority to intentional formation than their male counterparts. This may reflect the pattern we saw earlier (see Fig. 9) of women respondents coming more recently into ministry and thus perhaps more inclined by virtue of their training to give priority to intentional formation.

When we turn, however, to see how the respondents’ priorities match the realities of ministry, we find a different picture (Fig. 29). Only 1 respondent admits to being satisfied, whereas 8 respondents are barely satisfied, and the majority (22) only partially satisfied. On reflection, this question would have benefitted from a wider choice of options, as the scale is rather blunt.
Given your answer to question 2 above, to what extent is the priority you attach to intentional faith development and discipleship training satisfied in the everyday realities of your current ministry?

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<tr>
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<th>Response Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially satisfied</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barely satisfied</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>8</td>
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Figure 29: Satisfaction with priority in the realities of ministry

The responses reveal, however, that intentional activities, whilst considered important to respondents, are squeezed out by other demands. This is confirmed by the answers to the following question where respondents are asked about factors that deter them; the overriding response, stated by 20 respondents, is that of finding the time amidst many other responsibilities. One respondent gave a real sense of the dilemma faced, including a lack of interest among congregations, yet expressed a determination to persevere:

Currently, I am pastorally in charge of five churches and find that my time is spread too thinly between each to motivate, engage, recruit and lead intentional faith development and discipleship training. There is a very important need for it and so I am trying to initiate one of the aforementioned courses against a tide of apathy and/or the reality that those who are willing and enthusiastic already lead very busy lives in and outside the church. I am, however, determined to get something running within the limitations and capabilities of the congregations I work with.
When asked what they would like to see happen in their churches, many respondents looked forward to more people joining housegroups and cell groups. Others expressed a desire to see greater interest from their members; as one put it:

It would be good if more people felt a need to develop their faith and explore discipleship more deeply.

Several respondents looked for a more strategic approach:

It would be good to get a core of people committed to faith development and discipleship training that could be trained up to lead courses, who would then use the minister as a resource/support.

Others saw the possibility of working ecumenically; and one respondent, in expressing a wish that ‘this kind of training...be an integral part of the life of the churches I work with,’ went on to observe:

In general the Methodist People have lost a sense of commitment to Christian nurture and discipleship. The ‘discipline’ of discipleship is not necessarily an attractive concept in our 21st century culture but we are in danger, as Mr Wesley said, of becoming a dead church, if we don't renew our enthusiasm and commitment to faith development and discipleship in our congregations.

This brings us to consider how important a priority our respondents believe intentional faith development and discipleship training to be to the Methodist Church as a whole (Fig. 30). Here, the responses appear to mirror those given to the earlier question about the importance that ministers attach to it themselves (Fig. 27), with 17 answering as ‘very important,’ and 10 ‘fairly important.’ When we
How important a priority do you believe intentional faith development and discipleship training to be for the Methodist Church as a whole?

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<td>Not very important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
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answered question | 29
skipped question | 4

Figure 30: Importance to the Methodist Church

consider the responses by gender, we again find a similar picture with the highest importance attributed by women respondents (see Fig. 31).
The penultimate question invited respondents to state what, if anything, the Methodist connexion could do to help ministers and churches engage in intentional faith development and discipleship training. The most common request is for training – both for ministers and lay people – mentioned by eight of the 19 respondents. Some ask for more accessible resources, whilst another states that there is ‘no need to reinvent the wheel’ when there are resources currently available. Several suggest that materials be ‘showcased’ and ‘taster days’ held.

Finally, respondents were asked if there was anything further they wished to add. One respondent drew attention to the value of attendance at Christian gatherings and referred to being influenced by attending the Keswick Convention. This told me that the questionnaire would have benefitted by listing such events in the activities mentioned. It would have been interesting to see, for instance, how attendance at The Keswick Convention, Spring Harvest, Taizé, Soul Survivor, Greenbelt and other such gatherings would have featured. Two respondents stated that they had found the questionnaire thought-provoking; and one respondent declared:

This is the life or death issue for the Methodist Church!

In considering the value of this research to the Methodist Church in Britain, it is important to remember that it has been conducted within a specific District and context and that the results cannot simply be transposed to the Church as a whole. However, it would not be inappropriate to assume that there is a resonance well beyond the particular District in which the research has been conducted and that its
findings may prove helpful to the wider Methodist family. This concurs with Swinton and Mowat’s view that such research ‘frequently (arguably always), creates a resonance with people outside of the immediate situation who are experiencing the same phenomena which are not identical, but hold enough similarity to create a potentially *transformative resonance*.’\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{84} Swinton & Mowat, \textit{Practical Theology and Qualitative Research}, p 47.
Chapter 5: Interviews

From the outset it was my intention to conduct a small number of follow-up interviews. In reviewing the data, 18 respondents had checked the box indicating their willingness to be interviewed. The rationale for choosing potential interviewees was to provide further insight into instances of intentional Christian formation that I judged to be of particular interest and which might be an encouragement to others. Four respondents were subsequently approached and all agreed to be interviewed; however, only three interviews were subsequently conducted because one had to be cancelled and could not be conveniently rearranged. The three interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Minister A: Disciple
Minister A was chosen because of the experience the minister had leading *Disciple* which we have seen to be well regarded amongst our respondents for developing faith and discipleship. Minister A had not been in the circuit when the first *Disciple* group started but had subsequently led several groups, including a group that progressed to *Disciple 2*. Leadership was shared with a Local Preacher who was also a teacher, and over 50 people were taken through the year-long course. Minister A clearly saw great benefit to the individuals and the church:

...out of those groups people offered for all sorts of things within the church, like stewards and Sunday school teachers and housegroup leaders. But also we had people going into ministry out of those groups, or becoming worship leaders, preachers, ministers, deacons or whatever. And when I think of
them there are probably very few of them where there hasn’t been a huge
gift to the church back from the effort that people have put in.

Minister A recognised the ‘huge commitment in terms of time’ that Disciple
requires, but stated that the first group that experienced the course:
talked about it and people could see that there was a change and that they
had really grown through it.

The result was that despite the time commitment, Minister A found that:
when I offered to do the one that I led from the beginning we had enough
people. And then when I went on to do Disciple 2 it was almost all the same
people because they wanted to keep going... And had I had the time there
were people who would have gone on to Disciple 3.

The Disciple groups met for 34 weeks on a weeknight in member’s homes, although
one group in the circuit met in an afternoon. Disciple 2 shifts from a general
overview of the Bible to a focus on Luke-Acts, and to reading wider than the Bible.

This, Minister A observed:

led some people into thinking about preaching because they started using
commentaries and other reading.

Minister A mentioned one person who was dyslexic and felt unable at first to join a
group but who was encouraged to do so and who was provided with the Bible on
CD by the circuit. This person not only completed Disciple but:
did the Worship Leaders course and has now done Faith and Worship
Course and is a Local Preacher.

Minister A also mentioned another group member who had come to Christianity
through the AA group that met at the church:
I said, “Are you up for this?” and he said, “Yes.” He wasn’t working he had loads of time on his hands and he did the reading without any problem. And I remember meeting him in town one day and we were in the middle of the Old Testament and he said “What a fantastic story.” It was Joseph and his brothers. And he’d read far more because he wanted to find out what happened and that was so great for everybody else because everyone else in the group knew what was going to happen.

This person subsequently went on to complete both *Disciple 1* and *2*. Despite its obvious benefits, Minister A confirmed that the course is no longer running in the circuit:

> It is because I haven’t had the time, because it is a huge time commitment because as a leader you have to do the reading and even if you’ve done it before I wouldn’t feel confident at leading it without having done it again that week... But it’s not just one evening a week its all of the time every single day and in our circuit now we are spread thinner. There were three ministers, there are now two and I just can’t find an evening that I can commit every week for the whole year. If it were just a 6 week thing I could.

We are back to the pressure of time identified so clearly in the questionnaire and the difficulty in committing to such an intense though obviously worthwhile course. Subtitled, *Becoming disciples through Bible study*, *Disciple* is certainly a resource to be commended if ministers and lay leaders can make space to offer it within their churches.
Minister B: Film

Minister B drew my interest because of the respondent’s use of film as a medium to develop faith. In the interview with Minister B, I discovered that film was chosen because:

we thought we really needed to try a different angle on things. Because otherwise everything is book bound, and reading and Bible study – I know that sounds dreadful – but you’ve got to be able to read. So we wanted to do something different that didn’t require reading the Bible and discussing some questions but that would go somewhere else. That was our basic motive – to try and get a particular culture of people engaged in a different way from normal.

The event being planned was a Lent course and Minister B was seeking to offer something to a mixed multicultural congregation that was not particularly book based. The Bible Society Reel Issues website was the basic resource, but Minister B discovered that whilst it was helpful in providing ideas for films, themes and particular clips:

unless people are all highly middle class, which my folk are not, it’s a little bit pitched too high. You’ve got to pitch it down to a different level – which is not dumbing it down but just pitching the language and pitching it to where it hits people, not great theorizing about stuff.

Six films were selected: Atonement, Secrets and Lies, and Walk the Line chosen mainly for the adults, and Prince of Egypt, Up, and The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, selected for youngsters who would be attending. Whilst the children’s films were shown in their entirety, only clips were shown from the adult films.
Between 15 and 20 people attended each of the film nights, and popcorn helped to make them feel authentic.

There was a considerable amount of work for Minister B in preparing for the evenings, which involved watching the films, writing out the plots, and selecting the themes and the clips:

It’s like reading a book. I had to know the answers. I had to be a line of authority on this visual literature.

The themes presented by the films included ‘betrayal, feeling forsaken, and paying the price for sin’ (Atonement); ‘coming to terms with the past, and forgiveness’ (Secrets and Lies); ‘the struggle to keep on the straight and narrow’ and redemption (Walk the Line); rescue and ‘being saved’ (Prince of Egypt); ‘love, hope, disappointment…and how you treat people in old age’ (Up); and betrayal and sacrifice (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe). The underlying task for those watching was to see where the Gospel, that part of the Gospel, echoes with this film and where it doesn’t.

Minister B likened this to the teaching of English literature by ‘giving them the keys to open up and do it themselves.’ In sermons prior to the Lent series, Minister B had spoken about:

the importance of talking about our faith and seeing things in our ordinary everyday life and seeing God in them and seeing these things worked out in our own lives and in the lives of others. And that’s actually the bit that I
found satisfying, is that people were saying to each other...that that was where these films had helped them....Because these are about people’s lives, and you might have lived these lives, but because they’d had somebody like me pointing out the themes, our Christian themes and where God could be, they could transfer that to their ordinary humdrum...lives.

In the language of Jeff Astley, I reflect that Minister B was encouraging ‘ordinary theology’ defined as:

\[ \textit{the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind.}^{85} \]

According to Astley, the engagement with ordinary theology of those in and outside of the church is important for ‘the general communication of the Christian gospel in the contemporary context, as well as the specific activities of Christian nurture, formation and education of the church itself.’^{86} Film appears to be one way of doing this. For another approach we turn to Minister C.

**Minister C: ‘Theology on Thursdays’**

Minister C has been holding fortnightly discussion groups on a Thursday evening covering a wide range of topics for the past two years. At the interview, Minister C told me that it all began with a brief three week membership course that Minister C ran for a group of eight busy people who the minister did not think would agree to a longer course:

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86 Ibid. p 147.
The first week we did, ‘What is your faith journey to this point?’ The second week was ‘What does it mean to be a Methodist today?’ And the third week was ‘Are there things you find difficult about faith?’ And it was just an open discussion for people to say, “I’ve never really understood this,” or “Not sure about that.” It was only an hour and a half / two hours long and at the end of it people said, “That was brilliant, I really enjoyed it, got lots out of it.”

The interest expressed in the third session with its open ended discussion led Minister C to ask the group if they would like to continue, and so began the fortnightly discussions. The group is now made up of some of the initial attenders and others who have joined since, including some:

who are not members of the church and who wouldn't even class themselves as Christians but who would say that they are spiritual. So we have some really different perspectives coming in from somebody who believes the Bible is inerrant and the devil exists through to somebody who I would say is more of a Buddhist. And we get every spectrum of belief in between. And we have covered all sorts of things. And I’d really like to call it ‘Theology on Thursdays’ because that’s what we are doing.

Initially, the group made a list of things to discuss and these formed the basis of the early meetings. Then people ‘came with their suggestions and ideas’ and Minister C also suggested topics. Some of those covered include:

The ethics of euthanasia, medical cloning; we did a few medical issues that are not in the Bible, the development of the creeds, heresies, what happened in the early church. We’ve looked at other faiths and that was
really fascinating because some people thought that Roman Catholics weren’t really Christians. And I think I was surprised at that one! What have we discussed recently? Does the devil exist, where do we get our concept of hell from, miracles – what were they?

This is a unique approach being developed by Minister C to give people the skills to engage in discussion and reflection about God and the world and our place in it:

I just keep saying to them, No question is stupid, no comment is stupid. There are about eight who come on and off, and about five of those are regulars and they seem to really enjoy it. And as I say at different stages in the Church – one lady comes because she’s done housegroup for years and she’s bored to death with Bible study. And some of them are coming because they are fairly new Christians and they just want to ask all these questions that you never get a chance to ask in church.

Being open-ended does not mean that there is little time preparation needed – quite the reverse; Minister C spends about three hours preparing for the fortnightly sessions:

I prepare for it like a lecture, but try to make it more of a seminar. I suppose if you put it into academic terms, it’s a seminar.

Asked if this kind of open-ended discussion group is something that other ministers should be encouraged to try, Minister C replied:

I’d have a go because I think it’s brilliant for learning to talk about God... because you never know what question you are going to get thrown at you in any pastoral conversation.
Chapter 6: Critical Faithfulness

In the development and conduct of this research, I have been guided by an overall hope and aim, helpfully articulated by Swinton and Mowat:

The fundamental aim of Practical Theology is to enable the Church to perform faithfully as it participates in God’s on-going mission in, to and for the world. As such it seeks to reflect critically and theologically on situations and to provide insights and strategies which will enable the movement towards faithful change.\(^7\)

Reflecting ‘critically and theologically’ to enable ‘faithful change’ is a highly aspirational goal for an inexperienced researcher such as myself conducting a modest piece of empirical research into the complex, multifaceted world of Christian formation. But even so, the task remains of theologically reflecting on the results of the research, employing Swinton and Mowat’s method of ‘critical faithfulness,’ in order to move towards revised practice.\(^8\)

The purpose of this research has been to discover how, and to what extent, Methodist churches in one Methodist District are engaged in intentional faith development and discipleship training. Notwithstanding some undoubted shortcomings, I trust that the methodology and method employed have enabled the research question to be reasonably well answered. The picture the research portrays is of a Church in which intentional faith development and discipleship

\(^7\) Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2006. p 25.
\(^8\) Ibid. p 93.
training does not feature significantly in its life and practice. We have found that though the majority of ministers believe in its importance, both for their ministries and for the Church as a whole, intentional Christian formation is overtaken by many other demands, with administration and meetings being frequently mentioned. In only 26 of the 91 churches represented in our sample, are specific intentional activities to develop faith and discipleship occurring on an ongoing basis, although a further 25 churches refer to them occurring either annually or occasionally; this leaves 40 churches – almost half our sample – without any such intentional activities at all.

When we probe deeper and consider the nature of the intentional activities that are taking place, we find they are most commonly aimed at teenagers. Without negating the importance of such work, this only serves to highlight that adult Christian formation appears to be neglected in our churches. Where it does occur, it usually takes the form of short term courses, e.g. at Lent, or in preparation for Church membership / Confirmation. Whilst these are to be welcomed, they cannot provide sustained and focussed Christian formation. A longer term course, like Disciple, whilst well regarded, does not feature in the programme of many churches, with only 4 out of 33 ministers mentioning that they either have or are currently using it. Alpha is the one course that does play a significant role, mentioned by 13 ministers, but it is not regarded by our respondents as a high value resource for developing faith and discipleship, perhaps because it focusses on the early stages of faith, for which it is intended.
The survey also suggests that people are generally deterred from engaging in intentional formational activities because they perceive little benefit and lead busy lives. Some ministers express frustration about this. Apart from those who are actively seeking or coming new to faith, it is mature Christians who are most likely to participate in intentional activities, with far less perceived interest shown by those aged 20 to 40 – but this may be because this age group forms ‘the missing generation’ in most of our churches.

In the absence of significant intentional activities, Christian formation among adults appears to rely heavily on those activities that have a formative dimension rather than a specific formational intention. Were it not for the Bible studies, housegroups, and prayer meetings – and I would also add opportunities to serve others – there would be little formational activity taking place in most churches, outside of worship.

When we bring the findings of this research into conversation with the theological understanding of Christian formation explored earlier, and the contemporary missiological context, we can only conclude that the importance of faith development and discipleship training has yet to be grasped within our Methodist Church. The research suggests that we are failing on the two levels identified earlier: (1) church culture, and (2) specific intentional activities. As we have seen, there is little evidence to suggest that the general culture of our churches is one in which intentional Christian formation appears to be valued and actively embraced. While some may sense its importance, like many of our respondents, in practice it
forms part of the ‘null curriculum’ – it is not what we do and appear to be about. It
is not surprising, therefore, that against the background of such church culture, we
find little evidence of specific intentional activities taking place in the majority of
our churches, despite some of the creative and energetic work evidenced, for
example, in the interviews. A shift in church culture is required, accompanied by
the introduction of specific formational activities.

When we consider the results of the research and set them alongside the classical
ministry and mission of the Church, of which Maria Harris reminded us (Acts 2:42,
44-47), where evangelism, teaching, worship, community and service embody the
Church’s raison d’être, to be fashioned anew in each generation, we may conclude
that there is a considerable work of fashioning and refashioning to be done if the
contemporary Methodist Church is to be reconfigured as ‘a discipleship movement
shaped for mission.’

But there is help at hand. Like Jesus’ parable of the master who brings out of his
treasure what is new and what is old, the Christian tradition is a treasure whose
riches are offered us anew in every generation. In considering the need for
intentional Christian formation within our church communities, we find ourselves
contemplating something akin to the catechetical approach of the early church,
before the birth of Christendom. In a culture in which Christian faith and practice
required initiation into a way of life that was very different and distinctive from the
surrounding culture, those who desired to share in the Christian community were

89 Matthew 13: 52.
first welcomed into the catechumenate. Here, they would spend up to three years, being formed in belief and practice. An important feature of the catechumenate was the concept of apprenticeship and practice, whereby ‘persons apprenticed themselves to the community and participated in its life accompanied by a sponsor who represented the community’. Westerhoff explains,

Through this process the catechumen, the enquiring Christian, travelled through the community’s yearly cycle so as to make its story their story; shared in a ministry of reconciliation, healing, and service by caring for the sick, hurt, prisoner, orphan and lonely, and developed an intimate relationship to God by practicing the disciplines of prayer and discernment.

This holistic approach to initial Christian formation points the way for the contemporary church. Martyn Atkins goes so far as to say that a suitably adapted form of catechesis will be ‘a crucial means by which authentic, mature disciples of Jesus Christ will be made in the West in the early twenty-first century.’

There is treasure within the Methodist tradition as well, when we remember that John Wesley and the early Methodists practiced intentional Christian formation. Wesley’s genius lay not only in his gifts of leading men and women into vibrant faith in Christ, but in the way in which he arranged for faith and discipleship to be nurtured in community. Wesley saw the goal of his ministry as reaching far beyond

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91 Ibid., pp 68-69.
conversion to the entire sanctification of the believer. Describing the rise of Methodism, Wesley wrote:

In 1729, two young men, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point. God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise a holy people.⁹³

To this end Wesley organised his followers into classes and bands where they might learn and grow in faith and discipleship, evidenced in lives characterised by love of God and neighbour, and finding encouragement, support and mutual accountability as they pressed on in their common goal. The class meeting was not optional. It was, as David Lowes Watson has shown, ‘a weekly gathering, a subdivision of the early societies, at which members were required to give an account to one another of their discipleship and thereby to sustain each other in their witness.’⁹⁴ Wesley regarded it as ‘the means by which members “watched over one another in love.”’⁹⁵ It was here that the ‘early Methodists helped each other plumb the depths of the scriptures and the teachings of the church; and it showed in their discipleship.’⁹⁶ Here we are offered a model that we may fashion anew in our day to develop forms of communal practices that will grow, nurture, sustain and renew faithful discipleship, firmly rooted in the world and practiced as a way of life.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p 18.
⁹⁶ Ibid. p 18.
CONCLUSION

In seeking to discover how, and to what extent, churches in one Methodist District are engaging in intentional faith development and discipleship training, our research has concluded that such formational practices have yet to become an established part of Methodist church life and culture. Though many ministers appreciate its importance, the reality is that there is little time for it and interest within churches is often lacking. We have concluded that a change in church culture is needed if Christian formation is to figure prominently in our churches, and the making and nurturing of ‘whole life, lifelong and world transforming’ disciples realised.

In conducting the research, I have been conscious of some shortcomings. Looking back I would have tried to broaden the scope of the questionnaire, which I now see overemphasised courses and structured learning and did not sufficiently include other important practices, such as mentioned by Dykstra. This may have restricted the kinds of answers that I was given. I am also conscious that the use of the term ‘faith development and discipleship training’ was rather awkward, and I was concerned that this might be off-putting, but nothing better came to mind. In the future, further empirical research, focussed on church members might yield a richer picture than I have been able to gain in this research that focussed on ministers.
Personally, I hope to develop my concern for Christian formation further in a Research Based Thesis which has the preliminary title, ‘A holy people: tradition, formation and mission in contemporary Methodism.’

There is an old joke about the traveller who is lost and seeks direction, and who receives the response, “If I were you, I wouldn’t go from here!” Well, here is where we are. The missiological challenge we face in the 21st century is not to be underestimated. And whilst the Methodist people may not be in the best place to meet that challenge, I am reminded of another saying: the longest journey begins with taking the first step. Becoming 21st century disciples may seem a far off goal, but by taking small steps to restore intentional Christian formation to the heart of the Church’s life, by God’s grace, we may be surprised to find ourselves being fashioned anew into a ‘discipleship movement shaped for mission.’


Appendix 1: The Questionnaire

Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

1. INTRODUCTION

BECOMING 21st CENTURY DISCIPLES: A STUDY OF INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING IN THE CHURCHES OF ONE METHODIST DISTRICT

Thank you very much for being willing to take part in this survey in the midst of your many other pressing commitments and responsibilities. I very much appreciate your participation.

The questionnaire seeks to find out what churches in one Methodist District are doing to develop the faith and discipleship of their members and adherents outside of worship. It is particularly concerned with those activities that are undertaken with that clear intention in mind, but also includes other activities that may contribute to the development of faith and discipleship without having that as their primary purpose.

The questionnaire leads you through the following sections:

1. You and your ministry
2. What is going on?
3. Who is participating?
4. What resources are being used?
5. Your views on developing faith & discipleship

All the information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymised and used only for the purposes of this research.

The questionnaire should take around 20 minutes, but please take your own time.

Thank you again,

David Mullins
Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

2. You and your ministry

The following questions are concerned with your time in ministry, current appointment and denominational affiliation

1. How old are you?
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65+

2. Are you?
   - female
   - male

3. What level of theological education have you received?
   Tick all that apply.
   - Diploma or Certificate awarded by Theological College
   - Degree
   - Postgraduate degree

4. What best describes your current ministry?
   - I am a Methodist minister
   - I am a minister of another denomination serving in a Methodist appointment!
   - I am a minister of another denomination serving in an LEP with pastoral charge of Methodist members

   Other (please specify)

5. How many Churches are in your pastoral care?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate if you share the pastoral care with other ministers
## Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

6. How long have you been in ministry?
- [ ] less than 5 years
- [ ] 5 to 10 years
- [ ] 11 to 20 years
- [ ] 21 to 30 years
- [ ] 31 to 40 years
- [ ] 40+ years

7. How long have you been in your current appointment?
- [ ] Less than a year
- [ ] I am in my second year
- [ ] I am in my third year
- [ ] I am in my fourth year
- [ ] I am in my fifth year
- [ ] I have served between 5 and 8 years
- [ ] I have served between 9 and 12 years
- [ ] I have served more than 12 years
Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

3. What is going on?

The following questions relate to the activities and practices that take place outside of worship to develop faith and discipleship in the churches in your pastoral care.

Questions 1 & 2 are concerned with those activities and practices that have an element of faith development and discipleship training, though this may not be their primary purpose.

Questions 3 to 5 are concerned with those activities and practices that are undertaken with the primary purpose of developing faith and discipleship.

Where activities are listed, they are in alphabetical order.

1. What regular and ongoing activities - both structured and unstructured - that have an element of faith development and discipleship training take place in one or more of your churches?
   Tick all that apply.
   - Bible Study groups
   - Book/Reading groups
   - Cell groups
   - Fellowship Meetings for Men
   - Fellowship Meetings for Women
   - Fellowship Meetings for Women and Men
   - Housegroups
   - Opportunities to serve others eg lunch club, toddler group, Street Pastor
   - Prayer Meetings
   - Quiet days
   - Retreats
   - Spiritual direction
   - Young People's groups

Other (please specify)
## Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

2. How helpful do you believe these activities are in taking people forward in their faith and discipleship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not at all helpful</th>
<th>Not very helpful</th>
<th>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</th>
<th>Fairly helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bible Study groups</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book/Reading groups</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cell groups</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellowship meetings for men</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellowship meetings for men and women</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellowship meetings for women</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>House groups</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to serve other groups, Church clubs, toddler groups, Street Pastors</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prayer meetings</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiet days</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retreats</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual direction</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young People’s groups</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please feel free to comment further
### 3. What activities and practices take place within one or more of your churches that have as their primary purpose the development of faith and discipleship and with what frequency do they occur? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
<th>At least once a year</th>
<th>Regularly but less than once a year</th>
<th>Occasionally as the need arises</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities for young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confirmation or Membership courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courses for those seeking or new to faith eg Alpha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Longer-term courses eg Disciple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-term courses eg Lent or to explore issues</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Other (please specify)**

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### 4. How many of the churches in your pastoral care engage in activities and practices that have as their primary purpose faith development and discipleship training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of churches who do so on an ongoing basis</th>
<th>Number of churches who do so at least once a year</th>
<th>Number of churches who do so regularly but less than once a year</th>
<th>Number of churches who do so when the need arises</th>
<th>Number of churches who do not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so on an ongoing basis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so at least once a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so regularly but less than once a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do so when the need arises</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of churches who do not</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of churches of whom I am unsure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

6. In your view, what level of importance is attached in each of your churches to intentional faith development and discipleship training?

Please use one line for each Church in your pastoral care. For example, if you have four churches please complete Churches 1 - 4 and ignore Churches 5 - 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church 1</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Neither important nor unimportant</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Church 2</td>
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<td>Church 3</td>
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<td>Church 4</td>
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<td>Church 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church 6</td>
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<td>Church 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church 8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

4. Who is participating?

Questions 1 - 3 seek to find out who is participating in intentional faith development and discipleship training activities and practices.

Question 4 seeks to find out who is leading or facilitating these activities and practices.

1. Who is participating in intentional faith development and discipleship training?
   Tick all that apply.
   - [ ] Teenagers (aged 13-19)
   - [ ] Early twenties (aged 20-25)
   - [ ] Young adults (aged 26-40)
   - [ ] Those exploring or seeking faith
   - [ ] Those new to faith
   - [ ] Those seeking confirmation or church membership
   - [ ] Those who have been Christians for some years
   
   Other (please specify)

2. Overall, within each of the following groups, what level of interest do you discern in learning more about the Christian faith and what it means to be a disciple?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very interested</th>
<th>Fairly interested</th>
<th>Neither interested nor uninterested</th>
<th>Not very interested</th>
<th>Not at all interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers (aged 13-19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early twenties (aged</td>
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<td>20-25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young adults (aged</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-40)</td>
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<td>Those exploring /</td>
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<tr>
<td>seeking faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Those new to faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Those who have been</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christians for some</td>
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<tr>
<td>years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. What are the reasons, if any, would you say deter people from engaging in faith development and discipleship training programmes and activities?
### Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

4. Who leads or facilitates intentional faith development and discipleship training for the following groups?
   - Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Those aged 13-25</th>
<th>Those exploring or new to faith</th>
<th>Those seeking Confirmation / Church Membership</th>
<th>Those who have been Christian for some time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I facilitate and lead</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Presbyter</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Deacon</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Lay Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Local Preacher</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A housegroup / cell group leader</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An employed circuit or church youth worker</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Volunteer youth worker</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A suitably gifted church member</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)
Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

5. What resources are being used?

The following questions seek to discover the resources (i.e. materials, courses, programmes) that are being used in intentional faith development and discipleship training in your churches and the levels of satisfaction with these resources, where applicable.

1. What resources (i.e. materials, courses, programmes) are being used in your churches with the intention of developing faith and discipleship?

2. Are any of the following resources being used to develop faith and discipleship? Tick all that apply.

- Alpha
- Apprentice (Steve Chalke)
- Christianity explored
- Come as you are
- Disciple 1
- Disciple 2
- Doxa: A discipleship Course (John B Thompson)
- Emmaus: The Way of Faith - Nurture
- Emmaus: The Way of Faith - Growth
- Imagine (London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, LICC)
- Living Faith (Tom Wright)
- The Methodist Catechism
- Youth Alpha
- Youth Emmaus
**Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)**

3. How do you value the following resources for developing faith and discipleship?  
Tick N/A if you are not familiar with or have no opinion on any of the resources listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Fairly helpful</th>
<th>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</th>
<th>Not very helpful</th>
<th>Not at all helpful</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apprentice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christianity Explored</td>
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<tr>
<td>Come as you are</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disciple 1</td>
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<td>Disciple 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doxa: A discipleship Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emmaus: The Way of Faith - Nurture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emmaus: The Way of Faith - Growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imagine (LCC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step Forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Methodist Catechism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Alpha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Emmaus</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. What additional resources would be helpful to you and your churches to develop faith and discipleship?
## Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

### 6. Your views on Faith Development & Discipleship Training

This section is about you and your experience of Christian formation. Your personal views on faith development and discipleship training are invited and welcomed.

1. **How important to your own personal journey of faith and discipleship have been the following activities and practices?**
   
   Tick N/A if you have not participated in these activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Neither important nor unimportant</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bible study groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEF groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confirmation or church membership courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courses for those seeking or new to faith eg Alpha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellowship meetings</td>
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<td>Longer-term courses eg Disciple</td>
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<td>Opportunities to serve others</td>
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<td>Short courses</td>
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<td>Youth Group</td>
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2. **How important a priority do you believe intentional faith development and discipleship training to be in your current ministry?**

   - Very important
   - Fairly important
   - Neither important nor unimportant
   - Not very important
   - Not at all important

3. Given your answer to question 2 above, to what extent is the priority you attach to intentional faith development and discipleship training satisfied in the everyday realities of your current ministry?

   - Totally satisfied
   - Partially satisfied
   - Barely satisfied
### Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

4. Are there any factors that deter you from engaging in intentional faith development and discipleship training?

5. What would you like to see happen in your churches in the way of faith development and discipleship training?

6. How important a priority do you believe intentional faith development and discipleship training to be for the Methodist Church as a whole?
   - Very important
   - Fairly important
   - Neither important nor unimportant
   - Not very important
   - Not at all important

7. How could the Connexion help ministers and churches engage in intentional faith development and discipleship training?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to any of the questions on this questionnaire?
Becoming 21st Century Disciples Questionnaire (print version)

7. Thank you

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your help is greatly appreciated.

All the information that you have provided is strictly confidential and will be anonymised and used only for the purposes of this research.

1. Would you be willing to be interviewed as part of a follow up to the survey?

   (One to one interviews will be arranged at a mutually convenient time, last no more than an hour and a half and take place either at one of your churches or in your manse or wherever is most suitable to you. With your permission, interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder for later transcription before being permanently erased).

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

If you answered yes, please give your name and email address
Appendix 2: Emails to participants

Introductory Email to participants 06.03.2011

BECOMING 21ST CENTURY DISCIPLES

Dear ....

At a time when ‘discipleship’ is being given a raised profile within the Methodist Church, I am writing to invite you to participate in a small piece of research entitled:

**Becoming 21st Century Disciples: a study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District.**

The purpose of my research is to identify what local churches are doing to help their members grow as disciples, both in faith and practice. The research is being overseen by King’s College, London where I am a part-time student on the DThMin programme, and I have the permission of the District Chair, XXXXX XXXXX, to conduct the research.

The research is based around an online questionnaire, the link to which I will shortly be sending to you and to all other ministers who are in pastoral charge of Methodist members within the XXXXXXXXX District. The reason for this email is to introduce myself and the nature of the research to you so that the link doesn’t arrive ‘cold’ in your Inbox.

I very much welcome and value your participation in this small research project and to that end I attach an Information Sheet which explains in a little more detail what is involved. (It is in both PDF and Word formats).

I appreciate that life is busy and that there are many demands on your time, but I do hope that if you are willing to participate, you will find it interesting and that it will give you the opportunity to share the thoughts and experience that you have on faith development and discipleship training which I hope may be helpful to the wider Church once the research is completed.

The research is entirely confidential and all responses will be anonymised, and I will be sending an electronic copy of the final report to all participants once it is completed later in the year.

Finally, if you are thinking of undertaking further study either now or at some future time, I can thoroughly commend King’s to you. They have an interesting
range of MA courses as well as the DThMin, all of which are practice based and related to ministry. Details can be found on their website:

MA Theology & Ministry courses:
http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/education/courses/masters/theomin/

DthMin programme:
http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/education/courses/research/ministry/

Thank you again. I will be in touch shortly with the link to the online questionnaire, which has been designed using ‘Survey Monkey’. If you have any questions or queries, I will be only too happy to answer them.

With all good wishes

Revd David Mullins
david.mullins@kcl.ac.uk

Second Email to participants with link to questionnaire
08.03.2011

BECOMING 21st CENTURY DISCIPLES

Dear ....

Following my recent email, I am now writing to provide you with the link to the online questionnaire for the research entitled:

‘Becoming 21st Century Disciples: a study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District.’

At a time when ‘discipleship’ is being given a raised profile within the Methodist Church, this small piece of research aims to discover what in practice Methodist churches are doing, outside of worship, with the specific intention of developing faith and discipleship among adults of all ages, including teenagers. The reference to ‘intentional’ is important because whilst much of our life together within our churches helps to form and shape us as Christians, this research is principally concerned with those activities and practices that are undertaken with the development of faith and discipleship as their the primary purpose.
The research is being conducted, with the kind permission of the District Chair, XXXXX XXXXX, among all ministers within the XXXXXXXXXX Methodist District who have pastoral charge of Churches, including ministers of other denominations who are authorised to serve. It is being overseen by King’s College, London, where I am a part-time student on the DThMin programme. The questionnaire is confidential and all data will be anonymised and used only for the purposes of this research.

I very much hope that you will be willing to take part in this research by completing the online questionnaire by Thursday 31 March 2011. It should take about 20 minutes of your time.

Here is the link to the survey:

[Survey Link]

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

With all good wishes

Revd David Mullins

david.mullins@kcl.ac.uk
Reminder Email to participants 22 March 2011

BECOMING 21ST CENTURY DISCIPLES

Dear ...

You may remember my recent invitation to participate in a small piece of research, entitled:

‘Becoming 21st Century Disciples: a study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District.’

There is still time to complete the online questionnaire before the end of March. I would be very grateful if you can find the time to contribute to the research in this way. I am anxious to take all views into account and every response is helpful as each of us has a different perspective and experience to share, leading to a comprehensive understanding of what is taking place within the District.

Here is the link to the survey:

[Survey Link]

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Just to reassure you that the survey is confidential and all data will be anonymised. It should take about 20 minutes of your time.

Thanks for your participation!

With all good wishes

Revd David Mullins

david.mullins@kcl.ac.uk
Appendix 3 (i)

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS (QUESTIONNAIRE)

REC Protocol Number:  KCL/10-11_86

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Becoming 21st Century Disciples: A study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District

We would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

- The aim of this research is to understand how and to what extent churches within one District of the Methodist Church are intentionally engaged in faith development and discipleship training among teenagers and adults, with a view to helping them become, grow and mature as Christians in both belief and practice. The research is particularly concerned with how churches are responding to those who are coming new to faith with little Christian background as well as those who have been Christians for many years. It also seeks to find out the resources that are being used and the levels of satisfaction with them as well as any gaps that need to be filled and suggestions for the development of further resources. In the context of our increasingly secular society, it is hoped that this small research study in Christian formation will be of benefit to the wider Methodist Church (and perhaps beyond) at a time when there is a national focus on ‘Discipleship’ and ‘Regrouping for Mission.’

- The research will be conducted among Methodist ministers and, in the case of Local Ecumenical Projects, clergy of other denominations who are in pastoral charge of the churches within the particular Methodist District.

- Participants will be invited to complete an online questionnaire between January and March 2011.

- Submission of a completed questionnaire implies consent to participate.

- Participants will be able to indicate in the questionnaire whether they are willing to be contacted and interviewed in greater depth about their practice and that of their church or churches. Some of those participants who agree to being contacted for this purpose will be approached following the submission of the questionnaires and provided with a further information sheet and be asked to sign a consent form.
• You may withdraw your data from the project at any time up until it is transcribed for use in the final report on 30 June 2011.

• Participants will be offered an electronic copy of the final report.

• Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by the researcher who alone will have access to submitted questionnaires.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

RESEARCHER:  Revd David Mullins – david.mullins@kcl.ac.uk
SUPERVISOR:  Dr James Steven – james.steven@kcl.ac.uk
Appendix 3 (ii)

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS (INTERVIEW)

REC Protocol Number:  KCL/10-11_86

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Becoming 21st Century Disciples: A study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District

Thank you for your participation in this postgraduate research project and for the submission of your completed questionnaire in which you indicated your willingness to be approached for the purpose of a follow-up interview. We would now like to invite you to participate further in this postgraduate research project by taking part in an interview to be arranged at your convenience. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

• The aim of this research is to understand how and to what extent churches within one District of the Methodist Church are intentionally engaged in faith development and discipleship training among teenagers and adults, with a view to helping them become, grow and mature as Christians in both belief and practice. The research is particularly concerned with how churches are responding to those who are coming new to faith with little Christian background as well as those who have been Christians for many years. It also seeks to find out the resources that are being used and the levels of satisfaction with them as well as any gaps that need to be filled and suggestions for the development of further resources. In the context of our increasingly secular society, it is hoped that this small research study in Christian formation will be of benefit to the wider Methodist Church (and perhaps beyond) at a time when there is a national focus on ‘Discipleship’ and ‘Regrouping for Mission.’

• The research will be conducted among Methodist ministers and, in the case of Local Ecumenical Projects, clergy of other denominations who are in pastoral charge of the churches within the particular Methodist District.

• All participants will be invited to complete an online questionnaire between January and March 2011.

• Some participants who have indicated on their questionnaire that they are willing to be contacted and interviewed in greater depth about their practice and that of their church or churches will be approached for this purpose following the submission of questionnaires.
• Participants who are approached and invited to be interviewed will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

• The interview will be arranged at the convenience of the participant and will be held in an agreed convenient location such as the participant’s office or study at their church or home or in some such similar and appropriate location.

• Interviews will last no more than 90 minutes.

• Interviews will be recorded, subject to your permission. Recordings of interviews will be deleted upon transcription.

• You may withdraw your consent to be interviewed at any time prior to the interview. You may also withdraw your data from the project at any time up until it is transcribed for use in the final report on 31 July 2011.

• Participants will be offered an electronic copy of the final report.

• Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by the researcher who alone will have access to submitted questionnaires and interview data.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King’s College London using the details below for further advice and information:

RESEARCHER: Revd David Mullins – david.mullins@kcl.ac.uk

SUPERVISOR: Dr James Steven – james.steven@kcl.ac.uk
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Becoming 21st Century Disciples: A study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District

King’s College Research Ethics Committee Ref: KCL/10-11_86

- Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.

- If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 31 July 2011.

- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Participant's Statement:

I _____________________________

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.