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## **Solidarity with the Poor?**

### **Positioning the Church of the Nazarene in England in 2003 and 2013**

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## **Solidarity with the Poor?**

### **Positioning the Church of the Nazarene in England in 2003 and 2013**

#### **Abstract**

The Church of the Nazarene is committed to identifying with the poor and socially marginalized. This paper investigates how far the Nazarene priority for the poor intersects with the everyday geographies of its local presence in England. Cross-sectional data on the distribution of churches, clergy, and lay office-holders are evaluated against neighbourhood variations in socio-economic deprivation. The extent to which they are based in deprived areas is considered to reflect opportunities for identifying with people in poverty and exercising a ministry of presence. The findings are broadly consistent with the Church's self-proclaimed responsibility to the poor. Questions arise about the sustainability of that commitment at the local or community level and the Church's ability to respond pastorally, and act prophetically and politically on behalf of the poor.

**Keywords:** Ministry of presence; Neighbourhood deprivation; Option for the poor; Poverty and inequality; Social action.

## Introduction

From its formation around the turn of the twentieth century, the Church of the Nazarene, which proclaims a theology of Christian holiness within the Wesleyan tradition, has worked alongside the poorest in society. Indeed, the name ‘Nazarene’ was chosen to associate the Church with despised, outcast, and rejected people.<sup>1</sup> The Church’s official statement of faith and practice describes the responsibility of both clergy and laity to the poor as follows:

The Church of the Nazarene believes that Jesus commanded His disciples to have a special relationship to the poor of this world ... first, to keep itself simple and free from an emphasis on wealth and extravagance and, second, to give itself to the care, feeding, clothing, and shelter of the poor. ... [we] are called to identify with and to enter into solidarity with the poor and not simply to offer charity from positions of comfort. We hold that compassionate ministry to the poor includes acts of charity as well as a struggle to provide opportunity, equality, and justice for the poor. ... we understand Christian holiness to be inseparable from ministry to the poor ...<sup>2</sup>

As far as is known, a preferential option for the poor continues to be proclaimed throughout contemporary ecclesial strands of the Wesleyan tradition, and in other Christian denominations and faith groups, and scholars frequently draw attention to its priority in the life, ministry, and writings of John Wesley.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the scandal of poverty and inequality persists: over 13 million people, including almost four million children, are estimated to be living in households below the official poverty line, around one in five of the UK population – a proportion that has changed little since 2010/11.<sup>4</sup> Set against such figures, the decline in religious identity and participation with each successive generation, raises questions concerning

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1. Floyd Cunningham, ed., *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 100-102.
  2. Church of the Nazarene, *Manual 2013 to 2017* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2013), 375-376.
  3. Donald Dayton, ‘The Wesleyan Option for the Poor’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26 (1991), 7-16; Theodore Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1990); Timothy Macquiban, ‘The Wesleyan Legacy in Issues of Wealth and Poverty: Reflections on Wesley’s Sermon, “The Use of Money”’, *Holiness: The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge*, 2 (2016), 419-428; Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker* (Franklin TN: Seedbed, 2014).
  4. Adam Tinson, Carla Ayrton, Karen Barker, Theo Born, Hannah Aldridge, and Peter Kenway, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2016* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016).

whether, how far, and in what ways churches can promote and sustain solidarity with people in poverty.<sup>5</sup>

A key indicator of solidarity at the local or community level is residency: where do churches and their clergy maintain a presence? Do clergy and lay leaders live in poor communities or are they found in more affluent areas? Do gathered church congregations and locally resident communities live separate lives, with little in common and little contact between them? Such questions have become urgent as social inequalities increase and the housing market becomes economically and geographically ever more polarized.<sup>6</sup>

The response of faith groups depends on whether separation from poor communities is seen as problematic, and the willingness and ability of churches to focus their ministry in poor communities. Such considerations have often evoked tensions within the Wesleyan tradition between personal and social holiness, between promoting personal piety or social transformation.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the Nazarene Church regards both strands as integral to its ministry alongside the poor and ‘not simply to offer charity from positions of comfort’. Although that phrase may be understood in different ways, choosing to remain in or move into deprived areas may be necessary, on both theological and practical grounds, to uphold a preferential option for the poor.<sup>8</sup> Where finite resources limit the geographical reach of religious organizations, locational choices are key. Poverty and social exclusion are concentrated in deprived neighbourhoods with significant adverse effects on health, child development, educational attainment, and employment.<sup>9</sup> Devoting human and financial resources to ministry

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5. David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, ‘Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging’, *Sociology*, 39 (2005), 11-28; Alasdair Crockett and David Voas, ‘Generations of Decline: Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 45 (2006), 567-584.
  6. Danny Dorling, *Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 200-204.
  7. Timothy Macquiban, ‘Wesleyan Responses to Poverty’, in Philip Meadows, ed., *Windows on Wesley: Wesleyan Theology in Today’s World* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1997), 86-109.
  8. Church Urban Fund, *Tackling Poverty in England: An Asset-Based Approach* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2013); Al Barrett, *Asset-Based Community Development: A Theological Reflection* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2013).
  9. Jonathan Bradshaw, Peter Kemp, Sally Baldwin, and Abigail Rowe, *The Drivers of Social Exclusion* (London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004), 85-89; Julia Griggs, Adam Whitworth, Robert Walker, David McLennan, and Michael Noble, *Person- or place-based policies to tackle disadvantage?* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008).

in more affluent areas has costs in terms of limited or foregone benefits for those living in poor communities. In contrast, maintaining a presence in poor neighbourhoods positions clergy and church members as stakeholders with an authentic voice in what happens there.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, acting out faith together in practical and transformative ways – especially when based on shared experience of a place and its influence on the lives of those who live there – builds mutual understanding and meaningful relationships.<sup>11</sup>

Self-proclaimed solidarity with the poor, therefore, might be expected to align the Nazarene Church's local presence with deprived communities. Such was the mission of the Church's founding figures amongst poor and socially marginalized people in Los Angeles, California.<sup>12</sup> Nowadays, poor people and wealthy people tend to concentrate in separate areas, making it relatively straightforward to identify areas of high socio-economic deprivation and establish a religious presence. Area variations in poverty and deprivation provide, in turn, useful criteria for evaluating the positioning of religious ministry, pastoral care, and witness.

This paper investigates how far the Nazarene priority for the poor intersects with the everyday geographies of its local presence in England. More specifically the distribution of Nazarene churches, ministers, and lay officials is assessed against a widely accepted measure of neighbourhood deprivation. The extent to which they are based in deprived areas is considered to reflect opportunities for identifying with people in poverty and exercising a ministry of presence. The study design is described in the next section: outlining sources of data, the measurement of deprivation, and analytical techniques. The paper then moves on to present the main findings followed by discussion of results, implications for the Nazarene Church in Britain and comparable faith groups, and directions for further research.

## Methods

Findings are based on quantitative data describing levels of socio-economic deprivation in the neighbourhoods in which Nazarene ministers and lay leaders live, and where their churches are located. The study relates to England during the early years of the twenty-first century.

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10. Andrew Rumsey, 'The Misplaced Priest?', *Theology*, 104 (2001), 102-114.

11. Tim Chester, *Unreached: Growing Churches in Working-class and Deprived Areas* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012); Bob Holman, *FARE Dealing: Neighbourhood Involvement in a Housing Scheme* (London: Community Development Foundation, 1997).

12. Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 79-111. For a history of the Nazarene Church in the British Isles, see: Tom Noble, *Called to be Saints: A Centenary History of the Church of the Nazarene in the British Isles 1906-2006* (Manchester: Didsbury Press, 2006).

## Data

The analysis uses an index of relative deprivation experienced by people living in small neighbourhoods.<sup>13</sup> This index combines thirty-eight measures of income poverty, educational disadvantage, poor health, housing barriers, crime, and other indicators of unmet needs due to limited resources and lack of opportunity. The index provides a composite measure of deprivation across all its domains. Although some deprived people live in the least deprived areas, and not everyone in a deprived area is disadvantaged, the index identifies localities where multiple deprivations accumulate.<sup>14</sup> Such localities might be considered priorities for church action on poverty and inequality. Areas of high socio-economic deprivation are associated with loss of self-worth, poverty of resources, and broken relationships.<sup>15</sup> Area-based measures of deprivation are also good predictors of individuals' health, financial position, educational attainment, and life expectancy, and are often used to determine insurance premiums, credit ratings, and annuity rates.<sup>16</sup>

The index of deprivation has been calculated for 32,482 Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England. LSOAs divide the country into small neighbourhoods of similar size, each containing around 1,500 people. LSOAs are the primary unit of analysis; findings are also presented for Middle layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs). These units comprise larger areas that might influence access to public facilities such as a church. Most MSOAs (78 per cent) comprise four or five contiguous LSOAs (mean 4.8 standard deviation 0.9) and contain around 7,200 people each. The level of deprivation in each MSOA is denoted by the median index score of its constituent LSOAs. Hence, MSOAs represent situations where a LSOA may be part of, or next to, a wider area with varying levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

Most indicators in the index of deprivation relate to 2008 although the analysis focuses on changes in the staffing and location of Nazarene churches between 2003 and 2013. Ideally, changes in area deprivation should be taken into account but comparable indices across the

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13. David McLennan, Helen Barnes, Michael Noble, Joanna Davies, Elisabeth Garratt, and Chris Dibben, *The English Indices of Deprivation 2010* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

14. Lisa Mckenzie, *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015).

15. Church Urban Fund, *The Web of Poverty: Area-based Poverty and Exclusion in England* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2011).

16. Office for National Statistics, *Pension Trends 2012: Life Expectancy and Healthy Ageing* (London: Office for National Statistics, 2012), 3-7.

study period were not available. They would probably not have altered the conclusions drawn here: geographical patterns of relative deprivation and other socio-economic inequalities are remarkably stable and persistent over the short or medium term.<sup>17</sup>

Datasets were compiled identifying the postcodes of churches and residences of officials in each church, including ministers licensed, ordained, or recognized by the Church as well as lay members with nominated roles and responsibilities. These data were drawn from directories produced by the Church of the Nazarene in March 2003 and March 2013 for the British Isles South District which covers England and Wales.<sup>18</sup> Church premises and residential addresses were linked to a LSOA and its deprivation index score via their postcode, a unique alphanumeric code representing mail delivery addresses in a street or part of a street. Postcodes were also used, in an online calculator, to estimate approximate travel distances by road in English miles between the places where clergy and lay leaders lived and the churches where they served.<sup>19</sup> Three churches in Wales with a combined membership of 94 in 2003 and 69 in 2013 were excluded from the analysis, as were individuals living there, because the index of deprivation was calculated for neighbourhoods in England only. Ministers without a pastoral or other role in a local church were also excluded: some of them served as hospital chaplains or worked in education, others had retired or were currently ‘unassigned’. The membership at each church was recorded in both years and is used here to represent changes in activity levels. Estimates for attendance at weekly corporate worship and other local activities, including membership of youth groups, were available for 2013 only. In the Results section, the term ‘Sunday school’ covers local ‘Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries’, and the term ‘Youth group’ covers local ‘Nazarene Youth International’ meetings.

### *Analysis*

Findings are presented as basic descriptive statistics for quintiles of the national distribution of multiple deprivation, each quintile containing 20 per cent of LSOAs or MSOAs in England and a similar proportion of the population. If churches and church staff were distributed evenly

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17. Department for Communities and Local Government, *The English Indices of Deprivation 2010: Neighbourhoods Statistical Release* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011), 7.

18. Church of the Nazarene, *Church Directory and Pastoral Arrangements* (Morley: British Isles South District Journal, 50th Annual Assembly, 2003); Church of the Nazarene, *Church Directory and Pastoral Arrangements* (Dewsbury: British Isles South District Journal, 60th Annual Assembly, 2013).

19. <https://www.doogal.co.uk/DrivingDistances.php>



across the deprivation spectrum, around 20 per cent or one-fifth would be found in each quintile. The extent to which that was not the case is an indication of disparity, at the ecological level, in the distribution of such phenomena associated with neighbourhood deprivation.

## Results

This assessment of Nazarene presence focuses on the extent to which local churches, ministers, and lay leaders are based in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. Such neighbourhoods are found predominantly in the conurbations and metropolitan areas of northern England and the West Midlands, plus some inner London boroughs with persistent levels of deprivation.<sup>20</sup> We start with an examination of the distribution of churches.

### *Churches*

The Church of the Nazarene is one of the smaller Christian denominations in Britain and, like comparable faith groups, has declined in recent decades. Nazarene churches in England recorded just under 1,400 members in 2013, a decrease of almost 17 per cent on its membership ten years earlier. Out of 51 churches in 2003, thirteen had closed and three new congregations had formed by 2013, reflecting a wider context of changing market shares for regular participants in faith groups and the emergence of new forms of religiosity and spirituality.<sup>21</sup>

Table 1 shows that Nazarene churches were located predominantly in more deprived areas. Over 40 per cent of churches were in the most deprived fifth of LSOAs, more than twice as many as would be expected if they had been distributed evenly across the deprivation spectrum. That proportion increased to over half of churches in the most deprived areas when wider catchments were considered (MSOAs). Table 1 shows further that between 50 and 60 per cent of members attended churches in the most deprived fifth of areas. Churches generally showed a systematic association with neighbourhood deprivation: the more deprived an area the more likely were churches to be located there.

[Table 1 about here]

Churches varied considerably in size, from under ten members to over 90 (mean 36, median 32 in 2013) and those in the most deprived areas were somewhat larger than elsewhere.

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20. McLennan, Barnes, Noble, Davies, Garratt, and Dibben, *The English Indices of Deprivation*, 60-61.

21. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

In 2013 for example, churches in the most deprived fifth of LSOAs typically had 46 members (median; inter-quartile range 22–70) compared with 22 (10–46) in Nazarene churches elsewhere in England. Comparable figures for 2003 were 38 (16–55) and 24 (14–39) respectively.

The extent to which individual churches challenged or contradicted the pattern of overall decline noted above varied considerably: one church with 22 members in 2003 recorded only two members in 2013; another church with eight members in 2003 had more than doubled in size to 21 members ten years later. Various contributory factors – demographic change, leadership, finances, and other resources – may account for such changes. Additionally, the growth or decline of Nazarene churches may be associated with their responses to local deprivation. Seven of the thirteen churches that closed between 2003 and 2016 were in the most deprived two-fifths of LSOAs; on the other hand, two of the three newly established congregations were located in the most deprived fifth. Church closures and membership decline were most marked in the third and fourth deprivation quintiles while membership of churches in the least deprived fifth of LSOAs increased, though from a small base (Table 2). Although growth rates varied widely among the 38 churches that were open throughout the study period, churches in the most deprived and the least deprived areas were generally more likely to report increasing membership, while churches in the middle of the deprivation spectrum were most likely to report declining membership. As a consequence of these changes, the proportion of church members affiliated to Nazarene churches in the most deprived fifth of areas increased slightly between 2003 and 2013; the largest net loss of members occurred among churches in the third deprivation quintile (Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

Levels of participation in church activities largely mirrored variations in membership. Approaching half or more of those engaged in corporate worship and youth activities gathered in churches in the most deprived areas (Table 3). Sixty people (median; inter-quartile range 29–77) typically attended worship at churches in the most deprived fifth of areas during 2013 compared with around 21 (13–50) worshipping in churches in less deprived areas. Sunday schools in the most deprived areas were also larger on average, with a typical attendance of 43 (29–80) compared with 25 (16–84) at schools in the less deprived four-fifths of areas. The distribution of youth group members in relation to area deprivation is less clear-cut because there were reportedly only 20 groups and their membership varied widely (minimum 2,

maximum 95). Nonetheless over half the young people attended youth groups in churches in the most deprived fifth of areas.

[Table 3 about here]

### *Church staff*

The staff listed against each church in the Directories for 2003 and 2013 were placed into two categories: firstly, those in pastoral charge or with a formal preaching role. Most of these individuals were ordained or licensed ministers in the Nazarene Church; this category also includes some lay people with pastoral oversight and some formally recognized clergy from other denominations. The second category includes church treasurers and secretaries, Sunday school superintendents and others working with youth and children, and those leading activities such as a kindergarten or women's group; these individuals are called lay office-holders. Some individuals took on more than one role but they are counted only once in the analysis and the ministerial category took precedence where a minister held the role of church treasurer, secretary or other lay office.

The homes of church staff were broadly clustered around the church where they served, although not necessarily within walking distance (Figure 1). Most staff lived within three miles travelling distance: 71 per cent of ministers and 65 per cent of lay office-holders in 2013 (78 per cent and 70 per cent respectively in 2003), and half or more of church staff lived within one and a half miles on both occasions.<sup>22</sup>

[Figure 1 about here]

Overall, the residential location of church staff was biased towards more deprived areas, with between a quarter and a third of lay office-holders and ministers residing in the most deprived fifth of areas (Table 4). Comparison with Table 1 shows that church staff residences were distributed more widely across the deprivation spectrum than were churches. On average, the further away lay office-holders lived from their church, the more likely were they to live in less deprived areas.<sup>23</sup> Although no comparable association was found when ministers' travel

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22. There is no consensus on what constitutes a church catchment. A three mile journey-to-work is suggested when creating jobs to benefit areas of significant employment deprivation although it is recognized that job search behaviour is not comparable to travelling to church: David Webster, 'The Geographical Concentration of Labour Market Disadvantage', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 16, 1 (2000), 114-128.

23. Analysis of variance and rank correlation analysis confirmed that the association was statistically significant in 2003 and 2013 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

distances to church were examined, around one in three resided in the least deprived two-fifths of areas (Table 4). These findings indicate that a substantial minority of church staff may live at some social and economic remove from the neighbourhoods of the churches they attended.

[Table 4 about here]

To investigate further, the level of deprivation in the neighbourhoods where church staff lived was compared with that of the churches they served. This analysis focuses on how far church staff were placed, either by their residence or church, or both, within the most deprived two-fifths of MSOAs – representing a fairly broad definition of relative deprivation and neighbourhood.

The findings, summarized in Table 5, show the extent to which church staff lived in similar or different communities to those surrounding their nominated church. The first row of this table shows that over two in five church staff lived in *and* attended church in the more deprived areas. A further one in four lay office-holders attended church in such areas but lived in less deprived areas (second row). The comparable proportion of ministers associated with a church in more deprived areas but living elsewhere exceeded that of lay office-holders after almost doubling during the study period (from 18 to 33 per cent). Of the 90 lay office-holders and 32 ministers associated with churches in the more deprived areas in 2013 (first and second row), a third or more (30 and 14 respectively) lived in less deprived areas. Combining rows two and four of the table shows that approaching half of church staff lived in less deprived areas; a substantial minority of lay office-holders also attended churches in less deprived areas. In contrast, most ministers living in less deprived areas in 2013 served churches in more deprived areas. Lastly, no more than one in ten church staff in 2013 lived in the more deprived areas while attending church elsewhere (third row of Table 5). The pattern of similarities or differences between place of residence and church location, shown in Table 5, changed little when the analysis was repeated at LSOA level.

[Table 5 about here]

## Discussion

Hempton suggests that the location of clergy and the churches they serve are useful socio-theological markers of their ministry and mission.<sup>24</sup> Surveying the decline of churches in modern Europe, he argues that the deployment of clergy in middle class areas compared with

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24. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Chapter 8.

working class areas characterizes churches that aligned themselves with forces of social respectability and cultural acceptance which limited their effectiveness in disseminating their message and growing organically. The contemporary significance of Hempton's analysis requires, as a starting point, evaluation of religious organizations against socio-economic inequalities and provides a context for the investigation reported here.

Findings show that the distribution of Nazarene churches in England is biased towards the most deprived neighbourhoods: the more deprived an area the more likely are churches located there. Most Nazarene churches have been where they are for decades<sup>25</sup> suggesting that some are located in areas that have been persistently most deprived. This bias was maintained during the ten year study period and, despite an overall decline in membership, churches in the most deprived areas were likely to grow on average. The Church's presence in deprived areas was further demonstrated by higher membership levels, as well as raised attendance at weekly corporate worship and activities for children and young people. These findings are consistent with the Church's commitment to the poor.<sup>26</sup> Although evidence is lacking on the effectiveness and reach of their ministry, the findings indicate that most Nazarene churches were, in principle, reasonably accessible to households from poor socio-economic backgrounds, and provided opportunities for them to worship and act out their faith in a local setting.

The relevance or viability of such opportunities may depend, amongst other things, on ministers' and lay leaders' socio-economic positioning. The findings show that church staff were less closely identified with deprived areas than were churches. Although their residential distribution was biased towards deprived areas, church staff were drawn widely across the deprivation spectrum, with around half living outside the most deprived two-fifths of areas (LSOAs). Moreover, a substantial minority of lay office-holders and ministers, associated with churches in the more deprived areas, lived in less deprived areas at some distance away. Such distancing risks weakening the Nazarene claim to identify with the poor if the places where church leaders live have little in common with the communities where their ministry, pastoral care, and witness is focused. Potential implications have been observed in comparable faith groups.<sup>27</sup> Church leaders in less deprived areas, at some remove from their local church, may have to balance the costs and opportunities of engaging in their own localities against those that

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25. David Montgomery, *Personal Communication*, December 2014.

26. Church of the Nazarene, *Manual*, 375-376.

27. E.g. Chester, *Growing Churches in Working-class and Deprived Areas*; Malcolm Doney, ed., *How Healthy is the C of E: The Church Times Health Check* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2014).

arise in the neighbourhood of their church. Lacking day-to-day experience of living in deprived areas and the impact of poverty may foster responses that reflect prevailing societal views, political preferences, and media characterization of the ‘undeserving poor’.<sup>28</sup> Such perceptions limit the scope to act pastorally, prophetically, and politically on behalf of the poor. Educational background, lifestyle, and leisure pursuits may further limit leaders’ ability to engage with individuals and families living in poorer neighbourhoods.<sup>29</sup> Young people in deprived areas, for example, may view local churches as middle class spaces for people who live ‘better lives’, greatly complicating efforts to develop meaningful relationships through youth work and other outreach services.<sup>30</sup>

Although the socio-economic background of Nazarene members and adherents is not known, socially diverse congregations can provide fruitful opportunities for personal interaction across status and cultural boundaries. The range and depth of relationships within and beyond a local congregation will, in turn, depend on a shared purpose and common identity. Solidarity is a multi-layered concept, and a sense of unity and interdependence between a local church and its neighbourhood cannot be assumed or taken for granted. This paper has focused on residency and shared experience of a place. Clearly, residency is not a sufficient condition for fostering solidarity at local or community level; however, residency may be necessary to sustain an authentic religious presence with some conviction. Further investigation of churches and ministers in deprived areas is required to demonstrate whether and with what effect their ministry is geared more towards the marginalized and poor than that of other churches.

Church Action on Poverty (CAP) has recently launched a campaign to challenge and enable Christian denominations and congregations to become churches of and for the poor.<sup>31</sup> It is clear from the CAP report, and recent survey research, that churches respond to such calls in

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28. Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams, *The Myth of the Undeserving Poor: A Christian Response to Poverty in Britain Today* (Guildford: Grosvenor House Publishing, 2014); cf. Church Urban Fund, *Bias To The Poor? Christian Attitudes to Poverty in this Country* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2012)

29. Cf. Nicholas Paterson, Ian Paterson, and John Sawkins. ‘A Demographic, Educational and Occupational Analysis of Methodist Local Preachers in England’, Department of Economics, Discussion Paper 98/6 (Edinburgh: School of Management, Heriot-Watt University, 1998).

30. Giselle Vincett and Elizabeth Olson, ‘The Religiosity of Young People Growing Up in Poverty’, in Woodhead and Catto, eds., *Religion and Change*, 196-202.

31. Liam Purcell and Sarah Purcell, eds., *Church of the Poor? A Call to Action for Churches in the UK* (Salford: Church Action on Poverty, 2016).

a variety of ways depending on their resources, leadership, and identified needs in their locality.<sup>32</sup> Opening church buildings for support groups and social projects, for example, can make a vital contribution to community cohesion and individual well-being but not all churches have the capacity or the premises for such initiatives, or the funding to sustain them. All churches, however, can work towards becoming a formative presence in their local community. A ministry of presence emphasizes 'being' rather than 'doing', working relationally, and understanding church as a process of encounter and engagement rather than as a building or a gathering of people. Such a ministry is often associated with the spirituality of Henri Nouwen and his concerns for social justice and community. Following a visit to South America, where he was confronted with the oppression and exploitation of the poor, Nouwen wrote:

More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water, and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets. It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them.<sup>33</sup>

Following Nouwen, residency provides opportunities for everyday social contact among individuals living in the same area. Casual opportunities may occur in the street or at particular places such as a post office, public house, park, or doctor's surgery. More frequent contacts among near neighbours or associated with luncheon clubs, children's attendance at school, and the like, may foster valued social networks for interpersonal exchange of information, social

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32. Ibid.; Church Urban Fund, *The Church in Action: A National Survey of Church-led Social Action* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2013); Church Urban Fund, *Faith in Action: A Survey of Christian Social Action around Middlesbrough* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2013); Geoff Knott, *Church for the Poor Survey Report* (London: Word on the Streets, 2016), published online: [www.wordonthestreets.net](http://www.wordonthestreets.net)

33. Henri Nouwen, *Gracias: A Latin American Journal* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 147-148.

support, and resources of various kinds.<sup>34</sup> Residency may underpin common cause around issues of concern in the locality such as public transport, green spaces, payday lending, and the quality of public or private services. Residency may also encourage engagement in school governing bodies, residents or neighbourhood associations, and other local voluntary action.<sup>35</sup> As Nouwen suggests, vulnerability and emotional responses are central to deepening these encounters and developing relationships that transcend difference and build solidarity and community cohesion.

A ministry of presence, therefore, depends on proximity and residency can underpin the integrity of such a commitment. There may be concerns about the financial implications of maintaining a presence in deprived areas but commitment to the poor draws attention to other issues – humanity, freedom, and equality.<sup>36</sup> Reflection on that commitment might consider where ministers and pastors live, and how that enables or hinders their role and continuing development, including the formation of lay leadership. Such considerations may lead to a review of the contexts in which ministerial training, learning, and theological education take place.

The CAP report shows that there is broad consensus – backed by doctrine, scriptures and tradition – for a preferential option for the poor.<sup>37</sup> Despite that, some Christian denominations struggle to deploy their clergy in deprived areas.<sup>38</sup> A study of two Church of England dioceses shows that staffing levels for clergy and other pastorally trained workers were highest in parishes with the smallest proportion of people who were income deprived.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, ministers of the Methodist Church in Britain live predominantly in less deprived areas: the more deprived an area the less likely they are to live there, increasingly so in recent years.<sup>40</sup> A bias towards more affluent areas reflects survey evidence showing that those attending mainstream

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34. E.g. Andrew Nocon and Maggie Pearson, 'The roles of friends and neighbours in providing support for older people', *Ageing and Society* 20 (2000), 341-367.

35. E.g. Angela Collins and Julie Wrigley, *Can a Neighbourhood Approach to Loneliness Contribute to People's Well-Being?* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014).

36. Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2003).

37. Purcell and Purcell, *Church of the Poor?*

38. Michael Hirst, 'Clergy in Place in England: Bias to the Poor or Inverse Care Law?', *Population, Space and Place* (2017), e2068. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2068>

39. Tom Atfield and Jayne Parry, 'The Poor will Always be with You: An Assessment of the Re-distribution of Resources within Two Church of England Dioceses', *Practical Theology*, 5 (2012), 321-339.

40. Michael Hirst, 'Poverty, Place and Presence: Positioning Methodism in England, 2001 to 2011', *Theology and Ministry*, 4 (2016), 4.1-4.25, <http://www.theologyandministry.org>



Christian denominations are drawn disproportionately from well-educated, middle income, middle class sections of society.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, smaller denominations, like the Church of the Nazarene, as well as Black and Pentecostal churches and some independent churches, maintain a presence in deprived areas.<sup>42</sup> The markedly different positioning of the Nazarene Church and mainstream Methodism towards poor communities in England indicates that no straightforward explanation arises from their shared Wesleyan or theological heritage.<sup>43</sup> Comparative analysis across faith traditions, therefore, might address the question of why the positioning of some denominations is more socio-economically regressive than that of others. The aim would be to identify the organizational arrangements, decision making, and other factors that explain the processes at work. Such an assessment might include the financing of religious organizations to show where power lies in allocating resources to meet priorities.<sup>44</sup>

As far as is known, this is the first attempt to evaluate systematically the self-proclaimed responsibility of the Nazarene Church to the poor. Although the research has produced useful insights and identified questions for further investigation, it is acknowledged that the design is concerned only with ecological data describing where Nazarene churches and leaders are positioned in relation to area variations in social and economic deprivation. Further approaches to understanding the nature and scope of solidarity with the poor might examine personal and communal interdependencies, including relationships and networks among clergy, congregants, and residents in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. That would require ethnographic approaches to engage with the everyday meanings of solidarity for local participants, their lived experiences of solidarity, and the factors involved. The aim would be to evaluate how church leaders and church members stand alongside people in poverty, act out their faith together, and engage in social action.

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41. John Sawkins, Paul Seaman, and Hector Williams, 'Church Attendance in Great Britain: An Ordered Logit Approach', *Applied Economics*, 29 (1997), 125-134; Ben Clements, 'Weekly Churchgoing amongst Roman Catholics in Britain: Long-Term Trends and Contemporary Analysis', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* (2016), published first online <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2016.1237422>
  42. Patrick Kalilombe, 'Black Christianity in Britain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20 (1997), 306-324; Chester, *Growing Churches in Working-class and Deprived Areas*.
  43. Cf. Calvin Samuel, 'More Wesleyan Than Methodists? An Exploration of the Wesleyan Holiness Church in Britain', *Epworth Review*, 33 (2006), 40-49.
  44. Atfield and Parry, 'The Poor will Always be with You'; cf. Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 109-130.

## **Conclusions**

Like governmental, charitable and civil society organizations, faith groups often set aims for their mission and identify priorities. The researcher's task is to evaluate progress towards agreed goals using a range of concepts, methods, and techniques, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, to identify opportunities and barriers, and to disseminate good practice. This paper has examined one aspect of the Church of the Nazarene presence in England: the location of its churches and where church staff live against neighbourhood variations in social and economic deprivation. The aim was to provide a preliminary assessment of the extent to which Nazarene churches and their leadership embody a relationship with the poor in their local ministry and mission.

Findings show that the local presence of the Church of the Nazarene broadly intersects with its self-proclaimed responsibility to the poor. Overall, the distribution of churches and church staff is skewed towards deprived areas. Despite that a substantial minority of lay office-holders and ministers lived at some distance, in socio-economic terms, from the most deprived areas and the churches they served. Implications for Church polity are whether such positioning provides an appropriate and effective response to poverty and inequality, consistent with Nazarene expectations and theological sensibilities. A ministry of presence based around residency in areas of high socio-economic deprivation may be necessary to identify with and enter into solidarity with people in poverty.

## **Biographical note**

Michael Hirst is an Honorary Fellow of the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York. From research in human geography and lectureships in Uganda and Australia, he moved into the field of social policy at the University of York. Since then, much of his work has focused on health, employment, financial, and social costs of disability, caring, and bereavement, and the evaluation of services and benefits for disabled people and carers.

## Solidarity with the Poor?

### Positioning the Church of the Nazarene in England in 2003 and 2013

**Table 1**

Church of the Nazarene: local churches and membership in England 2003 and 2013 by area deprivation (per cent)\*

	Churches				Membership			
	LSOAs		MSOAs		LSOAs		MSOAs	
	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013
Fifth most deprived areas	41	44	53	51	50	56	57	60
2nd quintile	22	22	16	17	19	21	15	15
3rd quintile	22	20	18	17	21	12	19	12
4th quintile	8	5	10	12	6	5	8	10
Fifth least deprived areas	8	10	4	2	4	7	2	2
<i>Base (=100 per cent)</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>1654</i>	<i>1378</i>	<i>1654</i>	<i>1378</i>

\* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 2**

Church of the Nazarene: change in number of churches and membership in England 2003 to 2013 by area deprivation

LSOAs	Churches			Membership			Churches	Membership*		
	2003	2013	% change	2003	2013	% change	2003/13	2003	2013	% change
Fifth most deprived areas	21	18	-14.3	819	767	-6.3	16	707	767	8.5
2nd quintile	11	9	-18.2	311	284	-8.7	9	284	284	0.0
3rd quintile	11	8	-27.3	355	164	-53.8	7	253	164	-35.2
4th quintile	4	2	-50.0	97	69	-28.9	2	71	69	-2.8
Fifth least deprived areas	4	4	0.0	72	94	30.6	4	72	94	30.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>-19.6</i>	<i>1654</i>	<i>1378</i>	<i>-16.7</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>1387</i>	<i>1378</i>	<i>-0.6</i>

\* In 38 churches open throughout the study period.

**Table 3**

Church of the Nazarene: weekly attendance at corporate worship and Sunday school, and youth group membership in England 2013 by area deprivation (per cent)\*

	Worship		Sunday school		Youth group	
	LSOAs	MSOAs	LSOAs	MSOAs	LSOAs	MSOAs
Fifth most deprived areas	53	59	44	54	50	56
2nd quintile	24	15	24	11	18	7
3rd quintile	12	15	20	21	20	25
4th quintile	5	10	7	12	7	11
Fifth least deprived areas	6	1	6	1	5	1
<i>Base (=100 per cent)</i>	<i>1611</i>	<i>1611</i>	<i>1948</i>	<i>1948</i>	<i>478</i>	<i>478</i>

\* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 4**

Church of the Nazarene: lay office-holders and ministerial staff in England 2003 and 2013 by area deprivation (per cent)\*

	Lay office-holders				Ministerial staff			
	LSOAs		MSOAs		LSOAs		MSOAs	
	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013
Fifth most deprived areas	31	23	26	29	31	29	33	24
2nd quintile	18	23	23	28	20	24	18	29
3rd quintile	28	28	26	17	16	19	16	12
4th quintile	9	16	13	15	16	10	24	19
Fifth least deprived areas	14	9	12	12	18	19	9	17
<i>Base (=100 per cent)</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>42</i>

\* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 5**

Church of the Nazarene: church staff residences and local churches in the most deprived two-fifths of MSOAs in England 2003 and 2013 (per cent)\*

	Lay office-holders		Ministerial staff	
	2003	2013	2003	2013
Home and church in most deprived areas	46	50	44	43
Church in most deprived areas, home elsewhere	26	25	18	33
Home in most deprived areas, church elsewhere	4	7	7	10
Home and church in less deprived areas	24	18	31	14
<i>Base (=100 per cent)</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>42</i>

\* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Figure 1**

Church of the Nazarene: travelling distance between home and church in England 2013

