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Mark Christopher Scanlan

Urban Saints: An Interweaving Ecclesiology as a Contribution to the Fresh Expressions Debate

Abstract

This thesis is a work of practical theology that offers a contribution to contemporary conversations about church and mission in the UK. It does this by exploring the underlying ecclesiology of Urban Saints (formerly known as The Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes) before placing this in dialogue with Fresh Expressions. Taking an approach that uses the framework of the Four Voices of Theology developed by the Action Research Church and Society project to set up an open-ended dialogue between theological theory and practice a two-step methodology is employed. The first step draws on an historical review of Urban Saints' practice to uncover an inherent ecclesial imagination in their work, alongside extended ethnographic case studies of two current Urban Saints groups that explore their operant ecclesiological approach. Taken together these highlight contradictions and ambiguity regarding the church. Participants however are able to appropriate the groups as part of their ecclesial life. As such the groups operate as potential ecclesial spaces. These spaces can then become part of a flexible form of church through what is interpreted as an interweaving ecclesiological approach. This reflects how the groups are used alongside various other communal Christian experiences and relationships to stimulate and support Christian faith. The second methodological step places this interweaving ecclesiology into conversation with Fresh Expressions to challenge and critique its church focused approach to mission. The argument is made that an interweaving ecclesiology utilizing potential ecclesial spaces, such as those of the Urban Saints groups, nuances the Fresh Expressions debate by resisting the drive to form mature churches as a necessary missional step. This moves the Fresh Expressions conversation on from discussions about what defines a church to allow for a focus on mission with a flexible ecclesiology not designed for stability but that can handle change.

Urban Saints: An Interweaving Ecclesiology as a Contribution to the Fresh Expressions Debate

Submitted by

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For the qualification of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

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Statement of Copyright

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The leadership team and trustees of Urban Saints centrally and the local volunteer leaders who I got to know also deserve a huge thank you for opening up their organisation and groups, as well as themselves, with enthusiasm and honesty.

The biggest thanks however go to my wife, Linda, for believing in me and putting up with the ups and downs of what turned out to be a longer journey than we had anticipated!

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Rev. Albert Kestin & Herbert Bevington who by their faith, vision, energy and creativity began the work of Crusaders over 100 years ago and through whose legacy untold numbers of young people have heard and responded to the Gospel.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban Saints[1] have been running and resourcing Bible study focussed youth groups in the UK for over a hundred years. The organisation was initially known as the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes and ran classes, independent of any formal church connection, focussing on outreach to upper and middle class boys. Over its lifetime the organisation's work has broadened but it remains committed to communicating the gospel to young people through local groups. This thesis argues that there is an underlying approach to mission and church in Urban Saints' work with young people that provides a helpful contribution to the Fresh Expressions debate in the UK. The argument is made in two-steps: first, by exploring the underlying ecclesiology within the history and current practice of Urban Saints; and second, by placing this in open-ended theological dialogue with the ecclesiological approach of Fresh Expressions.[2]

Inspired by a phrase used by an Urban Saints' leader I interviewed I have termed both this underlying ecclesiology and its contribution to Fresh Expressions as an 'interweaving' approach to the church.[3] I found this a helpful way of interpreting the approach to church that came to light through the case studies and subsequent analysis since it described well the way in which a range of activities, groups and congregations with a mesh of relational connections might be seen as forming a type of church for participants in the Urban Saints groups. Not all participants in Urban Saints groups use the groups as part of their experience of church so their ecclesial identity is ambiguous. To reflect this I describe the groups as potential ecclesial spaces that can see this potential fulfilled as participants utilize them as part of their construction of church.

I developed my understanding of the interweaving ecclesial approach of Urban Saints through bringing together an ecclesial imagination drawn out of an historical survey of their work alongside the operant and espoused ecclesiologies of current groups that form

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[1] "Https://Www.Urbansaints.Org/." Accessed 29/6/17. A full account of the organisation's story follows in chapter 2.
[2] "Https://Www.Freshexpressions.Org.Uk/." Accessed 29/6/17
[3] Dorothy Interview, St Aidans, 11/8/14, p. 6, paragraph 40.

extended case studies for this thesis.[4] The ecclesial imagination is characterized by the way that Urban Saints formed a communal Christian life outside the norms of congregations and denominations. This was built upon a focus on individual conversion, small groups of like-minded believers and a wider network of meetings, camps and conferences. The strength of this form of Christian life resulted in Urban Saints becoming a kind of faith tradition for many. This tradition could at times exert a stronger identity on its adherents than the local church or denominational affiliation, but it did not render those things obsolete. It was, rather, a both / and approach.[5]

In a similar way current Urban Saints groups can operate as potential ecclesial spaces that stimulate and sustain faith for participants, but are understood in relation to various other activities, congregations, meetings and relationships that together can construct ecclesial life for those participants. This type of ecclesial life comes from the groups providing places through which participants can experience connection with Christ and Christian practices in community. These experiences complement and are complemented by other communal Christian contexts and relationships to develop a form of church for participants. This is a flexible, relational form of church in which separate groups can resist being defined as a mature or full expression of church. In addition different participants at different times would consider a particular activity, relationship or group as the dominant thread in the interweaving of church. This too is flexible between participants and also might shift for each participant over time.

The approach allows participants to circumvent prior expectations as they explore and experience the Christian faith for themselves without needing to be "in church" to do it. It is then an approach in contrast with Fresh Expressions that operates with a church-centric approach to mission. The contribution of this interweaving ecclesiology is demonstrated through a detailed conversation with Fresh Expressions' approach that argues for a reversal of ecclesiological thinking. Relational dynamics from within Fresh Expressions are employed to regulate the interweaving approach.[6]

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[4] The terms 'operant' and 'espoused' are taken from H. Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (SCM Press, 2010). I detail my use of these terms in chapter 3 and the rationale for choosing the specific case study locations in chapters 3, 4 and 5.
[5] See chapter 2.
[6] See chapter 7.

By way of further introduction the following sections detail four aspects of this thesis and the research underpinning it. First, I discuss the way that this research and the core questions that drive it developed out of my own experiences as a local church Youth Pastor and, for a short period, Area Development Worker for Urban Saints; second, I outline how I have understood my own position and assumptions in relation to the research;[7] third, I detail the unique contribution that this thesis makes in developing the understanding of church for both youth ministry and the Fresh Expressions debate; and, fourth, I provide an overview of the chapters that follow throughout the thesis.

1.1 Autobiography

All research is to some degree autobiographical.[8] This present thesis is no different since I can trace the research puzzle[9] that formed itself into a formal research proposal to a particular moment when I was a Youth Pastor for a large Baptist Church in Luton.[10]

The moment relates to the opportunity to baptise a teenage girl who had become a Christian through the youth congregation that was held on Sunday evenings in the youth centre belonging to the church. The convention was to baptise young people on a Sunday morning so the regular church congregation could celebrate the occasion alongside the young people. This worked well when the young people were from church families and consequently familiar with the wider life of the church. However, on this occasion the girl asked if she could be baptised on a Sunday night, as this was her usual church time and experience. The situation was complicated by the fact that there was no baptismal pool or facilities in the youth centre so the service needed to take place in the church auditorium.

In the end we decided to hold a special evening service, with both the youth congregation and the church's regular evening service being cancelled so that both young people and adults could celebrate the baptism. This was seen as bringing together the girl's desire for the baptism to be on a Sunday evening whilst also being part of the life of the whole

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[7] This is known as reflexivity and is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

[8] Martyn Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Social Research* (Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2010), 14.

[9] Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, Second Edition ed. (Sage Publications Ltd, 2002), 17 - 8.

[10] I was on the staff team at Stopsley Baptist Church, Luton between 2001 and 2011.

church family. Plans were put in place, with young people and adults invited to celebrate the occasion. The girl herself was happy with the plans and invited a number of her friends and family, the majority of whom were not Christians.

The evening of the baptism arrived and I found it to be a powerful occasion and great celebration. However, I was also left with a sense of disappointment. As I reflected on the occasion I realised there had been fewer young people there than normally attended the youth congregation and fewer adults than usually attended the evening service. Despite the occasion it seemed that some young people and adults had felt that it wasn't for them. This then led me to consider the relationship between what we were doing in youth ministry and the wider life of the church. Why had the service not brought the two together as had been hoped?

In the days and weeks after the service these reflections helped to clarify questions that had gradually been growing in my mind. These questions revolved around the separate nature of work that we did with young people through the church – if it should be considered outside of the church then how should the relationship between youth ministry and the church operate? However, if it was within the life of the church then what was its ecclesiological status? In short how might youth ministry be accounted for ecclesiologically? These questions became the research puzzle that led to the proposal out of which this thesis arose.

As I considered this puzzle I realised that it expressed questions that had been below the surface in my work with young people for a long time. I had previously spent three years working for Urban Saints as an Area Development Worker.[11] This role involved supporting Urban Saints groups and working to develop new groups with local volunteer leaders. I had not been involved with Urban Saints before and, as an outsider, I became aware of a tension in their work that I was unable to reconcile. The tension revolved around the level of commitment and identity many of those involved had invested in the work – often encapsulated in the longevity of their involvement. This was a form of Christian life and ministry that had played and continued to play a significant role in the lives of many, and yet there was a sense of deep unease when it came into contact with formal church life.

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[11] From 1999 – 2002.

The format of running groups for young people that stimulated, supported and shaped Christian faith but outside of or in parallel with wider church life was taken as a given.[12] Therefore too much interaction with the church was viewed with some suspicion.

This tension was carried into my work in Luton and I realised that this was not unique to the work of Urban Saints but had become an everyday tension within youth ministry more broadly. For the most part however it remained unarticulated and was accepted as the way things were done. This tension broke through into the forefront of my consciousness through the episode of the baptism service described above.

Alongside this, during my final years as Youth Pastor, the church leadership wrestled with conversations around new forms of the church.[13] This resulted in experimentation with a new structure for the church, revolving around mission-shaped communities rather than a central congregation. The rationale for these moves was a desire to see more of the congregation taking ownership of the mission of the church. Whilst these moves were not entirely successful one consequence of these discussions was to bring the role and place of youth ministry in the life of the church to the fore. The questions of the place of young people in the church and the role of youth ministry itself in understanding the identity of the church became part of the wider church conversation. These events form part of my story and the background to the research puzzle that drew me into the research from which this thesis has developed.

1.2 Reflexivity – Bringing My Assumptions Into the Open

Even though the research puzzle behind this thesis flows naturally out of autobiography it was vital throughout the research that I did not let my own experiences and viewpoints blind me to the nuances of the operant and espoused theology coming through from the case studies. Reflexivity is a commitment to being 'self-critical' in research.[14] Scharen,

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[12] The role of youth groups as communities of practice that can stimulate, support and shape Christian faith is explored in Nick Shepherd, "Community Builder," in *Youth Ministry: A Multi-Faceted Approach*, ed. Sally Nash (London: SPCK, 2011), 36 - 8.

[13] A new Senior Pastor arrived who had been influenced by books coming out of the emerging church conversation such as Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* (SPCK Publishing, 2006); and Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2010).

[14] Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 79.

drawing on Bourdieu, points to the need to account for the influence the researcher introduces to the field, the space occupied by the researcher within the academic field and the risk of creating a 'God's eye' view of the world.[15] In the light of my story these are vital aspects of reflexivity in this research.

There were a few key *kairos* moments within the research process that caused me to question my assumptions and look afresh at what was happening within the Urban Saints groups. The term *kairos* refers to the richness or quality of a moment or period; consequently a *kairos* moment is a 'moment of meaning with another individual, or creation, or God'.[16] There were three of these in particular that prompted me to examine my assumptions, ultimately changing the direction the research and my thinking were taking. These moments revolved around first, the role of the groups in the lives of the leaders; second, a challenge to a binary approach to the church; and third, the language of interweaving to help articulate the ambiguous nature of what I was finding.

In one of the first interviews I carried out with a leader the way in which the group had an impact on the leader's faith stood out as a key moment. This leader described to me how his involvement in the Urban Saints group had allowed him to feel connected with Jesus in a way he hadn't previously. This alerted me to the assumption that the impact of the groups, and any ecclesial life within them, would be primarily experienced by the young people. Within this prior understanding the leaders were predominantly cast in the role of facilitators. It felt fortunate that this particular interview had come early on, though this happened quite by accident.[17] Consequently I was able to look for signs of this impact in my ongoing observations and in the ways that other leaders spoke during their own interviews. Despite not initially considering the groups playing this role for the leaders it became a key category in my data analysis.[18]

A second assumption that was challenged was the notion that the question of ecclesiology was a binary either / or option. I entered the field with the desire to answer the question of whether the Urban Saints groups could be defined as church. I was

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Steve Griffiths, *Models for Youth Ministry: Learning from the Life of Christ* (London: SPCK, 2013), 9.

[17] Resultant of which dates were convenient to particular leaders. For a full schedule of my qualitative research see Appendix A.

[18] Specifically one of the 'modes of belonging' for one of the groups. See chapter 5 for details.

looking for a definitive yes or no answer – they were either going to be church or they weren't. My own leaning as I set out on the research journey, prejudiced no doubt by my background in youth ministry, was that I wanted to be able to say that yes, these groups were forms of church. In addition, through my time on staff of a Baptist Church, I am naturally comfortable with Volf's definitional claim that the church can be a 'communion of interdependent subjects... constituted by the Holy Spirit... through the communal confession in which Christians speak the word of God to one another'.[19] These assumptions were challenged and ultimately nuanced in two particular ways: first, that the espoused theology of the leaders within the groups resisted being placed into the definitional category of 'church' and second, both the operant and espoused theologies simply didn't fit into a binary system.

The leaders in particular were clear that they were not trying to form church for the young people (or indeed for themselves) in the groups. Some of the leaders were particularly forthright about this.[20] Part of the rationale for resisting this was that they didn't want the label of church as they felt this would impact on what they were able to do, especially in terms of the mission of the groups. It could be argued of course that these leaders had too narrow a view of church to understand it in the way that I wanted to. However, as I reflected on their words alongside the way in which the groups operated and the interviews with the young people, it seemed an intuitive theological move was being made by resisting the definition of church. Consequently, despite my initial desire to see the groups as church and the way that I ultimately did come to understand an ecclesial life within the groups, with integrity to the theological impulses of the participants, I couldn't define the groups simply as forms of church.

Connected to this it became clear as the research progressed that there was not going to be a simple yes or no answer to the question of whether the groups were church. The interaction of various espoused and operant theologies that were brought to light demonstrated that for the participants there was not a single one-size-fits-all definition of what the groups were or what role they played. This made the task of finding helpful language to describe what I began to sense the research was revealing difficult. The

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[19] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: Church as the Image of the Trinity* (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), 224.
[20] E.g. Richard's interview, St Aidans, 21/10/14, p.11, para 101.

language of ambiguity was helpful, though as was pointed out to me, the word ambiguous is itself ambiguous![21] However, when wrestling with what were beginning to feel like the limitations of language to articulate the shape and form of ecclesial life that was coming through I recalled the words of one of the leaders I had interviewed.[22] This leader had described a vision of church locally as 'an interweaving thing' in which a range of activities, groups and congregations with a mesh of relational connections should be seen as the church.[23] Interweaving then became the language and the lens that helped me interpret what was emerging from the research.

The way in which these key kairos moments challenged the assumptions I had taken with me into the field shaped my research, my conclusions and also, to a degree, shaped me. Consequently, my own approach to youth ministry and the church will be different as a result of the research process. The detailed understanding of reflexivity that allowed me to take a posture within the research in which I was open to having my assumptions challenged is discussed in chapter 3.

1.3 The Contribution of This Thesis

This thesis offers a two-fold contribution by first, drawing out the underlying approach to church in Urban Saints and its groups; and, second, by using this constructively in conversation with the ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions. This two-fold approach then contributes to the understanding of the church for both youth ministry and contemporary ecclesiology. For youth ministry this thesis offers a practical ecclesiological framework that accounts for the ecclesial value of Christian youth groups, such as those offered by Urban Saints, thus moving thinking on from the limitations in current literature outlined below. In addition, through conversation with Fresh Expressions, this thesis offers a way of holding mission central in the life of the church without the church becoming dominant through the requirement that each initiative becomes a mature church in its own right.

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[21] Bard Norheim made this comment after I had presented a paper. (Mark Scanlan, "Ambiguous Ecclesiology: Exploring the Church in Conversation with Youth Leaders, Young People and the Youth Groups They Form Together," in *IASYM European Conference* (Amsterdam 2016).
[22] I am indebted to a conversation over lunch at the 2016 Ecclesiology and Ethnography Conference in Durham for helping to crystallize my thoughts on this.
[23] See Dorothy interview as cited above.

Underlying questions that revolve around youth ministry and the church find some articulation in youth ministry literature.[24] Kenda Creasy Dean for example bemoans the way that youth groups often leave young people having only marginal contact with the rest of the church:

> The congregation worshipped in the sanctuary; youth met in the basement. The congregation gathered on Sunday mornings; youth gathered on Sunday nights. The congregation listened to sermons; youth heard "youth talks." The congregation had Bible study; youth had devotions. The congregation has a budget; youth had a bake sale. Nothing that happened in the life of the congregation as a whole looked even vaguely familiar to youth ghettoized in youth groups.[25]

Dean goes on to conclude that this lack of interaction between youth groups and the church results in a 'chasm between youth ministry and the theology of the church as a whole'.[26] It is certainly the case that ecclesiology is generally an underrepresented or only superficially discussed subject within popular youth ministry literature. In my professional experience, and backed by my reading of such literature, discussion of the church in youth ministry seems to fall into one of three types. First, an agreed understanding of the church is assumed; second, a particular ecclesiological approach is imposed; or, third, the church is alluded to but not central to the discussion. I will illustrate each of these, with examples, to highlight the gap that there is for concerted ecclesiological reflection on youth ministry.

An assumed understanding of the church is one that either uncritically presents a particular ecclesiological position or where the focus is on drawing young people into a pre-existing church structure without questioning the appropriateness of such a focus. In *Christian Youth Work* Ashton and Moon provide a clear example of when an agreed understanding of the church is assumed. Though the authors raise the need for a 'thoroughly biblical doctrine of the church as a basis for youth ministry'[27] this amounts primarily to the Sunday congregation family church model favoured by evangelicals in the

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[24] I attempted to explore some of these in my MA dissertation: Mark Scanlan, "Youth Ministry Grown Up: Discussing the Influence of Youth Ministry on Contemporary Ecclesiology in the Light of Recent Trinitarian Theology" (Kings College London, 2011).

[25] Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Upper Room Books, 1998), 30.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Mark Ashton and Phil Moon, *Christian Youth Work: A Strategy for Youth Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Authentic Media, 2007), 117.

late twentieth century.[28] This is clear in their statement of the need for young people to be part of a mixed church community in which all ages are together.[29] Despite also asserting that there is no biblical blueprint for what church should look like,[30] some things are clearly ruled out. They describe youth churches, for example, as 'faintly ridiculous' and an 'unbiblical contradiction in terms'.[31] However they also assert that the church is seen as boring by young people[32] and advocate an approach that focuses on young people from church families being integrated into church life.[33]

Similarly the *Inside-Out* model of Christian youth work seeks to socialize young people into a particular church through the witness of those already involved, meaning the 'home' church ecclesiology is a given.[34] Doug Fields details this approach at length in the *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*.[35] This fleshing out of an inside-out approach proposes activities and events that are designed to draw young people through a system and into the life of the church. The assumed nature of this approach is extenuated since this is a youth ministry version of a popular book promoting the specific values and style of Saddleback Church in the USA.[36] When youth ministry operates from an assumed ecclesiology in this way it tends to be an approach to the theology of the church that is biased toward those already within the church. It also doesn't acknowledge the way that work with young people can shape ecclesiological discussion.[37]

Where the assumed understanding of church in youth ministry literature fails to adequately detail its ecclesiological foundations, the imposed approach takes a more detailed consideration of the church before describing what youth ministry might look like if such ecclesiological considerations were placed upon it. This approach is seen for

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[28] See Pete Ward, *Growing up Evangelical: Youthwork and the Making of a Subculture* (London: SPCK, 1996), 143.
[29] Ashton and Moon, *Christian Youth Work: A Strategy for Youth Leaders*, 114.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 115.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] See Pete Ward, *Youthwork & the Mission of God: Frameworks for Relational Outreach* (SPCK Publishing, 1997), 7 - 11.
[35] D. Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* (Zondervan, 2009).
[36] See Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church* (grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995).
[37] See, e.g. the role of youth congregations in shaping the missiological approach of the wider church John Hall, "The Rise of the Youth Congregation and Its Missiological Significance" (PhD, Birmingham, 2003).

example in *Mission-Shaped Youth.*[38] By being part of the burgeoning Mission-Shaped

series this book essentially takes as given the ecclesiological assumptions detailed in the

Fresh Expressions founding document and discusses what a youth ministry that takes

them seriously would look like.[39] This approach claims the influence of parachurch

organisations is diminishing due a growing understanding that mission is integral to the

identity of the church.[40] Similarly *Youth Work After Christendom*[41] imposes the view of

the church from the post-Christendom series onto work with young people.[42] Of

particular interest in these examples is a fundamental disagreement about the role of

parachurch work in contemporary UK church life – whereas *Mission-Shaped Youth*

dismisses it, the post-Christendom series sees it as a potential model for the wider church

to mirror moving forward.[43]

A further example of how views of the church can be imposed on youth ministry is found

in the call for intergenerational or family-based church as the primary model.[44] This is a

view of church that focuses on the congregation as the centre of gravity of church life and

operates from the assumption that the whole church family should be present together in

one place at the same time. There are echoes of this approach in Ashton and Moon's

assumptions about young people and the church highlighted above. The problem at the

heart of these approaches is that, despite calls for inclusivity,[45] they inevitably result in

the young people adapting to fit in with the requirements of the congregation.

There are occasional moments in the youth ministry literature, however, that try to break

out of the assumed or imposed categories. *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church,*[46]

for example, presents four different approaches and visions of the church and creates

space for conversation between proponents of each. This undoubtedly offers a more

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[38] T. Sudworth, G. Cray, and C. Russell, *Mission-Shaped Youth: Rethinking Young People and Church* (Church House Publishing, 2007).

[39] See *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

[40] *Mission-Shaped Youth*, 8 & 96 - 7.

[41] Jo Pimlott and Nigel Pimlott, *Youth Work After Christendom* (Paternoster, 2008).

[42] E.g. Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005).

[43] Ibid., 141 - 2.

[44] See Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 1994); Jason Gardner, *Mend the Gap: Can the Church Reconnect the Generations?* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

[45] For example Malan Nel, *Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Congregational Approach* (Pretoria, SA: Design Books, 2000).

[46] Mark H. Senter, III et al., *Four Views of Youth Minsitry and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

nuanced way of dealing with the issue, however each individual view can be seen to either make assumptions or impositions on youth ministry in relation to the church. Both of these approaches, to assume and to impose, fall into a trap within broader ecclesiological work:

> When it comes to history or philosophy, we proceed with great caution. We take great care to make sure that we abide by accepted academic convention and we want to demonstrate that we are proceeding with academic rigor. Then when we talk about the contemporary church, completely different rules seem to apply. It becomes acceptable to make assertions where there is no evidence. We assume a common perception of contemporary church life between author and reader. We base whole arguments on anecdote and the selective treatment of experience.[47]

This thesis seeks to talk about the church within youth ministry without either assuming an understanding of the church is agreed or by imposing a view on the youth ministry of Urban Saints. Rather, it will heed Ward's warning to only make assertions and claims where the evidence of the research data leads, and then humbly to point toward possibilities.[48] This is not to say that there is an absence of rigorous empirical qualitative research on youth ministry practice, however these studies tend to allude to the ecclesiological at the edge of their central research questions. Studies employing qualitative approaches have tended to be focused in one of three ways. First, by adding a qualitative element to a quantitative study to try and understand why young people are leaving the church;[49] second, by exploring how young people understand the role of faith in their life and in what things they tend to put their faith;[50] and third, looking at a particular aspect of Christian work with young people, such as identity formation or the role of worship.[51]

These approaches, that each allude to ecclesiological significance within youth ministry, provide an interesting picture of the relationship between young people and the church as it is happening with actual young people involved in youth work settings and churches.

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[47] Pete Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Eerdmans Pub Co, 2012), 4.
[48] The theological justification for this approach is detailed in chapter 3.
[49] E.g. Peter Brierley, *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers* (Christian Research, 2003); Leslie J. Francis, *Teenagers in the Church: Profile of Churchgoing Youth in the 1980's* (Collins, 1984).
[50] E.g. Sylvia Collins, "Young People's Faith in Late Modernity" (PhD, University of Surrey, 1997); Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo, and Sally Nash, *The Faith of Generation Y* (Church House Publishing, 2010).
[51] E.g. Steven Emery-Wright, "A Qualitative Study Construction of How 14-16 Year Olds Understand Worship," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 2, no. 2 (2003); Nick Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian: A Qualitative Study of Young People's Involvement in Two Youth Ministry Projects" (PhD, Kings College London, 2009).

Further, Emery-Wright's work suggests that where young people are engaged in communities of authentic Christian practice they are willing to engage with the claims of the Christian faith.[52] This corresponds with the findings of the *Faith of Generation Y* research that the 'deceptively simple' solution to young people's indifference to the Christian faith is involvement in authentic Christian community.[53]

Developing this, Shepherd suggests that not only is it important that youth groups function as genuine Christian community for the faith development of young people but also that the group should be embedded within a larger 'ecology of faith'.[54] Consequently he raises questions about the wider life of the church for youth ministry, including questions of the relationship of a youth group to this ecology of faith. These questions were beyond the scope of Shepherd's thesis but, taken together, these studies point strongly to the importance of Christian community to young people's Christian identity, and that a faithful transmission of faith to young people best takes place where they feel this authentic community exists. In addition the presence of certain practices seems to identify a community as Christian.

Rowan Williams has said that 'church is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to deepening and sustaining that encounter in their encounter with each other'.[55] He acknowledges that this definitional point of departure for ecclesiology allows room for 'theological diversity, rhythm and style'[56] in how church is expressed. Consequently, it is possible for the community of a youth group in which participants encounter Jesus and sustain their faith in Him through the encounters and practices of the group, to have some ecclesiological value. This might be especially true as the youth group also considers its place in the wider ecology of faith.[57] The implication here is that ecclesiological reflection is a previously unacknowledged, yet vital component to faith transmission with young people. This thesis will begin from this ecclesiological

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[52] Emery-Wright, "A Qualitative Study Construction of How 14-16 Year Olds Understand Worship," 76.
[53] Collins-Mayo, Mayo, and Nash, *Generation Y*, 98.
[54] Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian," 293.
[55] In *Mission-Shaped Church*, vii. See also Andrew Goddard, *Rowan Williams: His Legacy* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2013), 54 - 5.
[56] *Mission-Shaped Church*, vii.
[57] In the forward to *Mission-Shaped Church* Williams also acknowledges the need for churches to learn from each other in the proposed diversity, thus endorsing consideration of the wider ecology of faith, ibid.

gap in youth ministry literature and build to some extent on the work described above by interrogating Urban Saints to uncover any underlying ecclesiology and argue for the contribution of this to wider ecclesiological debates.

In addition to this limited attention given to the ecclesiological status of youth group ministry within the youth ministry literature, I have noticed the lack of a youth ministry voice within contemporary conversations about the church and mission. As an example of these conversations in the UK the Fresh Expressions movement grew out of a desire to close the gap between the church and contemporary society.[58] This gap is often framed in terms of perceived shifts in cultural climate, usually termed as the move from modernity to post-modernity and from Christendom to a post-Christendom context.[59] Fresh Expressions is based on responding to this by planting new forms of church that are envisioned to be primarily for those who are not already Christians or churchgoers.[60] The

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[58] In large part the motivation behind Fresh Expressions is a decline in church attendance that has been happening within the Church of England for nearly a century (Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), 1). Research demonstrates that despite some recent trends this drop in church involvement has also been the experience of other denominations (Peter Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing - What the 2005 English Church Census Reveals*, 1st ed. (Christian Research, 2006)). Often this has been reported with dramatic headlines and provocative language. It is a 'time bomb' (*Mission-Shaped Church*, 40) in which various denominations are at risk of 'meltdown' leading to their predicted non-existence within a generation (*Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*, 1). The talk of a time bomb refers specifically to the drop in number of children and young people involved in church life. Specifically in terms of young people the numerical decline became encapsulated in the headline figure stating that a thousand young people a week left the church in the UK. (See ibid). Elsewhere statistics show the number of young people involved in church life had halved up to 1996 (Sudworth, Cray, and Russell, *Mission-Shaped Youth*, 7; *Youth a Part: Young People and the Church*, (Westminster, London: Church House Publishing, 1996), 13). It has been predicted that by the year 2040 almost no one under the age of twenty will attend church with less than two percent of the whole population attending regularly (Ian J Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How Are They Authentically Church and Anglican?* (London UK: Moot Community Publishing, 2007), 34).
[59] A significant amount of the literature discussing contemporary ecclesiology in the UK devotes time to discussing post-modernity, post-Christendom or both. For a focus on post-modernity see, e.g., Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Paternoster Press, 2002); Graeme Fancourt, *Brand New Church? The Church and the Postmodern Condition* (London: SPCK, 2013); John Drane, *After Mcdonaldization: Mission, Ministry and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008); *The Mcdonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2000). For more of a post-Christendom focus see, e.g., David Goodhew, Andrew Roberts, and Michael Volland, *Fresh! An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of the Church and Pioneer Ministry* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012); Murray, *Church after Christendom*; *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Authentic Media, 2004). There has been criticism that proponents of new forms of the church read the contemporary culture and context from an unhelpfully ecclesio-centric viewpoint, e.g. John Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 19.
[60] Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012), xiv.

movement is about a 'reforming re-imagination of the Church'.[61] Each individual fresh

expression is intended to look different, shaped by its local context, rather than beginning

with a prior model of church.[62] In this way they are to be churches born out of mission, or

are mission-shaped. The intention is that these newly planted fresh expressions of church

carry equal legitimacy as traditional parish churches within the Anglican Communion.[63]

They were initially anticipated to demonstrate maturity by becoming self-propagating,

self-governing and self-financing.[64] They are seen as 'new ways of living out and

communicating the Gospel'; however seeking to define them as churches raises a number

of questions about what it means to be the church.[65]

A 'mixed economy' in church life has been proposed and much discussed to allow

inherited and new forms of church to exist with equal standing and legitimacy.[66] Fresh

Expressions are just one aspect of wider moves within the UK and USA that seek to

reshape the church to better connect with contemporary life.[67] These moves to reshape

church are predicated on perceived changes to the way in which people live and connect

within contemporary life. With a focus on networks rather than geography it is argued

that an individual's relationships and time no longer centre on a local community but on

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[61] With 'faithfulness to the past and contextual faithfulness to the present held together,' George Lings, "The Day of Small Things: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church in 21 Diocese of the Church of England," (Church Army, 2016), 9.

[62] *Mission-Shaped Church*, 105.

[63] Known as 'inherited church' within *MSC* and more widely (see, e.g. Ibid., 96.).

[64] Ibid., 120 - 3. The value of this three-self principle is now disputed. In favour of this principle see "Small Things," 18. For a report questioning the value of the principle see Andy Wier, "Sustaining Young Churches: A Pilot Study of Fresh Expresisons of the Church in the Church of England," (Church Army, 2016), 18.

[65] *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), vii.

[66] The concept of a developing 'mixed economy' in church life is key to explaining how the new forms of church are to work in relationship with inherited churches. The benefits and challenges of this concept are much discussed. See, e.g. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (SCM Press, 2010), 73 - 5; Robin Gamble, "Mixed Economy: Nice Slogan or Working Reality," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2008), 15 - 23; Michael Moynagh, "Do We Need a Mixed Economy?," ibid., 177 - 84; Louise Nelstrop, "Mixed Economy or Ecclesial Reciprocity: What Does the Church of England Really Want to Promote?," ibid., 196 - 203; Stephen Conway, "Generous Episcopacy," in *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard (London: SCM Press, 2013), 25; "What Is the Mixed Economy?," https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/mixedeconomy. Accessed 1/7/16

[67] See for example Emerging Church and Missional Church. E.g. Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*. and E.g. Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998). Olson highlights both the emergent and missional church conversations as being encouraging and potentially constructive for developing evangelical ecclesiology (see "Free Church Ecclesiology and Evangelical Spirituality," in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion*, ed. John G Stackhouse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 134 - 5).

an array of interest groups, activities, friends and colleagues, none of which need be within the locality of their home. Proponents of Fresh Expressions extend this thinking into church life and consequently render the parish model as outdated, no longer adequate to attend to the way that individuals live their lives.[68] While these moves in church life are seen as relational and incarnational,[69] they are also strongly challenged as a misreading of contemporary society with the counter-claim that the Parish model itself is intrinsically incarnational due to its local emphasis.[70]

There is some connection between these ecclesiological movements and work among young people. The influence, for example, of youth congregations in shaping their missiological emphasis is documented.[71] Similarly there are influential voices within the Fresh Expressions movement who developed their understanding of the church and mission, at least in part, through work with and reflection on young people.[72] There are also examples of established Fresh Expression churches that are predominantly aimed at young people.[73] However, the kind of work and Christian youth groups run through organisations such as Urban Saints is largely absent from these conversations. Consequently, this thesis will make a contribution to both youth ministry and the Fresh Expressions debate. This contribution will be made in two steps: first, by revealing the underlying interweaving ecclesiology of Urban Saints; and, second, by demonstrating the way that this interweaving ecclesiology moves the Fresh Expressions debate forward.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Following this introduction chapter 2 provides an historical review of Urban Saints. This takes a pre-dominantly chronological approach to telling the organisation's story, detailing its origins, the ways in which it formed its expression of Christian life and its self-understanding in relation to the church. The origins of Urban Saints, as The Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes, is shown to be influenced by two other organisations that developed in the nineteenth century – the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the

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[68] *Mission-Shaped Church*, 1 - 15.
[69] Cathy Ross and David Dadswell, "Church Growth Research Project: Church Planting," (Ripon College, Cuddesdon: Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology, 2013), 29.
[70] Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 152 - 6.
[71] Hall, "Rise of the Youth Congregation."
[72] For example Graham Cray and Jonny Baker
[73] See https://www.stlreading.org/who-we-are-1/. Accessed 25/10/17.

Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM). The founder, Albert Kestin, was a trained CMS missionary who recruited others with a similar background to support the early work of Urban Saints. CMS then influenced the organisation's philosophy to be based on that of a missionary movement. CSSM on the other hand provided the inspiration for creating groups specifically for young people (initially only teenage boys) that were outside of the congregational life of the church. These together contributed to developing a particular form of Christian life that contains an inherent ecclesial imagination expressed in a focus on individual faith conversion, small groups of likeminded believers and a wider national (and even international) fellowship that ran outside of denominational boundaries. Out of this historical review key research questions are identified that give specific shape and articulation to the research puzzle described above.

Following this, and flowing from the research questions, chapter 3 details the methodological approach I have taken to carry out this research. This approach argues for the research being broadly within practical theology since it aims to ask theological questions of Christian practice. Specifically the methodology finds its point of departure in David Tracy's call for theology to be understood as open-ended dialogical enquiry. This vision for a conversational form of theology is given a specific framework by the four-voice model for theology in which formal, normative, espoused and operant theology contribute together to deepen both theological understanding and Christian practice. The four-voice model leads to a two-step methodological process of drawing out the ecclesiology of Urban Saints before placing it in conversation with Fresh Expressions. This framework provides the scaffolding within which the constructive theological moves of this thesis can be made. In order to utilize this framework the methodology details the ways that the work of Elaine Graham and Jeff Astley help to understand the theological contribution of both the practice of the Urban Saints groups and the articulation of the participants' beliefs. The methodological chapter also discusses the methods of empirical research that were used to draw out the operant and espoused theologies from two extended case studies of Urban Saints groups.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain extended case studies of St Aidans Crusaders and Urban Saints Hightown.[74] These case studies were undertaken concurrently over an eighteen-month period.[75] In order to preserve the distinctiveness of each they are given separate chapters. St Aidans is first as it provides a natural bridge from the historical review of Urban Saints to the current practice of these groups. The case studies are structured to provide a thick description for each group that begins with an overview of a group night to provide a detailed picture of what actually happened within the groups and what the core practices of the groups are. Following this each case study chapter details the core modes of belonging that create identity and provide the reasons why young people and leaders choose to continue participating in the groups. Finally the case studies detail connections with the church for each group through core ecclesial practices and relational links to local churches.

Chapter 6 offers an analysis of the case study data in order to complete the first step of the two-step methodological process of this thesis. This analysis revolves around the contradictions and paradoxes at the heart of the case study data. These reveal that there is a dominant discourse of the church within the Urban Saints groups that restricts church to what happens on Sunday mornings within congregational life, consequently placing the groups outside of the church. However the contradictions and paradoxes within the data reveal a hidden discourse about church that highlights ways in which the Urban Saints groups carry an ecclesial life within them.

Consequently, participants consider the groups a form of church as they choose to appropriate the relationships and practices of the groups in this way. This ecclesial life and identity is not consistent or a given however, rather it is often hidden and ambiguous. In the ambiguity though is the possibility that the groups become communities of practice that stimulate and sustain faith through participants encountering Christ together.[76] This possibility means that the groups can be seen as potential ecclesial spaces that can become part of the experience of church as they interact with other expressions of ecclesial life. In and of themselves they are not churches, however the thread of Urban

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[74] The names of the groups and participants are pseudonyms throughout this thesis.
[75] See Appendix A for details.
[76] To echo Rowan Williams ecclesiological point of departure discussed earlier.

Saints groups can contribute to ecclesial life. This is the interweaving form of church that constitutes the coming together of operant and espoused theological voices.

Finally, chapter 7 constitutes the second methodological step in which this interweaving approach is placed into open-ended conversation with the ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions. This conversation is fruitful as it details the contribution that Urban Saints' underlying approach to church and mission can make to the Fresh Expressions debate, whilst also drawing on resources within Fresh Expressions to regulate the interweaving ecclesiology. This chapter details the foundations of the interweaving approach through discussion of the distinctions between modal and sodal forms of church life. In addition this section discusses how to regulate the interweaving approach through utilising inward and outward relational dynamics drawn from aspects of the Fresh Expressions literature.

Following this I discuss how the potential ecclesial spaces of Urban Saints groups offer a distinct approach to church and mission by resisting a church first approach. This leads to reversing the usual direction of ecclesiological thinking so that encountering the risen Christ leads to one becoming part of the life of the church. Finally the chapter argues that an interweaving approach utilizing potential ecclesial spaces provides a form of ecclesial life that is appropriate for the church in mission, offering a framework in which flexibility and an ability to change is intrinsic to ecclesial life. Consequently the theological conversation in this thesis deepens the understanding of the church in mission and of Urban Saints style of youth group ministry in the UK. After this final main chapter I offer a concluding summary that includes questions raised by this thesis that would require further research to pursue.

2. THE STORY OF URBAN SAINTS AND THE CHURCH

On Saturday evenings during term time, at a high school in the city, the leaders of St Aidans Crusaders meet with young people to study the Bible, build relationships and provide social activities. In 2015 the group celebrated its centenary, marking a hundred years since it was elected to the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes.[77] The team of leaders running the group is made up of men and women drawn from churches across the city, while the young people attending are boys and girls from a mixture of schools and backgrounds. Some are involved in the same churches as the leaders; others have little other connection with the Christian faith. The main leader is a Dr. Victoria Hall, whose father W. L. Hall had become a Christian through the class over seventy years earlier before also becoming part of leadership team.[78]

In 1915 when the class[79] was launched it met, as it does now, on what could be termed 'neutral ground'.[80] However rather than meeting on a Saturday evening the class gathered on a Sunday afternoon at three o'clock. At that time the attendees at the class were boys, almost without exception from private and public schools. Many of them would wear a badge pinned on their lapel. The badge was shaped like a shield with a cross on. Some would bring Bibles with the same crest embossed on the cover. Shortly after three o'clock the boys would take their seat among rows of chairs set out quite formally and the class would begin. An hour of prayers, choruses, hymns, scripture readings, a Bible talk and some notices followed. Some of those leading sections of the meeting would be older boys from the group and there might be conversation of a mid-week prayer meeting, a summer camp and sporting activities to join in with as well.

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[77] St Aidans Crusaders has been in existence since 1915 (Crusaders, *Crusader Group and Leader Record Book* (1906 - 1985). It is a member of Urban Saints, originally the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes. This Union has been in formal existence since 1906 ("Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906," (1906). By the start of the Second World War Crusaders had 256 (*The Story of the Crusaders' Union: These Fifty Years* (London: The Crusaders' Union, 1956), 17. Though gathered together in a Union, the classes are independent of each other by virtue of each being led by a team of local leaders. I discuss these origins in more detail below.

[78] In personal correspondence with Dr Victoria Hall, 14/12/13.

[79] The groups were originally called classes. I discuss this in more detail below.

[80] For Crusader classes 'neutral ground' meant specifically not the premises of any particular local church. I discuss this and the other aspects of Crusader classes described in this opening section in more detail throughout this present chapter. For the St Aidans class this neutral ground was the 'The Abbey Institute' (see Crusaders, "The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1926").

In late 2013 the rooms in which the group meet are set up less formally and there is no time spent singing choruses or hymns, instead there is significant time set aside for games and crafts. None of the young people appear to be wearing the badges or arrive carrying Bibles similarly adorned. The Bibles however are handed out and used when the teaching begins. A few of the young people are noticeably wearing black hooded jumpers with the name 'Urban Saints' emblazoned across the front of it.

This same 'Urban Saints' logo is evident on similar hooded tops and other items of clothing, as well as on a big screen, some twenty miles away on a Friday evening as a local church building in the market town of Hightown is transformed into the location for another Urban Saints youth group. This youth group has been in existence since 2006 and is loud with lots of games and activities, making use of an array of media through screens, a sound system and computers.[81] There is a team of leaders who are members of the church running the group. It is part of the outreach work of the church whilst also being part of a national organisation called Urban Saints. Alongside the games and activities is time for discussion based Bible study. The energetic founder of this Friday evening Urban Saints group is a man named Matt Summerfield, who is also the Senior Pastor of the church in which the group meets and the Chief Executive of Urban Saints. Urban Saints is the organisation formerly known as the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes.[82]

These two groups described have some similarities but also many differences, not least the length of time they have been in existence and the nature of the group at the time of its launch. One is independent of all local churches and the other is part of a specific local church's work among young people. Despite the differences in name, location, format and local affiliation the groups have a shared heritage and are part of the same story. This is the story of the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes that became known as Urban Saints as it entered its second century.[83] This chapter seeks to tell the story of this unique organisation by detailing its origins, structures, and outlook. In particular, it charts the

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[81] Urban Saints Hightown, "Urban Saints Hightown," http://urbansaints.wix.com/ush#! Accessed 20/11/13

[82] These two groups described briefly here form the depth case studies in chapters 4 and 5. This overview simply provides a brief snapshot of the groups by way of introduction.

[83] For simplicity I will refer to the organisation by the name that is appropriate for the era to which I am writing, but using the simpler 'Crusaders' rather than the full title 'Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes' for the period up until it changed its name to Urban Saints.

approach it and its groups have taken with regards to the church both in general and locally over the years. In doing so this chapter will identify an underlying ecclesial imagination within the organisation and a practical normative approach to the church. These will then be used to form research questions that will drive the research behind this thesis. This chapter is largely based on primary data drawn from archival research within Urban Saints' archive. This includes records such as their complete collection of minute books, magazines and vision documents dating from 1906 to the present day. Some key secondary literature was utilized to further illuminate the findings from the primary sources.[84]

2.1 The Origins and Influences on Crusaders

This opening section will outline the origins of Crusaders, in particular charting the key influences and personalities that led to the organisation taking the shape that it did. This will highlight in particular the paradox of Crusaders being outside of the church and yet in some ways resembling aspects of ecclesial life for its participants. To understand the roots from which Crusaders grew the story begins in 1867 and in the drawing rooms of a Mr. Josiah Spiers of Islington and a Mr. Tom Bishop of South London. Independently of each other both Spiers and Bishop had begun special services for children in their drawing rooms. Additionally, in 1868, whilst on holiday in Llandudno, North Wales, Spiers spontaneously held a Bible meeting for children on the beach. Due to the similarity in the work they had both begun Spiers and Bishop decided to collaborate and the Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM) was born.[85]

They worked together pioneering this new style of mission to children for over forty years. A significant aim of their work was to communicate the Christian faith in a way that was accessible for the children themselves. This innovative approach led to the importance of simple songs and choruses, and the production of their own CSSM chorus books for use in the meetings. Pete Ward describes how the 'simple words and lively tunes' of the hymns, alongside 'an informal style of preaching' came from the expectation

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[84] I am extremely grateful for the openness shown by those at Urban Saints in granting me open access to their archive.
[85] Ward, *Growing Up*, 27 - 30.

that the children themselves could and should personally respond to Christ.[86]

Furthermore, in 1879 they built on this belief that the Christian faith was accessible to children through providing daily Bible passages for children to read and launched the Children's Scripture Union.[87]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a gentlemen called Albert Kestin was involved in a Bible class in which a younger man, Herbert Bevington, was being nurtured in his Christian faith.[88] Kestin then joined the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and, from 1895, spent some years in Calcutta, India as a missionary.[89] On his return to London, while on furlough and studying for ordination in 1900, he lodged with a Mr. W. P. Saffrey and his wife in Crouch End.[90] Mr. Saffrey would later be described by Kestin as a 'senior Christian worker' and nominated to act as one of the first Vice-Presidents of Crusaders.[91] Whilst Kestin was staying with them, Mrs. Saffrey suggested the idea of a 'Bible Class for some of these boys who do nothing on Sunday afternoons' and further, in a manner resembling the now established work of CSSM among children, offered their drawing room as a meeting place.[92] As Kestin recalls:

> In her drawing room on Sunday afternoon, April 1st 1900, four boys met me in the first "Crusaders'" class. Next Sunday there were only two boys and for the first few weeks little progress was registered so that I began to ask myself if we really were working out any plan of God.[93]

From these inauspicious beginnings a youth ministry movement that was to influence the church in the UK during the twentieth century was born. The class began to grow and after leading on his own for twelve months Kestin recruited co-leaders in his 'old boy' Herbert Bevington and a missionary student known to Kestin through the CMS, a Mr. E. S. Daniell.[94] In the autumn of 1901 the now ordained Rev. Kestin returned to Calcutta, India

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[86] Ibid., 27.
[87] Scripture Union, "The Scripture Union Story," http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/AboutScriptureUnion/TheScriptureUnionstory/452.id. Accessed 11/12/13
[88] Crusaders, "Notes on the History of Crusader Classes (Pt1)," *The Crusader*, October 1906.
[89] Albert Kestin, in *Extracts from Annual Letters 1895* (CMS, 1895).
[90] Crusaders, "Leader's Conference Minutes, 20th March 1907," (1907).
[91] "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906."
[92] Albert Kestin, "Looking Back," *The Crusader*, 1919.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid. The archive records of the Church Missionary Society show that Mr. E S Daniell served in Uganda during 1903 – 4: CMS, "Church Missionary Society Archive: Index to Printed Volumes of *Extracts from the Annual Letters of the Missionaries* (1886 - 1912), Part I: 1886 - 1904," ed. Birmingham University Cadbury Research Library (1886 - 1904).

with CMS.[95] The class now numbered sixty and was left under the leadership of Bevington and, until he left for the overseas mission field, Daniell. The class continued to grow and in October 1902, upon growing too large for the Saffrey's drawing room, moved to meet in the dining room of Oakfield School.[96]

Herbert Bevington's business took him to Brighton for two years and, motivated by his leadership of the original class in Crouch End, he launched a Brighton and Hove class on February 21st 1904, experiencing great growth in this new class almost immediately.[97] With Mr. Daniell now readying himself for the mission field, a further CMS missionary student, Mr. Claude D. Ovens, took over leadership of the class in Crouch End.[98] Inspired by this work, by 1906 there were further classes in Richmond, Clapham, Blackheath, Camden, Hull, Stroud Green, Ealing, Chiswick, Wandsworth and Muswell Hill.[99] Among these classes were some, such as Muswell Hill, that were launched and led by senior members of the original Crouch End class.[100] Additionally a class in Hull came into existence as a result of the boys who launched it meeting and being inspired by members of the Crouch End and Richmond classes at a CSSM beach mission event they attended whilst on holiday. This class was launched in September 1905, immediately after the return of the boys from the holiday.[101]

By the time Kestin returned once again from Calcutta in 1906,[102] as well as the original group in Crouch End, there were eleven other independent 'Crusader' Bibles classes, with others being planned.[103] There was also informal communication between them through the sharing of prayer requests. In late March 1906, inspired by the energy of Herbert

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[95] Albert Kestin, in *Extracts from Annual Letters 1902* (CMS, 1902).

[96] Crusaders, "Notes on the History of Crusader Classes (Pt1); "Second Report of the Work of the Crusaders' Union 1909 - 10," (1910).

[97] "Notes on the History of Crusader Classes (Pt1)."

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid; "Notes on the History of Crusader Classes (Pt2)," *The Crusader*, November 1906; Albert Kestin, "Looking Back," ibid., 1919.

[100] Crusaders, "Notes on the History of Crusader Classes (Pt1)," ibid., October 1906.

[101] "Notes on the History of Crusader Classes (Pt2)."

[102] Kestin's return at this time was not planned but rather, according to the gentleman who took over his CMS work in Calcutta, due to ill health. See Rev. B. Grundy, in *Extracts from Annual Letters 1906* (CMS, 1906).

[103] The name 'Crusaders' came about quite by chance. According to two official histories of the movement Kestin happened across a picture of a mediaeval Crusader with the motto 'Be Strong' in a book and, finding the image appealing for an invitation card he was preparing for his Bible class, acquired the printing block for the picture. Thus the Bible class became the Crouch End Crusaders and the name spread as the further classes were launched (see Crusaders, *These Fifty Years*, 6; Jack Watford, *Yesterday and Today: History of Crusaders*, ed. Heather Keep (Crusaders, 1995), 2 - 4).

Bevington, the leaders of these current classes met together and the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes was born.[104]

The minutes of this first meeting highlight four important aspects of the origins of Crusaders. First, the significance of CSSM is clear. A formal association through membership of the CSSM was proposed alongside a decision to request that Crusaders use the CSSM magazine, *Our Boy's Magazine,* but with a distinctive Crusader cover[105] and some additional pages of specific Crusader news.[106] Further inspired by CSSM, Crusaders also decided there was need to have a chorus book for the classes that would, as with the songs used in children's services by CSSM, help to communicate the Christian faith in ways accessible to the boys in attendance.[107] That Kestin in particular held the work of CSSM in high esteem is demonstrated by his use of their 'scripture union' work during his second spell of missionary work in India.[108]

Second, the influence of missionary work is demonstrated in that three of the early Crusader class leaders present were commended as they were shortly leaving for missionary work overseas.[109] Indeed the early leaders of Crusaders saw the work not as youth ministry, but as a missionary movement reaching out to young people.[110] Third, from the beginning those setting up Crusaders were firmly committed to the ethos of evangelicalism[111] and were insistent that each class elected to the new organisation would be committed to being evangelical in nature too. Specifically, the following would be expected from each class:

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[104] Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906; "Second Report of the Work of the Crusaders' Union 1909 - 10," 5; cf. Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 5. By the end of 1906 there were nineteen classes in existence Crusaders, "Second Report of the Work of the Crusaders' Union 1909 - 10," 5.
[105] Featuring the illustration first used by Kestin in his invitation cards for the Crouch End class.
[106] Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906". Additionally in 1908 two men from CSSM leadership were appointed as Vice Presidents of Crusaders (see "Leaders' Conference Mintues, 26th March 1908").
[107] "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906."
[108] Albert Kestin, in *Extracts from Annual Letters 1904* (CMS, 1904). The 'Children's Scripture Union' was a system of daily Bible reading introduced by CSSM in 1879 (see Scripture Union, "The Scripture Union Story").
[109] Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906." These men were the now Rev. Ovens (mentioned above in connection with the Crouch End class), a Mr. S F Ford and a Mr. F E Keay. Both Ovens and Ford were linked with CMS in particular (see CMS, "Church Missionary Society Archive: Index to Printed Volumes of Extracts from the Annual Letters of the Missionaries (1886 - 1912), Part II: 1905 - 1912," ed. Birmingham University Cadbury Research Library).
[110] See, e.g., the reflections of Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 12.
[111] Crusaders, *These Fifty Years*, 8.

'The whole Bible be taught as the Word of God, and a keen evangelical and protestant spirit be maintained, the classes remaining unsectarian and working as far as possible in harmony with all denominations and local churches.'[112]

The significance and impact of the evangelicalism of Crusaders will be discussed in more detail presently. However, for now, I turn to the fourth and final characteristic of Crusaders that was made explicit at the Union's inception in that first Leader's Conference of 1906 - this being the particular boys that were the target for the mission of the Crusaders' Union. The record of the meeting states:

It was felt impossible to lay down very hard and fast lines owing to varying local conditions, but the meeting laid down as a guiding principle that the Crusaders' classes aimed at the upper middle class boys attending public and private schools and do not accept board school boys.[113]

It may seem strange that Crusaders articulated such a specific, narrow focus for this work, however, with some reflection, the reasons behind this become clearer. Mark Senter has written of the way in which specific social conditions, and times of social change in particular, can provide the ideal conditions in which an innovative, grassroots youth movement takes shape under an acknowledged leader.[114] It follows then that Crusaders' concise mission focus is likely to have come about due to the social situations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among these changing social situations was the industrial revolution in which the move from child to adulthood was slowed, thus creating space for a new category of adolescence to appear as a recognized life stage[115] and, alongside this, the rise of evangelicalism as a 'much louder and more intrusive' form of Christianity.[116]

More specific social conditions can also be seen to lead directly to the particular and narrow focus of Crusaders' work on public and private schoolboys. In order to expand on these specific social conditions I briefly highlight the rise of the Sunday School movement

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[112] "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906."
[113] Ibid.
[114] Mark H. Senter, III, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry* (Victor Books, 1992), 62 - 6.
[115] Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, Il.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 28; Chap Clark, "The Changing Face of Adolescence," in *Starting Right*, ed. K.C. Dean, Dave Rahn, and Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 41 - 3. It is not necessary to go into further detail here on sociological, physiological and psychological theories of the development of the term adolescence. It is sufficient to recognize that as a distinct life stage it first appeared in the nineteenth century.
[116] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 49.

through the nineteenth century. It was evangelicals that launched the first Sunday Schools in the late eighteenth century to provide a place of education for the children who, due to requirements of the era to work other days, didn't have the opportunity for this elsewhere in the week.[117]

Sunday Schools were able to attract the children of the working classes by offering an education that, due to work commitments, they would otherwise have been unable to have. The opportunity was then used to ensure that the education provided was Christian and involved the reading and reciting of hymns and scriptures. The Sunday Schools tended to meet on both a Sunday morning and afternoon.[118] It follows then that with the main reach of Sunday Schools being among the working classes those from the middle and upper classes who, significantly, would have been attending public or private school during the week were less likely to be attached to a Sunday school on a Sunday afternoon. It was precisely one of these unattached groups of boys with free time on a Sunday afternoon that came to the attention of Albert Kestin and formed the group from which his initial Bible class began.[119] Additionally, CSSM co-founder Tom Bishop identified a trend among thirteen and fourteen year old boys who, often due to starting work, felt they were too old for Sunday School and thus beginning to be lost to the churches.[120]

This influence of and formal connection sought with the CSSM, with its focus on running special services and beach missions for children of the middle and upper class families taking advantage of the new trend and possibilities for family holidays, suggests that the work of Crusaders would gain legitimacy from among that same section of society.[121]

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[117]Ward, *Growing Up*, 24; Danny Brierley, *Joined Up: An Introduction to Youth Work and Ministry* (Authentic Lifestyle, 2003), 31; Kenda Creasy Dean, Chapman Clark, and Dave Rahn, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* (Zondervan, 2001), 78. Core among the aims of the Sunday school movement was Christian education and bringing the children to Christ. The pattern set by the Sunday Schools of gathering children separately for Christian education and religious instruction was influential on the development of what Pete Ward calls 'youth fellowship work' where young people gather separately from the rest of the Christian fellowship (see *Growing Up*, 24).
[118] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1988), 123.
[119] Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906; Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 1.
[120] Specifically Bishop is quoted as saying: 'Often the Sunday School class leads the child to a certain point and then no further. They come regularly to Sunday School, but they do not come to Christ. At thirteen or fourteen they go to work, and fancy themselves to be too big for Sunday School – and so we lose them', (see N. Sylvester, *God's Word in a Young World* (Scripture Union, 1985), 25; cited in Ward, *Growing Up*, 29).
[121] Both Ward *Growing Up*, 29, and Watford *Yesterday and Today*, 19 describe the growing popularity among the upper-middle classes for seaside holidays at this time.

Additionally, Crusaders delayed articulating a detailed declaration of faith as it was deemed sufficient that their views be identified with those of CSSM.[122] This strongly suggests that the work of CSSM was well enough known among the constituency that Crusaders were working with that identifying with their work would lend credence to the fledgling Crusaders' Union.[123]

As described above, from the beginning those setting up Crusaders were firmly committed to the ethos of evangelicalism and were insistent that each class elected to the new organisation would also be committed to being evangelical. Evangelical religion had been in existence in Britain for at least a hundred and fifty years by the beginning of the twentieth century.[124] Evangelicalism cannot be seen as a coherent, narrow movement but rather is diverse and known for its complexity.[125] However, amidst this diversity one of the traits generally acknowledged as being key within evangelicalism is activism typified in innovation.[126] David Bebbington counts activism as one of four characteristics of evangelicalism, the others being Biblicism, Crucicentrism, and Conversionism.[127] This four-fold description is widely regarded as the best means to summarize what is meant by evangelicalism.[128] It falls short of universal acceptance however.[129] For Timothy Larsen the weakness in this description is that it fails to provide a definition that can adequately identify a particular Christian community.[130] Larsen does however allude to the innate activism of evangelical expressions of Christianity by describing the importance of 'participating in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all people'.[131]

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[122] Crusaders, "Leaders' Conference Minutes, 21st September 1907."

[123] "Second Report of the Work of the Crusaders' Union 1909 - 10," 7.

[124] Its origins as a movement have been dated to the 1730s (see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 1). Use of the term to describe a strand of the Christian faith, however, goes further back to the sixteenth century (see Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (InterVarsity, 1995)).

[125] Ward, *Growing Up*, 6; Leanne Van Dyk, "The Church in Evangelical Theology and Practice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 128.

[126] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 3; George Rawlyk, A., Mark A Noll, and David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll Rawlyk, Bebbington David, and A. George (Oxford University Press, USA, 1994), 6.

[127] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 3; Rawlyk, Noll, and Bebbington, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism*, 6.

[128] E.g. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism*.

[129] Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1 - 3.

[130] Ibid., 3.

[131] Ibid., 1. Debating the usefulness or otherwise of these summary descriptions of evangelicalism further is beyond the scope of the present project.

The origins of Crusaders demonstrate the way in which this inherent evangelical tendency towards innovation leads to evangelical organisations.[132] However, as demonstrated, evangelicalism is only one of the influences that led to Crusaders taking shape in the way it did. Of equal significance are the specific work of the CSSM in providing both the inspiration for the methods and important relational connections, the missionary outlook of Kestin and other early leaders trained for and experienced in overseas missionary work through the CMS and the clearly articulated narrow focus on mission to private and public schoolboys. These four influences find expression in a vital characteristic that was embodied in the work of Crusaders – the independence from formal church or denominational structures and affiliation, articulated as the classes being 'unsectarian' in the minutes of the first Leader's Conference.[133] This independence however did not mean a complete separation from church; rather, through the leaders and core practices of the groups, a consistent connection to the church was maintained within the independence. Resultant of this a characteristic ambiguity in relation to the church developed within the work. This is discussed further in sections to come and throughout the thesis.

St Aidans Crusaders is able to trace its history back to this first decade of Crusader's work. Indeed the current leader is only one generation removed from her father who, as a boy, became a Christian through the group in its early years. Consequently, when given the opportunity, I realised that this group would make for an excellent case study. The next section discusses in detail the core ecclesial independence that was characteristic of Crusader's work in general and the St Aidan's group in particular.

2.2 The Ecclesial Imagination and Faith Tradition of Crusaders

This section explores why the classes of the formative years of Crusaders (including St Aidans) took the shape they did as Bible classes outside of church structures by discussing significant aspects of the ecclesial independence that was the hallmark of the early Crusader movement and classes. Though outwardly independent of the church the classes and the Union as a whole displayed an ecclesial imagination, fostered by passing on leadership, values and organisational norms down through generations. Consequently a strong practical normative approach to the Christian faith and church was developed

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[132] Ward, *Growing Up*, 23; Senter, *The Coming Revolution*, 42 - 6.
[133] Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906."

within Crusaders. The ecclesial imagination is a way of describing the way in which ambiguity regarding church is expressed practically within the work of Urban Saints.

By arranging themselves in the manner that they did, as a union of classes outside the normal channels of ecclesial life, the pioneers of Crusaders were following the moves made by others in this early evangelicalism. This is unsurprising in the light of a claim by McGrath that in the pre-war era evangelicalism was a 'despised minority' in the English church.[134] As a despised minority their influence would have been limited. Churches or parishes sympathetic to evangelicalism were few and far between. It is from this place on the margins of ecclesiastical life that innovative moves of evangelicalism were made and that helped to shape the extra-ecclesial manner of many of these innovations.[135] The situation is such that Bebbington describes a 'displacement [of evangelicals] within the Church of England by men of higher churchmanship'.[136] It is likely that in the light of this situation for evangelicals within church life in the UK, especially when placed alongside the natural activism inherent in the evangelical outlook, they sought belonging, connection and community outside of formal ecclesial boundaries and often through the organisations they were quick to launch. Stanley Grenz describes this as the 'parachurch ethos' of evangelicalism.[137] Consequently it has been noted that historically evangelicals were not committed to any particular theory of the church or denomination, living with a 'minimalist ecclesiology'.[138] Moreover the rise of evangelical Christianity has not been confined to any one denomination, neither is it a denomination in itself.[139]

Despite this minimalist ecclesiology, and a lack of formal ecclesial understanding, the way in which Crusaders gathered and their core practices when they gathered displayed a resemblance to ecclesial life that was an outworking of their evangelical drive to innovate. Bruce Hindmarsh observes what he describes as the 'ecclesial consciousness' of evangelicalism characterized by subordinating church order in favour of personal

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[134] *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity*, 35.
[135] Bebbington tells a story of rising influence of Evangelicalism in church life in Britain until the mid-nineteenth century, but highlights a 'contraction of Evangelical influence' from the 1870's (*Evangelicalism*, 141).
[136] Ibid., 146.
[137] *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Baker Books, 2006), 288.
[138] R. T. France and Alister McGrath, *Evangelical Anglicans* (London: SPCK, 1993), 3 - 4.
[139] Ibid., 4 - 5.

evangelical piety.[140] He highlights three ecclesial experiments that anticipated the evangelical movement, naming these as first, radical congregationalism, which emphasized the importance of an experience of personal conversion; second, Pietism, in which regenerate believers do not form a new church but meet in smaller groups across or outside of ecclesial boundaries; and third, Moravianism, that encouraged the growth of the 'interconfessional and international brotherhood'.[141] Traces of these, Hindmarsh claims, would be taken up within the modern evangelical movement and, in his words, be turned into 'something unprecedented'.[142]

The underlying evangelical ecclesial consciousness helps to develop what can be termed an inherent ecclesial imagination among participants of groups such as Urban Saints. Craig Dykstra uses the phrase 'ecclesial imagination' to describe what happens when a Christian community develops a way of life that fosters faith.[143] He notes in particular how this 'emerges among the people themselves' and operates in the 'many contexts where [people] live their lives'.[144] Drawing on this Ward describes the ecclesial imagination as a practical form of 'wisdom that shapes the lives of disciples'.[145] Similarly MacDougall refers to an ecclesial imagination that 'runs deeper and broader' than academic ecclesiologies. It is an imagination that 'takes shape as it is lived' and operates in a place of intersection between ideas and practices.[146] It is this notion of an instinctive form of corporate Christian life that fosters faith and a Christian way of seeing life that I want to invoke to understand why the work of Crusaders took the shape it did and had such a profound impact on many of its participants. In addition the idea of an inherent ecclesial imagination helps to articulate what it is that is carried in the practices that

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[140] Bruce Hindmarsh, "Is Evangelcial Ecclesiology an Oxymoron? A Historical Perspective," in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G Stackhouse Jnr (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 15; Richard Beaton, "Reimagining the Church: Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion*, ed. John G Stackhouse Jnr (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Academic, 2003), 217 - 8.
[141] Hindmarsh, "Evangelcial Ecclesiology," 23 - 5.
[142] Ibid., 25.
[143] Craig Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C Bass and Craig Dykstra (Cambridge UK: William B Eerdmans, 2008), 57.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church* (Baker Academic 2017), 110.
[146] Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 1 - 2.

became normative within the organisation as leadership passed from generation to generation.

My suggestion is that one of the unprecedented moves of evangelicalism (to use Hindmarsh's phrase) was the rise of the parachurch youth ministry organisations, and that Crusaders exemplify this. There are certainly distinct signs of these traits in the work of Crusaders and, in part influenced by Crusaders, modern youth ministry in general. The Bible classes that were the heart of the work of Crusaders hold echoes of the radical congregationalism, whilst the emphasis on the personal faith of the young people mirrors in some ways the emphasis of Pietism. The influence of Moravianism, encouraging fellowship in the extra-ecclesial way described by Hindmarsh, can be identified in some moves by the early leaders of Crusaders that, as of yet, have not been discussed. From the earliest days as Crusaders became formalized into an organisation, ways of providing fellowship for the leaders and boys from across the different classes were sought. These included an annual 're-Union Gathering' to bring leaders and senior boys together in London and a programme of summer camps.[147]

This ecclesial imagination of Crusaders, and the forms of gathering and practice that it involves, are examples of evangelical spirituality being formed outside the flow of mainstream church life.[148] For those growing up in Crusaders however the parachurch became the mainstream. This is demonstrated in the way that those whose Christian faith was formed through the classes and many leaders identified as Crusaders. The organisation became a kind of faith tradition with consistently held approaches to its corporate life and faith that were passed down from generation to generation in both formal and informal leadership. Not that institutional and denominational church life became irrelevant for those involved with Crusaders; it was however Crusaders that became the identifying aspect of Christian life and the area that demanded primary allegiance.[149]

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[147] Crusaders, "Leader's Conference Minutes, 20th March 1907." Pete Ward discusses the significance of camps in the development of evangelical youth ministry more broadly in *Growing Up*, 36 - 41.
[148] Ward, *Growing Up*, 42.
[149] This is still a characteristic of some leaders in St Aidans and is discussed in chapter 4.

Statements made by or about key men within the movement, but separated by over eighty years of Crusader history, exemplify the strength of this Crusader identity. I will discuss both of these examples in more detail in sections to come but for now I simply highlight the way in which Mr. A. J. Vereker, on becoming the first permanent secretary of Crusaders in 1920, was described as being 'a Crusader to his fingertips'[150] and the Chair of Crusaders' Council, Nigel Spencer, in 2002 stated, 'I *feel* "Crusaders" down through my roots'.[151] The strength of this identity with Crusaders strongly implies that those involved with the work placed a very high value on fellowship and belonging across the organisation rather than within churches or denominations, thus mirroring the Moravian influence on the evangelical ecclesial consciousness highlighted by Hindmarsh. Indeed, Crusaders are on record as asking churches to be considerate of Crusader leaders who, due to the strength of commitment to Crusaders, will have 'little, if any, time for office bearing in the Church'.[152]

The Crusader identity, this tradition of evangelical faith, was formed in two ways that are pertinent – first, through the commitment of leaders to training senior boys in leadership, thus handing on the methods and ethos of the organisation;[153] and second, through objects that outwardly enabled individuals to identify with the larger movement and association. The values, methods and heart of Crusaders were embodied for many years in the key men who led the movement. And as with Herbert Bevington, who launched the class in Brighton and Hove when his business took him there for two years, the vast majority of leaders within Crusaders have been lay members of local churches rather than ordained.[154] Consequently training for leadership in Crusaders traditionally came about as

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[150] Crusaders, "The Editor Thinks Aloud," *The Crusader*, November 1919. This description is due to Mr. Vereker's history as an original member of the Finchley Class, becoming a class leader there and being an officer on early Crusader camps.

[151] Nigel Spencer, "From the Council Chair," *Link Magazine*, September 2002. Further examples and testimonies to this effect can be found in *Celebrating the 100: Stories and Memories from 100 years of Crusaders* Ali Tompkins, *Celebrating the 100: Stories and Memories from 100 Years of Crusaders* (Wothing, UK: Verite CM Ltd, 2011).

[152] Crusaders, "Crusaders and the Churches," (1970). It is likely that this request to churches in an official leaflet was included due to leaders expressing increasing feelings of guilt due to their levels of commitment to Crusaders leaving little time to help in their churches *General Committee Minutes, March 17th 1970* (1970).

[153] This form of mentoring in leadership was highly valued by Crusader's founder Albert Kestin during his early years as a missionary in India: 'And it is also great gain to a new missionary to be quartered for some time with one of ripe experience such as I enjoyed with Dr C Baumann', Kestin, "Extracts".

[154] By way of example, the 1926 annual report lists 153 main class leaders, with only 7 of them ordained Crusaders, "The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1926".

experienced leaders passed on methods to younger, emerging leaders.[155] This is true even through those who held the position of General Secretary through the first seventy-six years of the organisation's existence. The chain of leadership demonstrated through the General Secretaries reinforced the identity and values of Crusaders over the years.

At the time of the formalization of the movement into the initial Union of Bible Classes in 1906 Mr. Herbert Bevington was nominated and elected as the Honorary General Secretary.[156] The significance of this being an honorary role is that it was a voluntary position that Bevington would carry out alongside his business and local leadership within a Crusader class. As highlighted earlier, the founder of Crusaders, the Rev. Albert Kestin, had taught Bevington in a Bible class before pursuing missionary work in India. With Kestin also named as the first Chairman of Crusaders[157] these two gentlemen were able to ensure the aims, ethos and methods of Crusaders continued as first set out in Crouch End class of 1900. Indeed it would be difficult to overemphasize the influence of Herbert Bevington, having been personally responsible for starting three of the initial group of classes that formed the Union.[158]

In 1920 Crusaders appointed their first General Secretary. This was a paid role and it was to Mr. A J Vereker they turned, a man steeped in Crusaders since its earliest days[159] and a member of the Finchley class led by Bevington.[160] Vereker remained in post leading the organisation until ill health forced him to resign in 1946, at which point the post passed to Mr. Jack Watford. Watford himself had been a member of Muswell Hill Crusaders since the age of eight, becoming a leader there at the age of twenty.[161] Then, in 1931, when the work had grown to a stage requiring an Assistant Secretary, Watford was Vereker's personal choice for the role. Thus he was the natural candidate to take over following Vereker's resignation.[162] Jack Watford remained in position until his retirement in

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[155] The commitment to developing emerging leaders remains in contemporary Urban Saints groups. See chapter 5.
[156] Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906."
[157] Ibid.
[158] "Leaders' Conference Minutes, 27th March 1909."
[159] "The Editor Thinks Aloud."
[160] "The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1926."
[161] As per the blurb for Watford, *Yesterday and Today*.
[162] Crusaders, "The Helm Changes Hands," *The Crusader*, September 1947.

1976.[163] This chain of leadership briefly described here ensured that right through the first seventy years of Crusaders existence the overall leader was one who had been initiated and trained in Crusaders' ethos and methods from the very earliest formative years.

Watford selected a man named Melville Paton as his successor.[164] Paton was also a Crusader man, having been Chairman of the Scottish Branch.[165] Paton's leadership however was relatively short-lived and he stood down in 1981 following a disagreement over how Crusaders should respond to challenges the seventies had brought to the organisation.[166] Paton's resignation marked the end of Crusader men being chosen for leadership of the organisation. It is significant that at a time that was to provide a stern challenge to the identity of Crusaders it was outside of the organisation they turned for leadership.[167]

The training of young men in leadership and the passing on of leadership within specific Crusader classes mirrors the chain of leadership of the whole organisation described above. It appears to be part of the expectation and ethos that was embedded in Crusaders' normative approach from very early on. The level of responsibility expected of the senior boys is illustrated by the following report of a paper given at an early leaders conference:

> [There was] then read a paper on the encouragement of Senior Boys to take an active part in their training, touching upon the many different ways in which their help might be utilized and the different offices they might be asked to fill. The meeting was interested to learn… that at Ealing [the leader] was able to induce members of his class not merely to say a few words but to give addresses. Mention was also made of the formation of Junior Sections conducted by senior Crusaders.[168]

This sentiment is repeated and restated often in the early years of Crusaders with regular challenges regarding, for example, 'the problem of our seniors'[169] outlining the needs arising from the number of Senior boys would soon be 'in the city' and suggesting that a

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163 Jack Watford, "From My Window," *Crusader Review*, Autumn 1976. In which year he also received an MBE for his services to young people.
164 Ibid; Crusaders, "General Committee Minutes, 16th March 1976."
165 "General Committee Minutes, 16th January 1973."
166 "General Committee Minutes, 10th September 1981."
167 I discuss these challenges and the responses of Crusaders in later sections below.
168 Crusaders, "Leaders' Conference, Evening Meeting Minutes, 21st September 1907."
169 "Leaders' Conference, Evening Meeting Minutes, 27th March 1909."

further organisation like Crusaders was needed to allow for their continued discipleship and development. Similarly the importance of encouraging senior boys to engage in Christian work is noted.[170]

Noteworthy among these comments here is that they rarely refer directly to encouragement for the senior boys to find their place and continue their development within the churches. Conversely, there often seems to be a reinforcing of the importance of Crusaders over and above the church. This is demonstrated by an extract of a boy's diary printed in an early edition of the Crusader magazine in which the boy details how he nearly fell asleep during the church sermon but was excited to attend Crusaders![171] These different examples, taken together, serve to illustrate both the independence from the church and the ethos of expecting senior boys to be involved with, or training for, some form of leadership or ministry themselves.[172] Consequently many of the boys attending Crusader classes as they were growing up found identity through a keen sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation and their class in particular. When such strength of identity is connected to the central place of faith formation it is no surprise that the organisation operated practically as a faith tradition for many.

Crusader work in St Aidans[173] demonstrates the way in which leadership and the methods of leadership were often passed on at the local level of Crusader work in a way that is similar to the national level discussed above. The St Aidans class was formed in October 1915 and among its earliest leaders was a gentleman by the name of Laurence Head.[174] Through his ministry at a local level in the St Aidans class a W. L. Hall became a Christian.[175] Mr. Hall was then elected as a leader of the class in 1938.[176] Hall met his wife

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[170] "Executive Committee Minutes, 4th March 1907."

[171] "Extract from a Diary," *The Crusader*, May 1907. The article in question is ambiguous as to whether this was an extract from a genuine diary or a fictitious account. However, either way, the point remains.

[172] Crusaders can claim some considerable success in this regard considering that as of their fiftieth anniversary in 1956 there was some 185 Crusaders serving in overseas mission, 259 had been ordained and estimates suggested around 2500 were actively engaged in other Christian work *These Fifty Years*, 60 - 1; cf. Ward, *Growing Up*, 36.

[173] As mentioned above, the work at St Aidans will be the focus of one of my case studies, detailed in chapter 4.

[174] Crusaders, *Record Book*.

[175] In personal correspondence.

[176] Crusaders, *Record Book*.

through Crusaders and it became a formative faith experience for their daughters.[177] The current group is now led by one of these daughters, Dr. Victoria Hall.[178] In this way Dr. Hall, the current main leader, can trace her own involvement in the class back through her father to Laurence Head and the early periods of the class almost a hundred years earlier. It is, at least in part, this ability to develop such a strong identity within the groups and the organisation that has enabled it to survive for the length of time that it has despite its independence from wider ecclesial and denominational structures.

Certain objects that, from the earliest days of Crusaders, came to be important in signifying that one was a Crusader further reinforced this identity. Particularly noteworthy in this regard was the Crusader badge. As early as the autumn of 1907 it was agreed to develop a symbol or sign of some kind that could be used for fellow Crusader members to recognize each other. The proposal finding most favour and being adopted at the meeting was that of a small badge that would 'be easily recognized by Crusaders, but convey nothing to outsiders'.[179] The design of the badge was inspired by the name Crusaders and St Paul's 'Armour of God' passage in Ephesians 6:10 – 20. It was in the shape of a shield with a cross through the middle. The shield was adorned with the image of a sword diagonally across the shield, with a crown and helmet in opposite corners; a short phrase that was to become the Crusader motto 'looking to Jesus' (based on Hebrews 12:1) was added in Greek underneath.[180] It soon became customary for the badge to be awarded after ten consecutive attendances at a Crusader class, resulting in the badge becoming an object that played a significant role both in maintaining identity among members and initiating members into the group.[181]

The significance of the Crusader logo and badge is demonstrated by the way that, with only a minor alteration in 1991,[182] it remained the core logo of the organisation until 2003 when a new logo, dispensing with the shield motif was introduced. Even with this new

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[177] Inspired by the work among boys a Girl's Crusader Union had launched in 1915. The two organisations worked closely together often with boys and girls classes running in parallel, but they formally merged only in 1976. See Watford, *Yesterday and Today,* 41 & 137.
[178] In personal correspondence.
[179] Crusaders, "Leaders' Conference Minutes, 21st September 1907."
[180] Watford, *Yesterday and Today,* 12.
[181] Individual classes could increase but not decrease the number of attendances before a member was presented with the badge. Consequently Crusader identity was seen as something earned through commitment rather than simply attendance ("Leaders' Conference Minutes, 27th March 1909").
[182] "A New Look," *Link Magazine,* May 1991.

logo the concession to tradition was made by keeping the classic shield as 'the formal symbol for the Crusader Union', however it was felt that a new logo would appeal more to the young people for whom the organisation exists.[183] Colleen McDannell has written of the significant role that objects as well as ideas can play in forming and shaping religious practices and identity.[184] Pete Ward has built on this to specifically describe the way that objects are influential in forming an evangelical subculture.[185] In this way the Crusader badge and logo helped to shape the identity and culture of the organisation from its earliest days.

The combination of identifying objects and intentional passing on of methods and values helped to create a clear organisational identity and faith tradition among those involved in Crusaders. In addition the focus on individual faith supported by small focused local groups with a wider inter-confessional fellowship made up of camps, sports events and other activities displays the inherent ecclesial imagination that underpins these ways of gathering. This ecclesial imagination as it was passed on in the tradition and identity of the organisation became normative, a form of orthopraxy. At the heart of these forms of gathering, and the ecclesial imagination it fostered, were simple ecclesial practices, in particular studying the Bible. The next section turns to focus on this and the influence that these forms of gathering had on the institutional churches' attempts to respond to the growing needs of young people. This will again highlight the interplay of independence from and connection with the church that is evident within the ecclesial imagination that was an indentifying feature of Crusaders.

2.3 Ecclesial Practices and Influence of Crusaders

Despite the ecclesial independence of Crusaders, the Bible and its study were the core components of any class.[186] Sentiments such as 'the centre of class life is a Bible-based meeting'[187] and 'every Crusader class seeks to concentrate on diligent and definite Bible study'[188] are reflected and reinforced regularly throughout the story of the organisation

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[183] Matt Summerfield, "New Building! New Logo! New Website! Same Passion!," ibid., May 2003.
[184] C. McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Yale University Press, 1998).
[185] *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (SCM Press, 2008), 143.
[186] This demonstrates the Biblicism identified as a key characteristic of Evangelicalism.
[187] Crusaders, "Annual Report 1974," (1974), 3.
[188] "The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1926," 6.

through annual reports, leader's handbooks and other explanatory leaflets.[189] This is also reflected in the contemporary ethos and practice of both St Aidans Crusaders and Urban Saints Hightown.[190]

In 1921, Crusaders published its first statement of faith.[191] Later reflections recall this as a move to ensure that the work and beliefs of Crusaders were not impacted by the rise of liberal interpretations of the Bible and 'higher criticism' in particular.[192] Discussions taking place around the statement of faith resulted in correspondence and face-to-face meetings between members of the Crusader leadership council and individual leaders from a particular class. These resulted in three class leaders being required to resign as leaders as they felt unable to align themselves with the statements being considered as the basis of faith, and in particular with the belief in the Bible as the whole word of God.[193] Since these moves were designed to protect the organisation from the challenge of higher criticism it can be assumed that the view held within the Crusader leadership at the time was that literal interpretations of scripture were to be assumed.[194] Consequently the way in which the Bible is used was one way in which the organisation's self identity was upheld. These debates serve to illustrate the importance with which this issue was viewed as Crusaders was becoming established in the Christian world and also to demonstrate the way in which Crusaders to some degree mirrored the debates and disputes in the wider world of evangelicalism.[195]

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[189] cf. "Second Report of the Work of the Crusaders' Union 1909 - 10; *Crusader Class Organisation and Aims*, 2nd Edition ed. (London, EC4: The Crusaders' Union, 1933); *A Look at Crusaders* (St Albans 1976); *The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1931*.
[190] Detailed in chapters 4 and 5
[191] Crusaders, "Annual Business Meeting Minutes, 14th April 1921."
[192] Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 38. Higher Criticism was a movement challenging literal interpretations of the Bible. While it had been around it church and theological circles during the second half of the nineteenth century it was only through the 1890's and 1900's that it entered public debate in a major way (see Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Longman, 2006), 73). Ultimately this led to a major split between conservative and liberal evangelicals during the 1920's (Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 181).
[193] Crusaders, "Executive Committee Minutes," (1921).
[194] The archival evidence as to whether the view on the Bible as the whole word of God was that of inerrancy or sufficiency was limited. The nuances of this debate are not central to this thesis.
[195] That Crusaders' founders were clearly engaged with the debate on the status of the Bible as demonstrated by the desire to state clearly at the formalization of the Union in 1906 of the importance that 'the whole Bible be taught as the Word of God' (Crusaders, "Leaders Conference Minutes, 29th March 1906.") That this singular statement preceded the adoption of their own formal statement of faith by some fifteen years serves to illustrate the significance of the debate on biblical authority in the minds of the earliest Crusaders' leaders.

A belief in the whole Bible as the Word of God retains a place of prominence as one of only six statements that compose the statement of faith adopted by Crusaders. The statement of faith has been included prominently throughout the years by Crusaders in numerous publications, leaflets and booklets.[196] The minutes of the 1921 Annual Business Meeting record the adoption of the following statement of faith as a belief in:

1. God as the creator of all men, and the father of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The Lord Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God, Redeemer of the World, and the one mediator through faith in whom alone we obtain forgiveness of sins.

3. God the Holy Spirit.

4. The fact of sin and the necessity of the atonement.

5. The incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. The whole Bible as the inspired Word of God.[197]

This view of the whole Bible as the Word of God was so significant a position for these early Crusader leaders to establish that the 'method' of the organisation could be described as: 'The Bible, the written Word – leading to Christ, the living Word'.[198]

The growing significance of work among young people by evangelicals and their organisations can be understood as an interesting and particular response to theological debate about the status of the Bible. Rather than become embroiled in the debates to compete to be the dominant voice in twentieth century Christianity, evangelicals saw reaching young people as the 'grand strategy' that could give them 'control of the future' and thus circumvent the disagreements.[199] With little to be gained, so went the thinking of the evangelicals, from denouncing their opponents in debate they turned instead to

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[196] E.g. Urban Saints, "Http://Urbansaints.Org/Pages/4111/Statement_of_Faith.Htm," Urban Saints. Accessed on 8/10/13; Crusaders, *Handbook for Leaders of Crusaders' Classes* (London, EC4: The Crusaders' Union, 1935), 3; *A Look at Crusaders*, 14.
[197] "Annual Business Meeting Minutes, 14th April 1921."
[198] *Crusader Class Organisation and Aims*, 5.
[199] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 225 - 6. Bebbington goes on to list some eleven separate evangelical youth organisations, including Crusaders, to demonstrate the full extent of this strategy. For a full discussion of this see *Ward, Growing Up, 45 - 62.* In the light of the significance of this grand strategy and therefore of youth ministry to the development of the evangelical movement at this time the long time omission of the study of youth ministry within evangelicalism is indeed noteworthy (ibid., 10).

attempts to win the next generation.[200] Crusaders exemplify this position neatly whilst, however, standing out as an anomaly through its independence denominationally and institutionally. Common among these organisations, and clearly evident within this early work of Crusaders however is the subordination of church orders in favour of seeking personal piety that was a feature of early evangelicalism as a whole.[201] The assumption of the time seems to have been that church engagement among young people will naturally follow from personal conversion and developing in personal piety.[202]

The early Crusader classes, although each independent of the other and led with a particular local flavour, followed a similar pattern. Each class would meet weekly on a Sunday afternoon at 3pm and would usually contain hymns and choruses (from the Crusader chorus book), prayers, a scripture reading and some Bible teaching.[203] The chairs would often be set out in rows and, if it wasn't for the fact that the only attendees were teenage boys, an observer could easily have thought a regular Free Church congregation was meeting. In short there was something seemingly ecclesial about these classes, albeit in a way unacknowledged by the pioneers and early leaders of the Crusaders' Union.

The success and growth of Crusaders was founded on providing such a context in which young people could engage in these simple ecclesial practices. This was primarily through appropriate and diligent Bible study though also included the use of songs and choruses as inspired by CSSM. Through these simple ecclesial practices the Christian faith could be presented to teenage boys in a way that was both understandable and appealing. This use of simple ecclesial practices is still a key characteristic of Urban Saints groups today, as demonstrated by both case studies to come. These practices in turn are crucial to the ecclesial identity and understanding inherent within the groups.[204]

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[200] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 227; Ward, *Growing Up*, 45.
[201] See the earlier discussion on the ecclesial consciousness of evangelicalism.
[202] There seems to have been a measure of success behind this assumption through the first half of twentieth century as evident when looking at the numbers of Crusaders who grew up to enter church leadership or join the overseas mission field. See the following section for details.
[203] See e.g. Crusaders, *Handbook for Leaders*, 12 - 3. This handbook refers to as an 'order of service' with explanatory notes that offer more detail as to how to conduct each aspect of the meeting.
[204] See chapters 4 and 5.

Alongside the simple ecclesial practices the appeal for participating boys was the strength of belonging, identity and development provided by being part of a Crusader class. The need to bring these boys to a place of decision about the claims of the Christian gospel led, in way that would have seemed perfectly natural within the evangelical sympathies of Crusaders leaders, to the ecclesial independence and secondary nature of the church in their thought, that became such a distinctive hallmark of the organisation's work.

In the period between the two world wars this Bible class model of working with young people developed by Crusaders under the influence of CSSM was taken up within churches. The development of movements such as Covenanters and Pathfinders recognized the benefits of providing Bible study alongside other Christian practices and activities for young people apart from the wider congregation, whilst seeking to place the work directly within the ministry of local churches and parishes. Covenanters developed as an association of Bible Classes linked to the youth work of mostly non-conformist churches after the success of an initial class launched by businessman John Laing in 1928 at Woodcroft Evangelical Church. Laing was heavily involved in Crusaders and naturally considered whether the Crusader format would help with work among older boys within the church. He decided to be released from his Crusader leadership role with Mill Hill Crusaders in order to focus on this new work.[205] Similarly, in 1935, Rev. Herbert Taylor began a work called Pathfinders to cater for the young people from his parish who were too old for Sunday School. This work spread beyond the parish and became a significant youth work catering for young people within Anglican parish churches.[206]

Both Covenanters and Pathfinders used similar shield motifs as Crusaders for badges and logos and both can identify the influence of Crusaders in other ways.[207] These similarities and influences demonstrate the way in which the work of Crusaders, pioneered by Kestin, Bevington et al, inspired and shaped youth work within the churches as well. Crusaders

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[205] F.R. Coad, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W. Laing, C.B.E. (1879-1978)* (Hodder General Publishing Division, 1979); c.f. Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 88; Crusaders, "Minutes of General Purposes Sub Committee Meeting, 21st April 1931."

[206] Ward, *Growing Up*, 49; c.f. Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 89; and *Youth a Part*, 154.

[207] With Covenanters this was through the involvement of John Laing, whereas with Pathfinders Jack Watford recalls that the name was chosen through inspiration of a magazine called 'Pathfinder' that was run by an old Crusader and also that the first secretary of Pathfinders sought out and visited Crusaders head office in order to learn from the way they ran the organisation (see *Yesterday and Today*, 88 - 90).

however, despite this influential role and crossover of style with these developing church-based movements, were keen to retain their unique ecclesial independence that had been such a significant feature of their work from the start.

This remained significant enough an issue for Crusaders that the distinct ethos of ecclesial independence was cited as a reason for caution when looking at working more closely with Covenanters in the 1980s.[208] Additionally, through the inspiration of Crusaders' methods, whilst placing the classes directly within churches and denominations, Pathfinders and Covenanters demonstrate the move within Senter's cycle of youth ministry movements whereby the pioneer organisation's methods are copied but the original idea behind the method (in this case independence of any church or denomination) is omitted.[209]

As discussed, the way in which Crusaders gathered with young people was based around simple, core ecclesial practices. Primary among these was Bible study, though the singing of choruses and prayer were also important. Taking these simple practices outside of denominational and institutional church settings mirrored the early work of CSSM and reinforced the inherent ecclesial imagination of the organisation. Furthermore, taking these practices out of mainstream church life and shaping them for the work of reaching teenagers was then taken up within denominations themselves through organisations such as Covenanters and Pathfinders. This in turn paved the way for Crusaders to support groups such as Urban Saints Hightown that are connected directly to a specific church as its outreach to young people. In the next section I turn to discuss the distinctive ecclesial imagination and other characteristics of Crusader as they influence and are influenced by the changing face of the organisation and its work through the last three decades of the twentieth century and into the first years of the twenty-first century.

2.4 The Changing Face of Crusaders

For many years Crusaders experienced remarkable numerical growth, geographical spread and consistency of format within their work. The twelve groups that first came together to form Crusaders grew into 256 groups with over 16,000 members by the start

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[208] Crusaders, "Minutes of Crusaders' Executive Committee, 19th May 1987."
[209] Senter, *The Coming Revolution*, 68 - 9.

of the Second World War in 1939.[210] Furthermore, other than as a direct result of losses directly attributable to the world wars, Crusaders experienced unbroken growth through to, and beyond, their Golden Jubilee celebrations at the Royal Albert Hall in 1956. At this stage they had record numbers of classes (316) and members (18,500).[211] This section discusses challenges that led to the changing face of the organisation after this, with particular reference to the battle within Crusaders to retain their distinctive identity and consequently maintain their inherent ecclesial imagination.

The development of Crusaders in the first decades after the Second World War is a story of both continuity and discontinuity with what had gone before. Continuity in the way that the classes were still officially independent of local churches, albeit with anecdotal evidence that there were increasingly young people attending who were also part of local churches.[212] However there were two major changes of policy that would substantially alter the make up of the organisation for the years that follow. These two changes were, first, the introduction of mixed gender groups through the 1970s;[213] and second, the pattern of groups moving from the traditional Sunday afternoon Bible class format to less formal mid-week sessions that were akin to regular youth clubs but with a time for a 'God-slot' or Bible study being a priority.[214]

Many local groups whose identity had been forged through the early years of Crusaders adapted in the ways described above and continued to reach out to young people with the same ethos and identity but new patterns of meeting. Epitomizing this is the group at St Aidans. As they celebrated their centenary as a Crusader group in 2015 the changes

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[210] Crusaders, *These Fifty Years*, 17.

[211] Ibid., 42 - 3. The period immediately after the end of the Second World War and through the 1950's is widely considered to be a period of great optimism and prosperity among the different strands of Christianity in the UK (see Brown, *Religion and Society*, 177; Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), 31; Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1987), 491). While Hastings refers to the mood surrounding the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II as symbolic of this heady optimism among the churches during the 1950's (ibid., 424 - 5), for Crusaders it was this golden jubilee rally that encapsulated the upbeat tone of the period (*These Fifty Years*, 38 - 40; Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 123 - 4).

[212] Tompkins, *Celebrating the 100*, 15 & 48.

[213] Until this point there was a separate Girls Crusader Union, the adoption of this as part of the same organisation led eventually to an amalgamation of the two (see "General Committee Minutes, 20th December 1955," (1955); Crusaders, "Minutes of Joint Committee Meeting, 17th November 1964").

[214] Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 143 - 4.

were apparent. As the boys Crusader class being led by Laurence Head[215] the St Aidans group became quite well known and significant within the Union.[216] Since the late seventies the group has been led by Dr. Victoria Hall who describes the group as an 'old-style Crusader group'.[217] This description is fitting in the regard that they still call themselves 'Crusaders' despite the organisation now being known as Urban Saints and they remain independent of any specific church or denomination. However being a mixed-gender group, meeting in a youth club style on a Saturday night I don't think Mr. Laurence Head would describe the group as such!

Having experienced steady and continuing growth throughout the majority of its first sixty years, the 1970s and 1980s were years in which there was a decline in the work, both in terms of numbers of groups and individual young people affiliated to those groups.[218] Those in charge of Crusaders noticed this and by 1975 the 'health of the Union' was a vital topic of conversation. Throughout 1976 it was suggested that time was set aside to 'reappraise the role of Crusaders' Union in the changing pattern of Christian work in the country'.[219]

Even before this point however Crusaders had begun to discuss and adopt changes, some significant, others less so. In the light of the changes in society and the Christian church in the UK as a whole this is to be expected.[220] The changing of the decades from the 1960s to the 1970s seems to have acted as a catalyst for change becoming part of the agenda

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[215] Crusaders, "The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1926," 23.

[216] Head's success in reaching boys with the gospel was put to wider use through the creation of the role within Crusaders head office staff team of Travelling Secretary, which allowed him to travel to other groups and hold gospel events as outreaches for them (see "Executive Commitee Minutes," (1931)).

[217] In personal correspondence.

[218] Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 143. This decline correlates to that which has been widely reported through the use of quantitative statistical research (see footnote 57). It has also been demonstrated that young people's attitude towards the Christian faith has deteriorated over this time, e.g. Brierley, *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*; *Pulling out of the Nosedive*; Francis, *Teenagers in the Church*; Leslie J. Francis and William K. Kay, *Teenage Religion and Values* (Gracewing, 1995). This decline is part of a larger decline and marginalization of the churches and Christianity in British society as a whole (e.g. Brown, *Religion and Society*, 278; Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, 45 - 9). It is also well noted that this decline and increasing marginalization came despite the heady optimism within Christianity, discussed above, that was on display during the 1950's (ibid., 29 - 43; Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-2000*, 580).

[219] Crusaders, "General Committee Minutes, 16th December 1975."

[220] There is not space here to articulate all the full scope of changes alluded to here. It is sufficient for my purposes to simply highlight Grace Davie's insight that the generation born in the years after the Second World War as the first generation to largely break the formal link with the churches and that this accounts for the decline in attendance as described above (see *Religion in Britain since 1945*, 122).

within Crusaders. The new decade began with discussions focused on both the format of class meetings and terminology used within Crusaders. The scale of the changes, while remaining committed to the core aim of Bible teaching is reflected well by the comments of the then General Committee Chairman, Dr Robert Hunt, in an article aimed at Crusader Leaders in 1973:

> So where are we now? And where are we going? It is in His hands and we would want it nowhere else. And there are signs of encouragement. A new Crusader group is about to be opened – it is mixed, on a weeknight and combined with club activities. Unthinkable twenty years ago! But how we thank God that he has graciously given us flexibility of method, yet kept us firmly based on His Word.[221]

As illustrated by these comments the proposed changes opened up the way for midweek, mixed gender meetings to become increasingly commonplace. Indeed this is broadly the style and format of Urban Saints Hightown, discussed in depth as an extended case study.[222] Further amendments allowed the organisation to be officially known simply as Crusaders rather than the Crusaders' Union with those attending known as members not recruits. Within the changes discussed the centrality of Bible teaching as the main aim of Crusaders was reaffirmed.[223] It is plausible to suggest that, in a similar way to the social conditions at the turn of the twentieth century creating the environment in which Crusaders emerged as an innovative leader in a new cycle of youth ministry, the changes in society that led to the first decline in the organisation's history acted as an outside event that paved the way for a new youth ministry cycle to begin.[224]

At the end of the 1970s, despite the changes that had been discussed and implemented, Crusaders was still experiencing a decline in the numbers of both young people and leaders involved in its work.[225] Melville Paton was General Secretary at this time and, as mentioned earlier, it was the feeling of some on the General Committee that a new style of leadership was needed to address the decline and meet the challenges of the time. This ultimately led to Paton resigning and for the first time in the history of Crusaders they looked outside of their own ranks for a new leader and created a new role of

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[221] Robert Hunt, "Where Are We Now?," *Crusader Review*, Spring 1973.
[222] In chapter 5.
[223] Crusaders, *General Committee Minutes, March 17th 1970*.
[224] Senter, *The Coming Revolution*, 69 - 70.
[225] Crusaders, *General Committee Minutes, 24th April 1979*.

Director to facilitate this.[226] The person to whom Crusaders turned was a man by the name of Ernie Addicott.[227] Previous incumbent Jack Watford (who had selected Melville Paton for the role) expressed surprise at the appointment of someone with no previous Crusader background.[228] By the time of his resignation from the role nine years later however, Addicott would be credited with having 'turned the ship around' and seeing Crusaders return to a stable position from which they could look to the future.[229]

At the time of Addicott's appointment there was an ongoing conversation within Crusaders about the role of the organisation going forward and considering whether new methods might be necessary.[230] This resulted in working parties being set up to look at the advantages and disadvantages of types of new group that had become part of Crusaders but were distinct from the traditional Sunday afternoon Bible Class that had been the staple of the organisation for the first seventy years of its existence. The new types of group being assessed included school-based, midweek, family-led and church-linked.[231] Each of these types of groups were in existence to some degree already and this diversifying of types of groups that carried out the work of Crusaders anticipates the later development and articulation of a more network approach whereby local groups can affiliate with the national organisation in a variety of ways and levels. Though, significantly, the core foci of the normative ecclesial imagination of individual faith conversion, small local groups and a wider national network or fellowship that crossed normal denominational or confessional boundaries were not questioned. This indicates how much part of the organisational identity these things had become. It also points toward Crusaders maintaining something of its independent identity from the church, even when the relationship with the church was practically much closer.

The challenge for Crusaders at the time of Addicott's leadership seems to be one of legitimacy - ensuring that both the central organisation and local groups were secure in their place in relation to other organisations, the church as a whole and local churches

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[226] "General Committee Minutes, 10th September 1981."
[227] *General Purposes Committee Meeting Minutes, 25th April 1983.*
[228] Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 144.
[229] Crusaders, "Crusaders' Council Minutes, 8th June 1991."
[230] *General Committee Minutes, 18th September 1982.*
[231] *General Committee Minutes, 16th November 1982.* It is also around this time that the language had fully evolved to describe the local work of Crusaders as 'groups' rather than the traditional 'classes' (*General Committee Minutes, 18th September 1982*).

specifically. In particular, at this time of rising numbers of evangelical churches in the UK and of churches increasingly taking on parachurch strategies, Addicott seems concerned to demonstrate that Crusaders are an integral and active part of evangelical life. An illuminating instance of this is when choosing a new President for Crusaders in 1987 Addicott chose Clive Calver, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance. Addicott is keen to express the value of having Calver as President as it would 'give [Crusaders] a voice in the wider scene on matters which are relevant to our work'.[232] The importance for Crusaders of having the legitimacy offered by a wider voice and high profile President was confirmed when Addicott's successor as Director, Alan Kerbey, appointed Steve Chalke into the role when Clive Calver stepped down in 1997.[233] There is striking similarity in these moves to align Crusaders with figures that will add legitimacy to the organisation with the desire expressed when searching for a first President in 1907 that 'some well known public man in sympathy with boys work should be invited to become President'.[234]

Ernie Addicott's time as Director also saw the employment of Area Development Workers by Crusaders for the first time.[235] The vision for these workers was to help legitimize the work of local groups by providing training, area activities, and support for leaders whilst, importantly, developing new groups in areas where there was deemed a need for the work. Alan Dodds was the first of these workers and there was great excitement about the impact of his work, seeing six new groups launched in the Norfolk area during the initial twelve months of his work.[236] These moves are significant as they operated to strengthen and shore up the organisation's core structure that helped to maintain both its independence from institutional church life and the forms of gathering that fostered the inherent ecclesial imagination.

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[232]Ernie Addicott, "Our President - the End of an Era," *Link Magazine*, January 1987. On the importance of Clive Calver for Evangelicalism in the UK during the 1980s and 90s see Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966-2001* (Paternoster, 2007).

[233] Alan Kerbey, "A New President for Crusaders," *Link Magazine*, September 1997. Current Director of the Evangelical Alliance Steve Clifford acknowledges the significance of Steve Chalke within the contemporary evangelicalism, stating that 'when the history of the church in the UK is written, Steve's contribution over the last 25 years will be recognized as profoundly significant': Steve Clifford, "The Bible and Homosexuality: A Response to Steve Chalke," http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/the-bible-and-homosexuality.cfm. Accessed 3/12/13

[234] Crusaders, "Leader's Conference Minutes, 20th March 1907."

[235] This move was apparently inspired by the work of Young Life in the US (see Watford, *Yesterday and Today*, 150).

[236] Alan Dodds, "My First Year as an Area Development Worker," *Link Magazine*, January 1987; Heather Keep, "Happy New Year!," ibid.

The innovation of Area Development Workers strengthened Crusaders locally. After the numerical decline of Crusaders in the 1970s and early 1980s, there was modest growth in both group and membership numbers in 1987.[237] This was repeated in 1988 to record three consecutive years of growth, providing some evidence of success of the strategies implemented to reverse the decline of earlier years.[238] Fast-forwarding nearly a decade to 1997 and the growth continued with an increase in membership of nearly 9,000 with over 200 more groups.[239] However concern was noted that despite this overall growth there continued to be large numbers of young people dropping out of the work at about the age of fourteen and anecdotal evidence from individual groups suggests that those who did stay beyond that were then struggling to make the always hoped for and anticipated move into the life of a local church.[240] This last insight regarding the struggle to connect young people with local churches is particularly problematic given that the majority of new groups launched through the work of Area Development Workers were church linked.[241]

In 1992 Alan Kerbey took over from Ernie Addicott as Director of Crusaders,[242] but the main themes in Crusaders story remained the same with continued growth in the number of Area Development Workers[243] being mirrored by growth in group numbers. Alongside this Kerbey continued the work of aligning Crusaders with the wider evangelical movement and key organisations (for example through the appointment of Steve Chalke as President), supplementing this with putting the Crusader name on important youth ministry publications to demonstrate that Crusaders were at the cutting edge of work with young people [244]

The final decades of the twentieth century saw the work of Crusaders change quite dramatically whilst retaining the aim of being a union of groups that taught the Bible to young people who were not part of the church. Given the challenges and questions of identity raised by the first period of decline experienced in the organisations history it is

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[237] Crusaders, "Group Link," ibid., May 1998.
[238] "Group Link," *Link Magazine*, May 1989, 8.
[239] "Group Link," *Link Magazine*, May 1998, 10.
[240] "Struggling with Seniors," *Link Magazine*, January 1987, 10.
[241] "Crusaders' Executive Minutes, February 1990."
[242] Heather Keep, "Comings and Goings," *Link Magazine*, September 1992.
[243] Crusaders, "More Development Workers," ibid., January 1992.
[244] E.g. Leslie J. Francis et al., *Fast-Moving Currents in Youth Culture* (Oxford, England: Lynx, 1995).

no surprise that a certain amount of soul-searching was required and that new types of group and terminology developed. It is also telling that leadership drawn from outside the organisation was sought in first Ernie Addicott and then Alan Kerbey. The achievement of these two men being the re-establishment of an ecclesial legitimacy of Crusaders, nationally and locally, through identifying with the wider evangelical scene and through the growing network of Area Development Workers. This re-establishment of the legitimacy of the organisation was done in a way that didn't question the underlying ecclesial imagination, so ingrained as it was as a practical normative understanding within the organisation. The rise of evangelical churches and the increasing popularity of church-based groups however challenged the ecclesial independence of earlier Crusader work.

2.5 The New Millennium – Looking Back and Moving Forward

Crusaders made a major appointment in early 2000 when it was announced that Matt Summerfield was to be the new Executive Director.[245] At the time of this appointment the narrative being told by Crusaders through their main publication of the time, *Link Magazine,* was one of challenge and change, alongside the importance of retaining a strong connection with the story, traditions and heritage of the organisation. The then President of Crusaders, Steve Chalke, in an introductory message in the issue of *Link* in which Matt was introduced as the new Executive Director expressed this succinctly:

> The sheer speed of change is new and presents the Church with a massive challenge… The nature of the challenge facing Crusaders and the Church [is to] plan for tomorrow, building on the foundations of the past, at the same time as recognising that it will not be an extension of today.[246]

Two further articles of introductory comments in the same magazine emphasize this narrative. The first speaks of the number of young people leaving the Church that was common talk among evangelical Christians and churches of the time,[247] but then changed that popular narrative to state that the 'bigger number and bigger challenge' were young people who had never heard the gospel in the first place and that this was the group to whom Crusaders was called – with Matt Summerfield being encouraged to 'not let [Crusaders] forget this'.[248] The second article simply, but pointedly, comprised a brief re-

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[245] Peter Jeffrey, "News from the Chair," *Link Magazine*, May 2000.
[246] Steve Chalke, "A Word from Steve," ibid.
[247] Highlighted in footnotes 57 and 215.
[248] Jeffrey, "News from the Chair."

telling of the story of Albert Kestin meeting the group of boys who would become the first Crusader Bible Class.[249] The message to Summerfield was clear – he needed to lead the organisation through some desired and expected change in order to meet the challenges of the contemporary situation, whilst simultaneously retaining a strong connection and continuation with the ethos and legacy of the work that had been the raison d'être of Crusaders since 1906.

Summerfield himself touches on these themes in an interview in the pages of the same magazine[250] declaring that he saw his role as one of 'driv[ing] things forward… learning from everything we have done in the past'.[251] Additionally Summerfield saw his background as being ideal preparation for the role, drawing both on a team leadership and management role with a major communications company and as volunteer youth and children's pastor in his home church.[252]

Summerfield's time in charge of the organisation has indeed been a time of huge change that has, in many ways, been true to his initial desire to drive things forward whilst learning from the past. There has also been a sense of negotiation about the changes and developments that have occurred. Significantly Summerfield was influential in the moves within the organisation over the last decade that led to adopting a new name and, therefore with it, a new logo. Having initially sought to drop the name Crusaders in 2002, Summerfield was eventually successful in achieving this change in 2006, meaning that the organisation entered its second century now known as Urban Saints.[253]

Given the significance of the logo (and by default the name, intertwined as the two were) in forming and shaping the identity and practice of the organisation[254] the moves to change this speak volumes of Summerfield's outlook and leadership. The issue of the name change was not without some controversy and the proposal to change the name was initially rejected in 2002 but with the option to revisit the question at the time of the

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[249] Andrew Burkinshaw, "Editorial," ibid.
[250] The May 2000 Link Magazine was in many ways an edition aimed to introduce Matt Summerfield and set the tone for the beginning of his leadership.
[251] Jo Slater, "Meet the New Executive Director," *Link Magazine*, May 2000.
[252] Ibid.
[253] 'Urban Saints', "What Happened to Crusaders," http://urbansaints.org/pages/4110/What_happened_to_Crusaders.htm. Accessed 23/10/13.
[254] See earlier discussion above.

centenary celebrations. The strength of feeling and identity with the name Crusaders is well illustrated by the words of Nigel Spencer, the Crusader Council Chairman, in 2002: 'it has been decided that the unique name of Crusaders will be retained until at least our centenary in 2006... I for one am delighted... because I *feel* "Crusaders" down through my roots'.[255]

Summerfield's leadership resulted in a further significant development that has set the shape and tone of the work of Urban Saints for the foreseeable future. This final change in many ways marks the completion of the re-invention of Crusaders into Urban Saints and sets up the organisation to strengthen its place within the evangelical scene for the foreseeable future. At around time of the organisation's centenary celebrations in 2006,[256] alongside the decision to change the name, the strategic and ideological decision was taken that the organisation exists to serve the church in its mission to young people. Resultant of this ideological decision came the practical widening of the ways in which churches and groups could join Urban Saints. This way of connecting with Urban Saints operates much more as networks one can connect with at a level of one's own choosing, rather than an organisation to which one becomes a member. For example,

> Young people (aged 5 to 18+) connect with the movement in a variety of ways including weekly youth groups, special events, holidays, community projects and training programmes.[257]

This reinvention of Crusaders as Urban Saints then begins to exhibit and encourages something akin to the liquid ecclesiology based on networks of relationship proposed by Pete Ward.[258] These shifts also suggest that the approach of Urban Saints reflects the late-modern turn to make use of religion as a cultural resource to which individuals can turn as the required.[259] This is a flexible religious approach in which institutional religion is deregulated and no longer operates as a 'sacred canopy' over all things. This in turn embeds a variety of ways in which participants utilize the core practices of Urban Saints to foster identity and faith.[260]

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255 Spencer, "From the Council Chair."
256 The centenary being marked as 100 years from the point at which the formal Union was established
257 Urban Saints, "What Is Urban Saints,"
http://www.urbansaints.org/pages/4130/What_is_Urban_Saints.htm. Accessed 24/10/13.
258 Ward, *Liquid Church*. The concept of Liquid Church will be discussed more in chapter 7.
259 James Beckford, "Social Movements as Free-Floating Religious Phenomena," in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001), 232.
260 Ibid; David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000), 9.

This final policy change, along with the emblematic change of name, signified a new era for Urban Saints and also shows the way that the organisation is being both shaped by and shaping the youth ministry and wider church scene in the UK. Urban Saints is an organisation born out of a missionary movement with a desire to reach a particular type of young person that was not being reached by the churches of the time. It influenced the church but has also been shaped by the shifting cultural environment. Urban Saints has maintained a missionary heart, but with the freedom to adapt and the willingness to be continually remoulded by the environment in which it exists whilst still holding fast to the vital importance of communicating the Bible in accessible ways to young people. In this way, and through an implicitly minimal and liquid ecclesiology, the organisation and its groups may well be set up to continue to faithfully negotiate the relationship with church in order to reach and disciple the young people it is working with.

Furthermore, Summerfield has sought to enact and embody his vision for the future work and tone of Urban Saints through launching and leading Urban Saints Hightown. This group is connected with the church in which he also serves on the leadership team. This group, which has been in operation since 2008 and is to be the focus of a case study in the following chapters, in many represents what Summerfield envisages Urban Saints becoming in the years to come.

2.6 Crusaders / Urban Saints and the Church

Earlier sections discussed how for many years Crusader classes, although each independent of the other and led with a particular local flavour, followed a similar pattern with clear family resemblances.[261] This final section seeks to discuss the story of Crusaders / Urban Saints as told above in terms of how the organisation has sought to negotiate and renegotiate its relationship with the church.

Crusaders have gradually adapted how they view their relationship to the local church. This is particularly apparent through the period of decline, growth and on to re-invention from the 1970s onwards. Documents from the 1970s emphasize the independence of the

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[261] The details of which were described in depth above.

classes from local churches whilst simultaneously aiming to 'serve the churches'[262] and 'work alongside the churches [introducing] boys and girls to a local church';[263] albeit this is on occasion expressed with an inherent criticism of the work of the local churches. This criticism is demonstrated by suggesting, for example, that churches are unable to meet the needs for which Crusaders came into existence and the churches have become 'largely irrelevant to many'.[264] Compare this to the explicit, positive option promoted today whereby churches can specifically sign up to affiliate their work with young people to Urban Saints[265] and the change in the relationship is apparent.

It is clear that Crusaders certainly never intended or worked towards their groups being understood as churches or an ultimate replacement for church in the life of the young people. An example of this is found in a 1931 discussion and decision surrounding the place of communion within Crusader work. Particular leaders had introduced the taking of communion within the classes and camps under their leadership and others had expressed concern at this. The decision of the Crusader leadership was that communion would be taken only at main leader's conferences with senior boys and leaders 'encouraged to attend the local churches for the sacrament'.[266] Further to this the regular encouragements to both leaders and boys to be in participating in local churches highlights the way that Crusaders resisted labeling their own work as church.[267]

Notwithstanding this positive encouragement towards the church, Crusaders classic hallmark of standing independently of the churches carries within it a critique of the church in the way that any new move setting out to reach a currently unreached people must. It may be that this critique and the missionary heart for young people outside the reach of the church is behind the struggles Crusaders faced when dealing with the question of church-based groups from the 1970s onwards. From discussion around the leaflet *Crusaders and the Churches*,[268] to the statement that Crusaders are 'not really in

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[262] Crusaders, "Crusaders and the Churches."
[263] *A Look at Crusaders.*
[264] "Crusaders and the Churches."
[265] Urban Saints, "Energize Subscription Options," http://www.energize.uk.net/pages/subscriptionoptions. Accessed on 24/10/13
[266] Crusaders, "Minutes of General Purposes Sub Committee Meeting, 27th November 1931."
[267] *Crusader Class Organisation and Aims.*
[268] "Crusaders and the Churches; "General Committee Minutes, 16th February 1971."

favour of Church-based groups',[269] through to revisiting the question due to a request from a particular group in Yeovil[270] the question was not satisfactorily dealt with.

This subject of church-based groups was discussed at length during the 1982 Crusaders' Leaders Conference, being particularly highlighted in discussions around the future of Crusaders in the light of the decline of the organisation over the previous decade.[271] In a report prepared to stimulate this discussion it was highlighted that there were already some church-based groups and that they may be setting the example for one way forward to preserve Crusaders into the future.[272] Furthermore this report highlights the rise in evangelical churches as one of the 'adverse factors' that had negatively impacted Crusaders.[273] It is pertinent to note however that this rise in evangelical churches did not negate the ecclesial consciousness of evangelicalism identified as influential in the origins of evangelical organisations such as Crusaders. In particular, the Moravianism and radical congregationalism of this consciousness discussed above is still evident in cross-church or parachurch activities of evangelicals though events and activities such as Spring Harvest and Alpha.[274] Consequently patterns of evangelical corporate Christian gathering began to mirror that of organisations such as Crusaders even as this included denominational church life within it.

While this rise in evangelical churches was cause for celebration and thankfulness it also represented a challenge and a significantly different context from that within which the work of Crusaders had emerged some eighty years earlier.[275] However some considered this presence of church-based Crusaders groups an anomaly within the organisation throughout the years that followed despite the practice being formally adopted within Crusaders through an amendment to the constitution in 1988.[276] The debate within Crusaders of this kind of group was ongoing and discussion four years after this amendment to the constitution was agreed continued to reflect a level of concern that

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[269] "General Committee Meeting Minutes, 9th July 1974," (1974).
[270] "General Committee Minutes, 21st November 1978," (1978).
[271] Robert Hunt, "The Future of Crusaders," (Crusaders, 1982).
[272] Ibid., 8.
[273] Ibid., 5 - 6. Other factors to which the report attributed the decline were the national decline in Christianity, the decline in sympathetic parents, increased secularization of Sundays, changes in educational and work demands on leaders and potential leaders (ibid., 6 - 7).
[274] Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 67ff & 115ff.
[275] "The Future of Crusaders," 6.
[276] Crusaders, "General Council Minutes, 11th June 1988."

the majority of new groups were church-based whereas Crusaders' 'unique contribution' was independent groups.[277] The desire to reinforce the unique contribution of Crusaders as being outside of church reflects the deep-set identity and ecclesial imagination of the organisation.

Further light can be shed on the relationship with the church and local churches in particular through a notable lack of discussion of the subject in material produced for leaders of Crusaders groups over the years. Given the stated aim above for young people to find their way from Crusader groups into local churches the absence of help or advice on how this might work is telling. A 1995 magazine article entitled *The Local Church: A Positive Place* stands as a notable exception.[278] Likewise, strategic goals published within the last fifteen years contain practically no mention of the aim to integrate young people into church life.[279] Once again this is illustrative of the evangelical tendency to subordinate discussion of church and ecclesiology to personal piety and conversion. Indeed, in the rare occurrence of intentional theological work being presented for Crusader leaders in the last thirty years, it is only in the form of a series expounding upon the Crusaders statement of faith.[280] No similar treatment is given to discuss ecclesiology to serve the stated aim of integration with the local church.

However, as implicitly acknowledged in the claim that a rise in evangelical churches was in part responsible for the decline in the work of Crusaders through the latter decades of the twentieth century, more ecclesiological thought and movement was stirring within evangelicalism as a whole.[281] The gradually growing influence of youth ministry through the century resulted in growing numbers of evangelical ministers and leaders across the denominations[282] and, additionally, is likely to be responsible for the rise in churches

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[277] "General Council Minutes, 6th June 1992."
[278] "The Local Church: A Positive Place," *Link Magazine*, September 1995, 9.
[279] "New Strategic Ministry Goals," *Link Magazine*, May 1999; "9 Strategic Goals," *Link Magazine*, September 2000. The only mention being 'developing links to local churches' as an example of the goal to 'Encourage and equip all groups to disciple their young people to maturity in Christ' (ibid., 5).
[280] "Who Is This Jesus?," *Link Magazine*, May 1987; "What's Gone Wrong?," *Link Magazine*, September 1987; "Man in the Middle," *Link Magazine*, January 1988.
[281] This is seen in a specific way through the rise of the Fresh Expressions movement with the Church of England. See chapter 7.
[282] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004); Ward, *Growing Up*, 8.

adopting parachurch strategies.[283] This points to the inherent ecclesial imagination of groups such as Urban Saints spilling over into the church as a whole.

The last decades of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first centuries saw significant changes in the life of Crusaders, including the change of its name to Urban Saints. The decline in attendance mirrored by that within UK churches in the same period and the rise in evangelicalism within institutional church life were the catalyst for soul-searching and practical changes for Urban Saints. However out of this soul-searching emerged a desire to retain the primary forms of gathering and hence the ecclesial imagination that had been inherent since the early days of Crusaders.

2.7 In Summary

Were Albert Kestin to walk into a Friday evening Urban Saints sessions in Hightown today it is likely that he would struggle to recognize the work as a continuation of that which he began with four boys in the Saffrey's drawing room in Crouch End one Sunday afternoon in April 1900. However, if he were to spend some time observing the leaders and young people, he would discover some striking similarities. The central aspect of the session is a focus on the study and discussion of the Bible, there are young leaders being developed, a sense of belonging for young people who are not normally part of church and a connection to a wider organisation. Urban Saints continues the work started by Kestin and formalized as the Crusaders' Union of Bible Classes in 1906. The work of Crusaders saw great success in communicating the Christian faith to young people (initially middle and upper class boys only) in a way that was appealing and understandable based in locations that helped young people to feel comfortable.

The work carries within it an ecclesial imagination but doesn't seek to name its groups as church. The position of evangelicals as a despised minority within the church in the UK in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century forced those within evangelicalism to the ecclesial margins where they found expression for their outlook in the organisations they formed. Groups like Crusaders established a pattern of working that institutionalized parachurch work outside of the ministry of the local church. This is demonstrated by the

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[283] Root, *Revisiting*, 59 - 61.

Covenanters and Pathfinders who were inspired by the basic methods of Crusaders by creating structures that allowed young people to find belonging and Christian faith outside the mainstream of church life, even when their groups were established within the life of a local church or a denomination.

In its early days the core identifying features of Crusaders' work were its success in reaching middle and upper class boys through Bible classes operating with an intentional ecclesial independence. This independence has repeatedly been restated as the unique contribution of Crusaders, although less recognized is the essentially ecclesial character of its classes throughout the first sixty to seventy years of its existence. Crusaders created high levels of belonging and identity among those involved through the handing on of leadership and, consequently, the ethos and values of the organisation. This identity was embodied and reinforced through the badges awarded for attendance to the classes. Crusaders became a kind of faith tradition for many.

The changing face of church involvement and Christian commitment in the UK through the second half of the twentieth century led to an identity crisis for Crusaders in which their focus on Sunday afternoon classes for boys from middle and upper class families was no longer applicable. The rise in evangelical churches alongside societal changes led to the squeezing of Crusaders' unique place in Christian work within the UK. Subsequently the organisation has sought to retain its heart of reaching unchurched young people whilst adapting to the challenges of new situations.

The reinvention of Crusaders as Urban Saints allowed the organisation to continue into its second century. This change has seen the organisation respond to the changing scene in church, youth ministry and society as a whole to offer more of a network approach to affiliation whereby groups choose the level to which they are a part of Urban Saints and the extent to which they identify with a particular local church. This approach exhibits features of a liquid ecclesiology whilst continuing to embody the inherent ecclesial imagination in its forms of gathering. These ecclesiological traces are often unacknowledged or articulated minimally, however they represent something of a normative ecclesiology of Urban Saints.

This historical review of Urban Saints, in particular the organisation's ecclesial imagination, practices and relationship with the church, raise pertinent questions about how to account for these things theologically. In particular the following questions seek to explore these issues in order to develop constructive proposals for the ongoing connection between this kind of work with young people and wider ecclesiological conversations in the UK:

- *How might the practices and ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints and its groups inform and be informed by contemporary approaches to ecclesiology in the UK?*

This main research question can be broken down into three additional foci for research that can be seen as constitutive of the main research question:

- *To what extent do Urban Saints groups practically operate as 'church' for those involved?*

- *How is the concept of church articulated in the practice and conversation of young people and youth leaders in Urban Saints?*

- *What resources are there in a contemporary ecclesiology that can inform and complement the work being done in Urban Saints groups?*

The following chapter will detail a methodology through which these questions can be explored.

3. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS OPEN-ENDED DIALOGUE: DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The research questions detailed at the end of the previous chapter are predominantly focused on practices. Specifically they relate to the ecclesiological understanding inherent within the practices of Urban Saints groups and the relationship between this and the ongoing conversation around contemporary mission-focussed ecclesiology in the UK. These are questions with the practice of Christian communities at heart; consequently the overarching theological framework for this thesis is that of practical theology.[284] This methodology, therefore, details the specific approach that I have taken within practical theology to respond to the research questions.

Practical theology is concerned with the theological significance of the practices of Christians and Christian communities.[285] It has a broader scope than pastoral theology with which it is sometimes conflated.[286] Often it is framed as providing means by which the relationship between the theological meaning of Christian practices and prior theological theory can be negotiated.[287] The outcome of reflections on this relationship is seen to be pragmatic action in the form of revised practice,[288] however it is also important that theoretical contributions can be made to Christian theological understanding.[289] As Alister McGrath puts it succinctly it is the authenticity of theology that is at stake:

> Christian theology is seen at its best and most authentic when it engages and informs the life of the Christian community on the one hand, and is in turn engaged and informed by that life on the other.[290]

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[284] J. Woodward and S. Pattison, "Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. J. Woodward and S. Pattison (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 6. See also, for example, Astley: ''Practical Theology' is, indeed, about practice' *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2002), 2.
[285] "Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology," 7.
[286] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Contributions of Practical Theology," in *The Wiley-Bleckwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Chicester, UK: Wiley-Blackmore, 2012), 5 - 6.
[287] P.H. Ballard and P. Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (SPCK, 1996), 43.
[288] Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), 4.
[289] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 59 - 60.
[290] Alister McGrath, "The Cultivation of Theological Vision: Theological Attentiveness and the Practice of Ministry," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012), 107.

Consequently practical theology offers a theological 'construction zone'.[291] In addition it seeks to reflect on specific Christian communities and their practices in order that the 'found' theologies of specific communities might contribute to developing Christian theological understanding.[292] The idea of practical theology as a construction zone is helpful in pointing towards the epistemological underpinnings of this study in which the meaning of social practices can be as understood as a joint construction between researcher and participants.[293]

The research questions driving this study ask specifically ecclesiological questions that arise from the historical review of Urban Saints. In light of the above this methodology allows for the exploration of these research questions to be a form of ecclesiological construction. Ward, drawing on the work of Healy, has said that the Church 'cannot be dealt with in terms of the history of ideas or beliefs'.[294] Rather, the church should be defined less in terms of ontology and more through agency (of the Holy Sprit) and activity (of human participants).[295] This allows for something of what the church actually is to be considered rather than ecclesiology merely dealing with the theoretical consideration of what the church should be.[296] The church therefore can be understood as simultaneously theological and social / cultural.[297]

This methodology then will proceed by detailing a framework through which a two-step dynamic can occur in order to articulate theological responses to the research questions: first, the practices of Urban Saints groups can be interrogated for the ecclesiological meaning that can be attributed to them; and then, second, these meanings can be placed into a dynamic relationship with contemporary ecclesiology in order that they can inform

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[291] Serene Jones, "Practical Theology in Two Modes," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2008), 209.
[292] Gerardo Marti, "Found Theologies Versus Imposed Theologies: Remarks on Theology and Ethnography from a Sociological Perspective," *Ecclesial practices.* 3(2016).
[293] Colin Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd Edition ed. (Blackwell, 2002), 27. In a similar fashion youth groups can be viewed as a joint construction between leaders and young people. See Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian," 12 - 3.
[294] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 41.
[295] Ibid.
[296] See the well cited critique of Blueprint Ecclesiologies in Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25 - 51.
[297] Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 2.

ecclesiological conversation and be informed through this relationship.[298] Resultant of this is the potential for both the Urban Saints groups' theological vocabulary and contemporary ecclesiology to be enhanced.[299] The methodology that follows then begins by arguing for practical theology as open-ended dialogical enquiry.

3.1 Practical Theology as Open-Ended Dialogical Enquiry

This section will build on the broad, over-arching view of practical theology described above by framing the approach for this study in relation to David Tracy's desire for 'open-ended enquiry'.[300] The specific framework for this will be provided by the four voices of theology and consequently this section will address the strengths and weaknesses of this framework for the present study. In discussing these strengths and weaknesses the possibilities and limitations of other approaches will be discussed.

Tracy argues that approaches to practical theology have historically tended toward one of two extremes. They either apply pre-existing theological theory to practice or use practice to negate theory.[301] Neither of these approaches appropriately account for the theology contained within the practices of the Christian community nor the way in which such a form of theology can interact with formal theological discourse.[302] Since both uncovering the theological understanding inherent within Urban Saints groups and placing this in dynamic relationship with contemporary ecclesiological understanding are required to answer the key research questions neither of these tendencies within practical theology are appropriate for the study at hand.

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[298] See Robert Haight and James Nieman, "On the Dynamic Relationship between Ecclesiology and Congregational Studies," *Theological Studies* 70(2009).

[299] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 14.

[300] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Harper San Francisco, 1985), 7.

[301] Ibid; "Foundations of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*, ed. Don Browning (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 61.

[302] Ballard and Pritchard name four broad approaches to practical theology: Applied theology, critical correlation, praxis and habitus. See Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 57 - 68. Two of these, applied theology and praxis, are equivalent to the extremes that Tracy discusses. In between these extremes they place critical correlation. This is problematic for this study since classic forms of critical correlation rely on theology to provide answers to questions raised by the surrounding culture, rather than allowing the lived theology of a community to contribute to theological construction. For the roots of correlative theological methods see P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1973).

In contrast to these extremes Tracy then proposes an approach that he terms 'revised critical correlation'. This allows for open-ended enquiry in which practice can enhance or develop theory. He describes this as practice 'sublating' theory.[303] The strength of this approach for my study is that it nuances the relationship between theological theory and practice, recognizing that neither provides the final word on the church. By framing theological enquiry as an open-ended endeavour, Tracy's desire to see practice sublate theory rather than negate it or simply be a response to theory being applied reflects a concern to locate the doctrinal in the practices of Christian communities.[304]

The intention for theory to be enhanced through interaction with practice rather than applied or negated results in a dialogical approach in which the image of a conversation is helpful. Stephen Pattison has written of his pastoral vision of practical theology by making use of an image of 'critical creative conversation'.[305] The image of conversation is helpful, says Pattison, as it creates a way in which religious practices, traditions and beliefs can be brought into contact with experience and questions to 'engage in a transforming dialogue that has substantial practical implications'.[306] Although Pattison is focussed on individual pastoral care the concept of transforming dialogue helpfully builds on the basic framework offered by Tracy. In such a dialogue all partners in the conversation are open to transformation through this process and the integrity of both the tradition and 'beliefs, actions and perspectives' of the individual or community are reflected.[307] This 'interpretive dialogue' is one in which all parties to the conversation aim to come to understanding together.[308] The aim of such a conversation is not that one partner understands the other but rather it is that '*you and I come to an understanding together*'.[309] Adopting this outlook for the present study is immediately helpful: it is not that Urban Saints groups needs to understand ecclesiology and apply it, or that ecclesiology must understand youth ministry and be reshaped accordingly, but rather that the work of Urban Saints and the ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions understand each other in order for a mutual contribution to emerge from an open-ended dialogue. Though

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[303] Tracy, "Foundations of Practical Theology," 61.
[304] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 47.
[305] Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care*, 3rd ed. (SCM Press, 2000), 230.
[306] Ibid., 217.
[307] Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (Crossroad Publishing Co, U.S., 2004), viii.
[308] Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: "On Earth as It Is in Heaven"* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 61.
[309] Ibid. Italics original.

these might seem like unusual conversation partners at first glance, the shared rationale to communicate the gospel relevantly to sections of society unreached by conventional church means they share a discursive space that allows the possibility of mutual contributions from the dialogue. Indeed it has been identified that Fresh Expressions are asking the same questions that have been asked by Christians working with young people.[310]

The image of conversation in practical theology is developed further and for use within Christian communities, organisations and church congregations by Cameron et al's concept of 'theology in four voices'.[311] This has been developed through their method of 'theological action research' (TAR). TAR brings the insights of various strands of theology into conversation in order to 'make practice more theological… and in that way make theology more practical'.[312] The four voices are outlined thus:

- Formal theology – the theology of the academy and professional theologians.
- Normative theology – expressed in the scriptures, the creeds, official church teachings and liturgies.
- Espoused theology – the theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs.
- Operant theology – the theology embedded within the actual practice of the group.[313]

The aim of practical theology that inspires the four-voice model[314] developed by Cameron et al is to increase the faith community's theological capacity by expanding its theological 'vocabulary' and developing faithful mission.[315] The helpfulness of the four-voice model is reinforced by assumptions inherent within it and made explicit by Cameron et al. In particular I note that the model developed out of an awareness of the weaknesses within the pastoral cycle, specifically that the theological step is problematic.[316] In contrast the four-voice model, whilst not claiming to have resolved all the questions arising from the critiques of the pastoral cycle, can claim to offer a 'theological vision that aims to hold

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[310] Collins-Mayo, Mayo, and Nash, *Generation Y,* 100.
[311] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 51.
[312] Ibid., 17. In a similar way to Browning's fundamental practical theology that looks to draw on systematics, biblical studies, historical theology and practical theology.
[313] Ibid., 54.
[314] For brevity from here I will refer to the four voices of theology as the four-voice model.
[315] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 14.
[316] Ibid., 28 - 9. See more detail below.

these questions constructively to the fore'[317] and seeks to be theological from the outset.[318] In addition it is a vital understanding that just as the formal theological voice can inform the espoused and operant, so too can these more embodied theological voices inform and challenge the formal and normative voices. There is a commitment to the 'complex theology disclosed through a conversational method'.[319]

This complex conversational understanding of theology is well suited to this study since it opens up ways by which the inherent ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints (as detailed through the historical review) and extended case studies of current groups' practice can contribute to a mutual understanding of the church alongside more formal ecclesiological thinking. The complex theology that the four-voice model articulates means that it provides an ideal framework in which to hold the open-ended dialogue required for this thesis as per the core research question.

3.1.1 Strengths of the Four-Voice Model For This Study

This section builds on the introduction of the four-voice model for theology above by arguing for the particular strengths of the model as it pertains to this study and the research questions guiding it. In particular I will highlight four strengths, discussing key ideas and literature in each area as part of this. First, I will argue that the four-voice model guards against weaknesses inherent within the popular pastoral cycle method of practical theological reflection, specifically by avoiding the distillation of practice through analytical moves; second, by advocating the theological value of the operant life of communities the model draws on what can be termed the praxis model for practical theology; third, the normative voice makes explicit the theory-laden nature of practice and as such allows for key insights of Don Browning to help guide the process; and, fourth, as a result of these other strengths the model can be seen as being theological all the way through. I will now discuss each of these in turn.

The four-voice model of theology responds to a weakness inherent in the pastoral cycle relative to this study. The pastoral cycle is usually depicted as a four-stage process with a

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[317] Ibid., 32.
[318] Ibid., 29.
[319] Ibid., 50. Indeed the process of Theological Action Research from which the four-voice method developed is based on actual conversations between insider and outsider researcher teams.

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different question or move relating to each stage.[320] The cycle is designed to take one through from the current situation, analyzing the situation, identifying theological themes and concepts that can guide a response and then moving to a form of revised action or practice. Richard Osmer, for example, frames the cycle in terms of four sequential questions: 'What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? And how might we respond?[321] Often the cycle is referred to as a spiral in which the revised action provides the context in which the cycle of theological reflection can begin again.[322]

Both strength and weaknesses have been identified with the pastoral cycle. Ballard and Pritchard contend that it brings together strengths of four different models of practical theology in one tool.[323] Swinton and Mowat present a sustained argument for use of the pastoral cycle and in so doing make a case for the way in which the pastoral cycle can provide what they see as the right context for qualitative research methods to inform theological reflection.[324] In addition they argue that the cycle is theological all the way through.[325] Problematically for this thesis however their model, termed 'critical faithfulness', gives logical priority to formal theological discourse only making space for theology to be hospitable to data revealed through empirical methods.[326] In addition by labeling one of the four moves 'theology' the implicit weighting is to this prior theological theory. Similarly with Osmer's four questions the use of the word 'ought' at the equivalent stage gives undue weight to formal theological discourse and as such means the method can lapse toward an application model of practical theology and thus stifle the desired open-ended enquiry.

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[320] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (SCM Press, 2006), 93 - 7; Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.
[321] *Practical Theology*, 4.
[322] Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology* (London: Mowbray, 2009), 19 - 25.
[323] Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 74. The four models being applied theology, critical correlation, praxis and habitus ibid., 57 - 70.
[324] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 96.
[325] Ibid. They make this assertion despite specifically naming one of the stages on their version of the cycle 'theological'. In order to clarify the point they describe the way in which this stage is the one in which they 'develop the conversation by drawing out both the implicit and explicit dimensions'.
[326] They ground this logical priority on the Chalcedonian Christological perspective that although Christ was simultaneously fully divine and fully human the divine nature pre-exists and thus has logical priority over the human. Ibid., 83 - 7.

It is well noted that the intentionally theological stage of the cycle is problematic.[327] Pete Ward contends that there is an inherent weakness in the pastoral cycle in that, for all its intentions of closing the gap between theory and practice, in reality it separates them out into different stages of the cycle and 'experience is effectively distanced or distilled through analytical stages'.[328] As Ward goes on to say,

> 'In the practice of faith, doctrine is performed as it is prayed, sung, preached and enacted in mission… In faith, theology is performed and practiced as it is lived in'.[329]

Since the questions being interrogated in this thesis require being open to ecclesiological meaning being expressed in the practices and ways of gathering within Urban Saints groups then this distillation of experience needs to be avoided. Further, this comment from Ward points toward a second key strength of the four-voice model for this study in that it accounts for both the theology embodied in practice as well as the way in which that form of theological knowledge can inform and be informed by other theological sources.

Whereas proponents of the pastoral cycle claim that it is theological all the way through, despite specifically naming one stage as 'theological', the four-voice framework makes the theological nature of different aspects explicit. Subsequently it is possible to say along with Swinton and Mowat that theology has logical priority. However, whereas in the critical faithfulness model they propose the theological is seen as prior theological theory and tradition, the four-voice model embraces a broader view of the theological. In this broader view the insights of ordinary theology[330] and Elaine Graham's vision for transforming practice are helpful.[331] This is akin to what has been termed the praxis model for practical theology.[332] Taking account of this form of theological understanding through the operant and espoused voices represents the second strength of the four-voice model for this thesis.

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[327] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 28.
[328] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 35.
[329] Ibid., 35 - 6.
[330] See Astley, *Ordinary Theology*.
[331] Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Mowbrays, 1996).
[332] Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 66 - 8.

Ordinary theology describes lay theology and is seen as prior to academic theology since it is the theology that 'we all start with'.[333] Since the formal theology of the academy is only ever a minority interest in the church ordinary theology can be seen *as* the theology of the church.[334] It is a working theology that elsewhere has been termed the emergent theology of the church.[335] Ordinary theology is borne out of the first expression, reflection or judgment that people make about their life of faith; it is important because it is a form of practice that '[lets] the story of Jesus have its way' with people.[336] This importance of a way of understanding faith because of the way it is practised relates well to the way that Urban Saints developed as a faith tradition for many and points toward the value of seeking to draw out the ordinary ecclesiology carried in the way that Christian gathering is practised by those involved in Urban Saints groups today. The four-voice model though, whilst embracing something of this ordinary theological understanding, appropriates it into a more complex theological structure.

Ordinary theology is not exactly synonymous with the operant and espoused theologies of the four-voice model since it tends to be understood primarily by the way that people express their faith in speech.[337] The difficulty in accessing practices without the researcher putting undue interpretation of their own on them is acknowledged so ordinary theology rests on the participants' own articulated understanding of their faith life and practices. Consequently this can conflate the espoused and operant voices and lose some of the distinction between that which people do and what they say about what they do.[338] Helpfully though ordinary theology welcomes the lack of clarity and consistency that there often is in the faith speech of ordinary believers.[339] This is a vital insight as the neat framework of the four-voices can give the impression that espoused theology is one thing in any given community rather than the 'hesitant, inarticulate and unsystematic' journey towards understanding that ordinary theology acknowledges.[340]

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[333] Jeff Astley and Ann Christie, *Taking Ordinary Theology Seriously* (Grove Books, 2007), 5.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Martyn Percy, *Shaping the Church* (Ashgate, 2010), 159.
[336] Astley and Christie, *Taking Ordinary Theology Seriously*, 26.
[337] Jeff Astley, "The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Believing and the Church*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis (Abingdon, Oxon: Routeldge 2016), 5 - 6.
[338] See below
[339] Astley and Christie, *Taking Ordinary Theology Seriously*.
[340] Astley, "Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," 5.

Elaine Graham's work suggests that something akin to the lay theology of particular communities should be seen as the normative centre of theological construction. She draws on feminist theologies to challenge claims that disembodied truths can mount normative claims, preferring to locate the normative, and therefore grant epistemological priority, to the praxis of particular communities.[341] In contrast to Don Browning who finds a guiding normativity in historical consciousness and tradition, Graham sees the praxis as 'strategies of normative action' that generate new knowledge.[342] Ethics and politics, and by extension theology, become themselves practices and processes rather than ideals or disembodied truths. By locating theological knowledge in the practical wisdom of communities Graham's work helps to focus the insights of ordinary theology toward the transformative potential of the theology held within community – both espoused as a first step reflection and operant through the community's practices. Consequently the value of these lines of thinking contributes to holding in tension the various forms of theology held within the four-voice model.

Elaine Graham's focus on the transforming practice of faith communities alongside the emphasis of ordinary theology offer a reminder that theological enterprise is not restricted to the specialized field of the academy.[343] Consequently that which is understood as normative is the temporary, provisional theology that is drawn from the praxis of particular communities. This is helpful within an ecclesiological exploration such as this one since most dominant ecclesiological moves throughout history can be recognized as coming out of specific communities reacting to the key questions of their time and place.[344]

Similarly Kathryn Tanner's assertion that theology is a cultural enterprise removes an emphasis on theology's primary placement being in the academy.[345] Rather she sees theology as best understood on a continuum in which this specialized form is at one end with everyday theological activity at the other. The role of academic theology in this

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[341] Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 140 - 1.
[342] See more on Browning below.
[343] See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 69 - 71.
[344] Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge, *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge, 1 ed. (Routledge, 2007), 2 - 3.
[345] Tanner refers to this as the realm of high culture. See Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 70.

image is to lessen the gap between itself and other forms of theology.[346] It is exactly this that the four-voice model allows, with the explicit call of Graham's praxis-based approach and ordinary theology's focus on the theological expression of ordinary believers making the everyday theological activity explicit in this study. By drawing on these insights the practices and articulation of meaning attributed to practices can be seen as theological locations with the potential to contribute transformationally to the process of theological construction within the four-voice model.

The third strength of the four-voice model for this study is the way that it explicitly accounts for prior theological influence, calling it out as normative for the communities under consideration. Whilst the concepts of ordinary theology and Graham's transforming practice help to draw out the significance of the espoused and operant theological voices they do not adequately account for previous theological understandings that might have been influential in shaping the communities. The work of Don Browning is helpful here. His dominant thesis is his view that the aim of practical theology is the pursuit of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, that will inform the individual or community of how to live and act in a particular situation.[347] In elaborating on this Browning employs the image of an outer envelope with an inner core. At the centre of the inner core is *Experience* and this acts as the starting place; more specifically this can be seen as a 'critical incident' that leads to one asking the questions 'What should we do?' and 'How should we live?' The way in which these questions that arise from experience are surrounded by the outer envelope of historical consciousness and communities of memory demonstrates Browning's assertion that our experiences and practices are theory-laden even before we intentionally reflect on them and seek to bring theory to bear on them.[348] Hence Browning helps to articulate the significance of the inherent ecclesial imagination drawn from the history of Urban Saints – this historical consciousness and community of memory that passes down the organisation's generations and runs through regardless of changes in style is likely to be present in the current experiences and practices of Urban Saints groups. This helps to articulate well the

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[346] Ibid.
[347] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, New edition ed. (Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 2 - 4.
[348] Ibid., 10 - 1.

specific nature of the normative theology that helps to shape the practical ecclesiology of Urban Saints.

Once the questions arising out of a 'critical incident' have been asked the pursuit of practical reason deliberately moves to the outer envelope. This includes what Browning calls interpretive paradigms, experimental probes, historical consciousness and communities of memories. These refer to the 'fund of inherited narratives and practices that tradition has delivered to us'.[349] This action–reflection process (as Browning calls it) is a hermeneutical process of interpretation. This means that the critical incident that has led to reflection requires interpretation to better understand it but then in turn the elements of the outer envelope are subjected to further interpretation in order to understand the way in which the practice that led to reflection in the first place needs to be revised. This revised action, or to use Browning's phrase, the 'critically-held theory-laden practice' is the result of employing practical wisdom.[350] The four-voice model for theology provides a framework by which these insights about the theory-laden nature of Christian practices in community can be made explicit and interrogated for their value in the constructive conversation to come later in the thesis. However, whereas Browning helps to strengthen the understanding of the normative, his perceived outcome of transformed praxis falls short of Tracy's open-ended enquiry in which the theology contained within this outer envelope can also be open to transformation.[351]

So, in bringing these strengths together, the four-voice model for theology provides a framework by which the research questions can be addressed appropriately and in a way that is theological all the way through. There is a commitment to viewing the practices of Urban Saints groups as being able to embody theological commitments and, specifically for this study, understandings of how communal or corporate Christian life is formed through particular ways of seeking relationship with God. However the four-voice model also helps to guard against either of the unhelpful extremes of practical theology that Tracy warns against. In particular it helps to hold in dynamic tension the theology of

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[349] Ibid., 11.
[350] Ibid., 7.
[351] Browning is also critiqued by Ray Anderson for placing experience at the centre, preferring instead to refer to *Christopraxis,* the ongoing ministry of Christ by His Spirit, as the central fulcrum. See Ray S Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (IVP Academic, 2001), 26 - 31.

communities' praxis, that which is normative within those communities and formal theological practices.

In addition, by adopting this framework and acknowledging that it is theological all the way through it aims to recognize the logical priority of theology, resultant of the ontological reality of God's Triune life,[352] whilst also not attempting to step outside of the situation but realising that God is revealed in the contextual contingent nature of human life.[353] Moreover this view that embraces the theological potential of different theological practices held in tension finds its basis in a particular Christological foundation. Rather than being based on the Chalcedon model preferred by Swinton and Mowat the four-voice model embraces something more akin to that of Ward et al who take inspiration from the vision of Christ as simultaneously head of his body, the Church, and the one in whom all things hold together.[354] This is in turn a theological vision that acknowledges the ontological reality of God, but by recognizing that theology can be revealed as it is performed in practices, refuses to conflate that theological reality with our provisional and contextually limited knowledge of it.[355] In this Christological vision the church is simultaneously theological and social / cultural, consequently observation on the life of communities can itself be a theological practice.[356]

The four-voice framework then can be understood as theological not because it draws on formal academic theology and gives this priority but because it allows for the revealing of God and hence theological meaning in what communities say, what they do, the tradition they draw on and through the formal practice of the academy. These are different arenas in which human practice can work to grasp something of and participate in the reality of God's life. It is this provisional nature of theological claims that leads Elaine Graham to place the praxis of the Christian community at the normative centre of theology but in this study allows for open-ended theological construction within the four-voice model for

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[352] Paul S. Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Discipline, Two Worlds," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Cambridge, UK: William B Eerdmans, 2012), 26.
[353] See how Healy draws on the Theodramatic theory of Von Balthazar for example. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 52 - 76.
[354] Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 2 - 3.
[355] Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Discipline, Two Worlds," 27.
[356] Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 2.

theology. This understanding of theology then enhances ecclesiological reflection through such a complex conversational framework.

3.1.2 Challenges of Using the Four-Voice Model For This Study

There are a number of challenges of using the four-voice model for theological conversation in relation to this particular study. This section will deal with four of these in particular and address how I have approached using the model in the light of them. The four limitations are as follows: first, that the model provides a framework but not the process of construction within it; second, the challenge of not prioritizing one voice over the others; third, it can unintentionally separate intertwined theological voices; and, fourth, how each voice will be practically accounted for.

By drawing the four-voice model out of its context of theological action research (TAR) and appropriating it for the purposes of this study I am aware that it has been removed from the process of action research that it was designed to serve. Consequently I need to be clear about the process by which the framework assists in the task of theological construction in this thesis. It is as if the four-voice model provides scaffolding within which the construction can take place. However, there are principles within TAR that inform and guide the development of a construction process for the four-voice model.

Action research as a method is invariably focused on enabling research to be conducted by those who are direct participants in the context being researched with a specific aim to offer new perspectives that will result in new action within that context.[357] Specifically in terms of TAR the method involves a commitment to research being conducted by an insider team in dialogue with an outsider team in order that such new understanding and action might be the outcome.[358] On a practical level I am not conducting this kind of research as I am a solo PhD researcher and not part of a team. In addition however the research questions I am asking are not held within a single containable context, but

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[357] See, e.g. Colin Robson's description of action research: 'Action research is primarily distinguishable in terms of its purpose... *Improvement* and *involvement* are central to action research. There is, first, the *improvement* of a practice of some kind; second, the improvement of the *understanding* of a practice by its practitioners; and, third, the improvement of the *situation* in which the practice takes place. Collaboration between researchers and those who are the focus of the research... [is] typically central to action research.' Robson, *Real World Research*, 215 - 6.
[358] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 64 - 5.

rather are drawing on specific contexts in order to reflect on the wider implications of Urban Saints' approach to and understanding of the church. Consequently the approach I have taken is to use the four-voice model of theology as a framework to construct theological proposals in which the operant and espoused voices are heard primarily through adopting the extended case method of ethnographic enquiry.[359]

However, relying as it does on two specific teams, the outsider and insider teams, working together but also separately for particular tasks in order that each voice might be given an appropriate hearing in the conversation, the practical process of TAR implies two key moments. The first of these involves the insider team working in their context to draw out the espoused and operant theologies at work in their communities; the second involves these then already articulated voices being brought into conversation with the normative and formal voices in the conversation.[360]

Similarly then to aim for integrity within my use of the four-voice model the approach I have adopted is a two-step process. Having already articulated what is essentially the normative voice through the orthopraxy contained in the underlying ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints, and from this forming my research questions, the first step of theological construction is to discern the operant and espoused theologies of current Urban Saints groups. This step draws on the praxis model of practical theology and is focussed on the first two subsidiary research questions – to what extent do Urban Saints groups operate as church for those who are part of them? And how is the concept of church articulated in the practice and conversation of young people and youth leaders in Urban Saints?

By taking these questions as a particular moment, a first step, in the construction process this research will remain in keeping with the intentions of TAR and the four-voice model without adopting the full extent of the method. It will ensure that the vital aspect of the voices drawn from practice will be articulated clearly before being placed in conversation with the normative and formal voices. Osmer also envisages that a normative move in

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[359] See more below
[360] Normally articulated by the outsider team.

practical theology can be a two-step process drawing on Graham's praxis based theological vision as the first step.[361]

In envisaging a two step process I am aware of a risk that in practice my method will revert to a form of the pastoral cycle and consequently fall prey to the weaknesses of this model as detailed above. However this risk is minimalised through holding fast to the philosophy behind the four-voice model that understands theological construction as a coming together of various forms of theology. In Terry Veling's words it is about the 'you and I' of different voices coming to an understanding rather than either moving to the viewpoint of the other.[362] It is about ensuring the second step does not result in either a simple negating or applying of the first-step theology.[363]

In addition the understanding of the theological value of praxis reduces the risk of falling into a version of the pastoral cycle despite a two-step approach. By keeping the ideas drawn from the work of Elaine Graham and ordinary theology at the fore, the first step does not become subservient to the second. On the contrary the first step is an essential moment in ensuring the appropriate theological validity of the espoused and operant theologies contained within the practices of Urban Saints groups.

This then leads onto the second challenge of using the four-voice model for this study – not prioritizing one voice over any other. As detailed just now the two-step process is one of ensuring that each voice is considered appropriately in order to maintain the spirit of open-ended enquiry essential to this methodology. The first aspect of this is that while acknowledging the priority of theology in its broadest terms, this does not mean that the theology embodied in practice needs to bow to the theology of the academy, the formal theology of the four-voice model. Here the formal structure of a thesis helps rather than hinders the use of the model since different chapters relate to different voices.[364] In

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[361] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 157. For another viewpoint that envisages two moments in practical theological construction, see Thomas W. Ogletree, "Dimensions of Practical Theology: Meaning, Action, Self," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*, ed. Don Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
[362] Veling, *Practical Theology*, 61.
[363] As per the framework of Tracy detailed above.
[364] See below for details

addition the two-step process proposed prevents the formal theology from over-

powering the espoused and operant theologies of the Urban Saints groups themselves.

In addition, as discussed above, the theological underpinning in which the ontological

reality of God expressed in Triune life leads to an epistemological relativity in relation to

what constitutes faithful Christian life and mission in this time and place demands that

the voice of both the current life and practice of the church and doctrinal formulations be

taken into consideration.[365] There is no blueprint for the church so academic, formal

theology can be seen as one particular type of Christian practice that can produce

theological knowledge.[366] Indeed this is implied within the structure of Browning's vision

for a fundamental practical theology in which systematic theology and historical theology

are particular modes of theological thought that serve a greater theological endeavour in

relation to the church's mission and ministry.[367]

Further to this the approach to reflexivity that I adopt notes the importance of all

research being to some degree autobiographical but also provides means by which I can

adopt the stance of stranger within my research.[368] My own experience in ministry among

young people results in a natural disposition toward the possibility of theological

engagement within the operant life and espoused expression of youth groups.[369] This

helps to guard against the formal theological voice becoming domineering. My reflexive

approach also assists in ensuring that the operant and espoused voices do not drown out

the formal in the two-step process. By deliberately accounting for the introduction of

formal ecclesiology as a specific moment it ensures a fair hearing even when my natural

disposition might be toward that of the youth ministry practices.

The third challenge in adopting the four-voice approach for this study is that of artificially

separating intertwined voices. Cameron et al recognize that each of the voices is never

fully independent of the other.[370] There are indeed echoes and resonances between the

voices. Within youth ministry specifically for example it has been noted how fragments of

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[365] Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Discipline, Two Worlds," 25.
[366] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 48.
[367] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 7 - 8.
[368] See more detailed discussion below.
[369] See also Ward's theo/autobiography in *Participation and Mediation*, 4 - 29.
[370] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 53 - 60.

formal theology are discernible in the espoused and operant theologies of those who work with young people.[371] This is a helpful reminder to keep listening for the hidden voices within each step in the process and ensuring that the intertwined nature of theology in the four-voice model is maintained. In addition the four-voice model keeps me alert to the different voices even when the lines are blurred in the practice of the case studies. Moreover there are times in which the voices themselves are not clear and consistent thus creating paradoxes and contradictions.[372] These incidents and at times disruptions cause reflexive moments in which the overlapping voices can be considered together.[373] However, since a structured thesis relies to a large extent on being able to account for each of the voices in distinct sections, one of the limitations of this study is the way that each voice is to some degree artificially separated from the other in the writing process.

The final challenge of the four-voice model for this thesis flows from this and relates to how I will account for each of the voices. In an organisational sense the normative theological voice can be discerned through accepted practice.[374] This form of normativity has been attributed to youth ministry as a whole.[375] In brief norms and practices are passed on informally and then formalized in literature and resources. Within these accepted, and now written practices, a normative theology is expressed. As detailed in the previous chapter there is an inherent ecclesial imagination within Urban Saints that contains the organisation's practical normative approach of the church.

The operant theological voice is to be found in the embodied practice of communities. As such the life of current Urban Saints groups must be explored to bring this voice to the surface. In addition these groups will contain something of their own espoused theologies. In some ways the idea of the espoused voice is the one that is most complex in relation to exploring the questions of this thesis since there are various ways in which

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[371] David Bailey, "Emerging Faith, Youth Ministry and Theological Shorthand," in *IASYM European Conference* (Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic 2014); "Relationships as Communicative Acts in Youth Ministry and Trinitarian Theology" (Kings College London, 2013).
[372] See following chapter.
[373] Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "From Proclamation to Conversation: Ethnographic Disruptions to Theological Normativity," *Palgrave Communications*, no. 24 (2015).
[374] Cameron et al refer to how orthopraxy within an organisation or community can function as normative. See Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 54 - 5.
[375] Bailey, "Emerging Faith, Youth Ministry and Theological Shorthand; "Relationships as Communicative Acts", 76.

this espoused theology is heard – through the groups studied, the individuals within them as well as to an extent through the historical review. Furthermore the espoused theology was shown to vary within each group and between the groups. Indeed it is this variance that creates something of the ambiguity that is key to the practical ecclesiological approach within Urban Saints.[376] The chapters following this methodology will detail extended case studies of two Urban Saints groups and analysis of the data contained within the thick descriptions of these groups.

In considering what might make up the formal theology for the constructive theological conversation within this thesis it is important to note that unlike the formal TAR process there is not a formal ecclesiology that Urban Saints look to or are a part of through, for example, denominational affiliation. In this situation then I look to the most appropriate ecclesiological conversation within which to bring the normative, espoused and operant theologies into dialogue.[377] Since Urban Saints self identifies as foundationally an evangelical organisation with a missionary emphasis, and is based almost exclusively in the UK, the formal theological voice within this thesis will be that of the ongoing Fresh Expressions of church conversation. This is appropriate since this is predominantly an evangelical conversation in the UK about how church might be more 'mission-shaped'.[378] The final main chapter of this thesis details this contemporary ecclesiological approach in conversation with Urban Saints' approach.

3.2 Youth Groups as Communities of Practice

In order for the complex conversation of the four-voice method to take place the operant ecclesiology of Urban Saints groups must be brought to the surface as a first step in the construction process. As described above this is the theology embodied in the actual practice of particular communities. I detail below the methods of empirical research that will allow me to access these practices, here however it is important to discuss the way in which practices of youth groups can be understood to have legitimacy within ecclesiological conversation when they are not generally recognized as church. The

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[376] See later chapters.
[377] For more on the need to be aware of the conversations we are part of as theologians see Pete Ward, "Attention and Conversation," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: William B Eerdmans, 2012), 37.
[378] *Mission-Shaped Church*.

starting place for this is to understand that Christian youth groups can be seen as communities of practice. Communities of practice are gatherings of people where the community is focused on passing on or sustaining a particular way of life through participating in practices of that life.[379] Shepherd develops this understanding by drawing on the work of Elaine Graham to demonstrate the importance of both formal practices such as Bible teaching and informal practices in sustaining the Christian life of the group.[380] Further, Shepherd describes how community of practice is a good way of understanding the task and purpose of being church.[381] In particular he points to the way that youth groups can stimulate, support and shape faith among participants.[382] That this is in keeping with the earlier remark about approaching ecclesiology in terms of the agency and action of the church this seems to be a helpful route to take.

There is a connection between theological convictions and performative actions. Without this connection our words become empty and actions are hollow.[383] To avoid this however our words and actions need to do more than exist side by side, rather they must 'co-inhere'.[384] The place where this co-inherence can occur is in the practices of Christians as they gather in faith communities together. Dorothy Bass concurs by differentiating between acts (or actions) and practices – 'practices are not just acts; they embody beliefs'.[385]

Bass and Dykstra define Christian practices as 'patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ'.[386] Practices, therefore, are communal, in that they are acts humans take part in together with others. This cooperative, communal character of

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[379] Shepherd, "Community Builder," 35 - 6.
[380] Ibid., 38. Other recent moves in youth ministry have suggested the concept of 'communities of practice' as a helpful way of understanding the role of youth groups in developing faith of young people. See Andrew Root and K.C. Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (IVP Books, 2011), 34; Shepherd, "Community Builder," 35 - 8. By drawing on Elaine Graham's *Transforming Practice*. Nick Shepherd builds a case for seeing 'communities of practice' as a 'helpful way of viewing the task and purpose of being "church"', see "Community Builder," 38.
[381] "Community Builder." See also Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 7 - 8.
[382] Shepherd, "Community Builder," 38.
[383] Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 14.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Dorothy C Bass, ""Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ": The Consumer and the Practitioner," in *Life Together: Practicing Faith with Adolescents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 5.
[386] Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 3.

Christian practices has an instinctively ecclesial dynamic. This definition of practices also stresses that Christian practices have a role, over time, in shaping the life of the community rather than simply being something that a community does together. The phrase 'over time' helpfully implies that there is not always a direct relation between the life that the community of believers professes or aspires to (i.e. its beliefs) and the shape of life expressed in the concrete situation in which it exists. There is a challenge to address the discrepancy often found between beliefs and practices in Christian life.[387] Adherents to the Christian faith 'are not noticeably successful in attaining a unity between statements of their own being-in-the-world and their actual practice'.[388]

This disconnect between espoused beliefs and the operant life of communities does not have to be 'fatal to the theory' of the theological nature of Christian practices.[389] Kathryn Tanner emphasizes how theologians often over-simplify their reflection on Christian practices in order to make explicit connection between belief and practice or to assume that practices are performed because they exhibit particular beliefs. The reality is much messier than this and there is not such a tight connection between belief and practice. Christian practices are often quite open-ended and despite efforts to make them so, they do not often hang together entirely with Christian beliefs. Christian practices seem to be constituted in great part by a slippery give and take with non-Christian practices.[390] Specifically Tanner lists the following things that practices do not necessarily depend on:

> Much explicit understanding of beliefs that explain and inform their performance, (2) agreement on such matters among the participants, (3) strict delimitation of codes for action, (4) systematic consistency between beliefs and action, (5)

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[387] Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Attending to the Gaps between Belief and Practice," in *Practicing Theology: Beleifs and Practives in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy C Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 34.

[388] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God V. 1* (SPCK Publishing, 1992), 134. Empirical studies into specific areas of this relationship between belief and practice in young people concur with this statement. See, e.g. Kathleen Cobb Leonard and Diane Scott-Jones, "A Belief-Behavior Gap? Exploring Religiosity and Sexual Activity among High School Seniors," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25, no. 4 (2010); Abby Day, "Believing in Belonging: An Ethnography of Young People's Constructions of Belief," *Culture and Religion: An Interdiscplinary Journal* 10, no. 3 (2009). Day's article also highlights a discrepancy between religious identity and belief by citing an adolescent boy who referred to himself as a Christian but admitted he didn't even believe in God. This causes Day to suggest the notion of 'unbelieving Christians' (ibid., 265 -6).

[389] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 134.

[390] Kathryn Tanner, "Thelogical Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C Bass (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm Eerdmans, 2001), 228 - 30. I pick up on this in analysis of the Urban Saints groups in chapter 6.

attention to their significance that isolates them from a whole host of non-Christian commitments'.[391]

This open-ended, give and take nature of Christian practices leads Tanner to argue that, despite being in general agreement with the definition of Bass and Dykstra cited above, practices are essentially 'improvisational'.[392] This improvisational nature of practices allows 'non-elites' to be involved in the production of meaning.[393] This gets to the heart of the nature of theological meaning embodied within a community's practices. Since they are open ended and improvisational those who are participating in the practices are involved in the construction of the meaning construed to those practices. Consequently, in a Christian youth group as the young people and leaders participate in the life of the group together they are involved in the construction of meaning.[394]

Furthermore, it is this give and take nature of practices, acknowledging their fallibility that establishes the 'essential place of theological reflection' on everyday life.[395] If it wasn't so then there would be no need for complex conversational models for theology since the line of connection between theological theory and a community's embodied practice would be much more tightly drawn.[396] Rather it can be the gaps or dissonance between theological theory and embodied practice that 'draws our gaze toward the God who works in them and through them'.[397] Thus practices themselves can embody a form of knowledge of God (and therefore a theology) and faithful theological reflection on Urban Saints groups as communities of practice can bring both the operant and espoused theologies, as well as the differences between them, to light. These communities that

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[391] Ibid., 229. Paul Bramadat's ethnographic study of an evangelical Christian Fellowship on a college campus demonstrate this through his findings that highlight the way that members negotiate an implicit contract between the beliefs of the fellowship and participating in the life of the wider community of the college. See Paul A Bramadat, *The Church on the World's Turf: An Evangelical Christian Group at a Secular University* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

[392] Tanner, "Thelogical Reflection and Christian Practices," 230. Tanner claims only a possible difference in emphasis between her understanding of practices and that of Bass and Dykstra (ibid., 228 - 9. n1.) Shepherd describes this difference in emphasis on the way in which Tanner sees practices as being more 'fluid and flexible, accommodating both the reality of organising social life and engaging in acts signified as historically meaningful', see "Trying to Be Christian," 39., whereas for Bass and Dykstra the emphasis is solely on the latter understanding.

[393] "Thelogical Reflection and Christian Practices."

[394] This has been described as a collaborative theology for youth ministry. Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian," 247ff.

[395] Tanner, "Thelogical Reflection and Christian Practices," 232.

[396] Indeed operating in a more purely applied or praxis manner using Ballard and Pritchard's designations for practical theology.

[397] Plantinga Pauw, "Attending to the Gaps between Belief and Practice," 34.

help to stimulate, support and shape faith can then contribute toward developing ecclesiological understanding of the action and agency of the church.

This section has detailed how I am adopting the four-voice model as a framework for practical theological enquiry and construction within this thesis. In particular I have discussed the main strengths and weaknesses of this approach for my purpose and outlined an understanding of Urban Saints groups as communities of practice to underpin the viewpoint that the practices of these groups have the potential to embody theological knowledge. The approach is part of a two-step process of discerning the theology in the practices of the groups, then placing this in a complex creative constructive conversation with the normative and formal ecclesiologies outlined. The next sections then turn to the role and form of qualitative research methods that I will employ to access the practices of the groups.

3.3 Accessing The Operant and Espoused Voices: Qualitative Research and Ethnographic Case Studies

If Urban Saints groups can be considered communities of practice, in which the practices can contain forms of theological meaning, then the research design of this thesis needs to be appropriate to gather data from which such meanings can be gleaned.[398] Denzin and Lincoln argue that qualitative research is best understood in terms of attempts to 'study things in their natural settings… [interpreting] phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.'[399] In this way qualitative research seeks to understand the way in which people interpret their social reality.[400] My research questions, in particular the first two subsidiary questions, require one to understand the ecclesial meaning and interpretation that leaders and young people bring to their experiences of their Urban Saints groups. This is in line with the understanding of ecclesiological enquiry detailed above and it follows that embracing qualitative methods, those often referred to as

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[398] For a summary of issues in relating a research design to specific research questions, see Robson, *Real World Research*, 85 - 6.

[399] Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis, *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Studetns and Researchers* (London: Sage, 2003), 2 - 3.

[400] Bryman 1988, p8. Similarly qualitative research can be described as research that aims to 'get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables', see J.M. Corbin and A.L. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Sage Publications, Inc., 2008).

ethnographic, is a necessary part of developing plausible ecclesiological claims.[401] Because the church is simultaneously theological and social / cultural, ecclesial meaning is constructed in a dialogue 'held together in the one from whom all things have their origin'. Consequently the social and cultural meanings of particular Christian communities of practice need to be researched with appropriate disciplinary rigour.[402] This section argues that ethnographic case studies following the extended case method provide such an appropriate approach for this thesis.

3.3.1 Case Study Research

The use of case studies in practical theological research and reflection is well established[403] and can be utilized well for both exploration and theory building.[404] Research has also demonstrated the usefulness of case study research in further developing the understanding of youth ministry.[405] Although established in practical theology the case study did not originate within the field but rather has developed within the social sciences as a means of empirical data generation within qualitative research.[406]

Robert Yin describes a case study as:

> An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.[407]

This definition neatly encapsulates the rationale behind selecting case study methodology to inform my approach to the empirical aspect of this study, as it would be impossible to realistically study any young people in an Urban Saints group apart from the context

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[401] Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Discipline, Two Worlds," 29 - 35.
[402] Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 2 - 3.
[403] Daniel S Schipani, "Case Study Method," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (John Wiley & Sons 2011, 2011), 91.
[404] Ibid., 96. Schipani offers further detail in explaining that case studies can be helpful in the following ways within practical theology: 'critical and constructive reflection on ecclesial and ministry practice; study, analysis, and evaluation of different forms of faith experience, formation, and transformation; and theory building as well as application or demonstration of theory' ibid., 91.
[405] Steven Emery-Wright, "Teenage Worship : An Examination of the Understanding of Worship among a Group of 14-16 Year Olds within the Methodist Church" (Doctoral, Oxford Brookes, 2003); Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian."
[406] Jennifer Mason describes qualitative research as generating rather than collecting data *Qualitative Researching*, 25 - 6.
[407] Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (California: SAGE, 2003), 12. Case Studies have similarly been described as a 'phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context' M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (SAGE Publications), 25.

within which the group operates. Indeed it is the way in which case study research takes so seriously the context within which the phenomenon under consideration is to be found that offers such potential to practical theology. In addition the case study approach with its focus on specific contexts helps to limit my attentions to the particular groups rather than slipping into trying to describe the practices of Urban Saints as a whole organisation.

Building on his definition cited above, Yin goes on to outline the suitability of case study research for answering questions of an exploratory, explanatory or a descriptive nature.[408] That this present study is asking exploratory questions about the practices of specific Urban Saints groups and their relationship to the church reinforces the suitability of case studies for this purpose. Furthermore, case studies can be described as being intrinsic, instrumental or collective in nature. The intrinsic study is where the case is interesting in and of itself, making no attempt to generalize or discuss theory in relation to the case. In contrast, both the instrumental and collective types could be classed as being extrinsic in nature, meaning that they seek to influence theory either by revising a generalization or by studying a general phenomenon.[409] Guest, Tusting and Woodhead have discussed a similar distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic studies in the field of congregational studies. For them a theological aim to a study can be a defining aspect of work that is extrinsic.[410] This is the nature of the present study.[411] The intrinsic case study ignores the key question of how even attempts at description are affected by theory and the way in which a case is by very nature a case of something in which the researcher is interested.[412] The question then becomes about the place of theory within case study research with the extrinsic approach allowing greater clarity with this question. This fits with the two stage approach described above and is demonstrated in the following chapters that detail the thick descriptions from case studies of two Urban Saints groups

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[408] Yin, *Case Study Research*, 5 - 8.

[409] David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*, Second Edition ed. (Sage Publications Ltd, 2004), 139.

[410] Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting, and Linda Woodhead, *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 1 - 2 & 9.

[411] In relation to Yin, the descriptive case study follows closely the intrinsic type, whereas exploratory and explanatory are more extrinsic in nature.

[412] J. Blommaert and D. Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Beginner's Guide* (Channel View Books, 2010), 12; Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 138 - 40.

before offering a theological analysis of these that is put into conversation with contemporary ecclesiology.[413]

It has been argued that case studies can be used to either build theory or test theory.[414] This statement opens up the important question within case study research of how the data generated from the social situation relates to theory. Much case study research is understood to be inductive in nature, meaning that it begins with the data and seeks to develop or discuss theory from the point of view of this data. An example of this is the work of Glazer and Strauss in developing grounded theory.[415] In discussing the merits of case study research (and the work of Yin in particular) in relation to theory Alvesson and Karreman look to move beyond a polarised debate around inductive or deductive approaches. Rather they argue for empirical data collected through case studies to be seen as a 'partner for critical dialogue'.[416] This viewpoint, they say, allows for empirical data to 'speak back to pre-understandings and theoretical ideas'.[417] The concept of seeing data as a partner for a critical dialogue with existing theory bears striking resemblances with both the four-voice model as a practical theological framework for this project and also points toward the extended case method of Michael Burawoy.[418] Therefore in seeking to negotiate the relationship between theory and data it is to this that I turn.

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[413] This then moves beyond but builds on the groundbreaking work in detailed congregational studies by James Hopewell. See James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, New edition ed. (SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd, 1987).

[414] David Scott, "Qualitative Approaches to Data Collection and Analysis," in *Understanding Social Research: Perspectives on Methodology and Practice*, ed. George McKenzie, Jackie Powell, and Robin Usher (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 1997), 158.

[415] There is, however, some disagreement in the literature as to whether grounded theory is purely inductive or not. See for example Bryant and Charmaz arguing that it is *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* (SAGE Publications Limited, 2007), 15., whereas Corbin and Strauss claim that it has both inductive and deductive aspects *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 325 - 6.

[416] Mats Alvesson and Dan Karreman, *Qualitative Research and Theory Development* (London, UK: Sage, 2011), 14.

[417] Ibid., 15.

[418] Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (1998); *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis* (Berkely and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1991). The usefulness of Burawoy's extended case method for practical theology is explored in Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Discipline, Two Worlds; and Luke Bretherton, "Generating Christian Political Theory and the Uses of Ethnography," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2012).

3.3.2 The Extended Case Method

Burawoy describes the way that methodology 'is concerned with the reciprocal relationship between data and theory'.[419] His extended case method seeks to use data to reconstruct, or extend, existing theory, suggesting that data from case studies can be used to 'examine the macro world through the way [it] shapes and in turn is shaped and conditioned by the micro world'.[420] There are clear parallels between this view and Tracy's vision for practical theology sublating theory. Burawoy goes on to explain how the foundation for analysis of data generated from cases is dialogue, rather than either immersion or distance. This proposed dialogue is seen to be between theory that is of interest or the researcher is seeking to improve,[421] our own biases and perspectives[422] and the data generated from the social situation(s). A key contribution to the conversation provided by the data consists of what Burawoy describes as the 'lay theories' or 'commonsense knowledge' of the community being studied and that it is this that can often provide the point of departure for reconstructing or reshaping theory.[423] In theological terms this commonsense knowledge is akin to ordinary theology or the practical wisdom of the community favoured in the praxis model of practical theology. It is these lay theories of ecclesial life in the operant and espoused theologies of Urban Saints groups that the following chapters seek to discern.

Burawoy contrasts this extended case method with other techniques for dealing with the relationship between theory and data, with the question of generalisability always hovering in the background of the relationship. He contends that his method avoids two unhelpful types of reduction – the positivist and the humanist – that either takes the view of the observer or that of the participant to be sacrosanct.[424] Specifically Burawoy contrasts the extended case method with three other ways of negotiating this relationship between theory and the data of the social situation – grounded theory, the interpretive case method and ethnomethodology. The key differences being that both the interpretive case method of Clifford Geertz and ethnomethodology tend to ignore the challenges of generalisability by focusing specifically on the micro world of the particular.

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[419] Burawoy, *Ethnography Unbound*, 271.
[420] Ibid., 8.
[421] Ibid., 10.
[422] Ibid., 4.
[423] Ibid., 26.
[424] Ibid., 4.

For ethnomethodology it is only the particular that is of interest, whereas Geertz'
interpretive case method contends that the general and macro world can be seen being
expressed in the particular and micro. The contrast with the extended case method is that
Burawoy suggests that the micro world is shaped by external forces of wider society,
without necessarily being a concise expression of it.[425]

Conversely grounded theory shares with the extended case method an understanding
that the micro and macro worlds are discreet and causally related, however they differ in
that a grounded theory approach seeks to construct theory from the ground up.
Consequently those following a grounded theory approach seek to enter the field without
a commitment to prior theory whereas using the dialogical approach of the extended
case method there is space to lay out what is expected to be found before entry into the
field.[426] In relation to the specifics of the present study this allows for the espoused and
normative theologies of Urban Saints and their groups to be brought into the
conversation from the point that the research begins in order that the conversation
between theory and practice may be ongoing throughout the data generation process.

The assumptions underpinning the extended case method help to mitigate against two of
the main challenges to case study method – those of generalisability and reliability. As
discussed above the extended case method doesn't seek to ignore the challenge of
generalisability by solely focusing on the micro world of the specific case, but neither
does it assume that the macro world is simply an extension of the micro. By operating
through dialogue between established theory and the specific case the desired outcome
is the refining of theory rather than ignoring it or developing it from the case. In this way
the extended case method reflects David Tracy's conviction about practical theology
being a dialogue with various possible outcomes. Theory that is refined from the
extended case method is then open to be tested again in dialogue with further cases. If
this were to be done it would be an external generalisability that was being tested.[427]

However it also important to be aware of internal validity – the extent to which the
findings of the case study are accurate within the case itself. External generalisability is

[425] Ibid., 272.
[426] Ibid., 9.
[427] Robson, *Real World Research*, 107 - 9.

more likely if the internal validity of the findings is strong.[428] One way in which I sought to check the internal validity of my findings was through a process of returning to the case study groups to share my developing findings and check for resonance with those involved in the groups on a regular basis. Internal validity is closely connected to reliability in case study work. The extended case method is also helpful here as it does not approach the data generated from a positivist point of view but requires critical dialogue in which findings are tested. In addition, triangulation between different data sources seeks to help with the reliability of findings from case study data.

3.3.3 Ethnography, Participant Observation and Interviews

By following Burawoy's extended case method I am committing myself to approaching the cases in my research ethnographically.[429] Ethnography[430] has become a difficult term to define as its usage has developed from its root in nineteenth-century anthropology.[431] This root imagines the work of a lone researcher travelling to some far-flung place to spend time observing some 'natives' in order to understand their culture and then, upon return, to write the definitive description of that culture.[432] Indeed there is still some disagreement about the extent to which the term still refers to a particular methodological approach or now more accurately refers to a posture for qualitative research more generally.[433]

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[428] Ritchie and Lewis, *Qualitative Research Practice*, 274.

[429] There is some disagreement in the literature regarding whether case studies can in fact be described as being ethnographic. Gobo ("Ethnography," in *Qualitative Research*, ed. David Silverman (London: Sage, 2011), 104) argues that case study research should not be mixed up with ethnography whereas Colin Robson acknowledges that every research project is a form of case study (Robson, *Real World Research*, 142. Yin seems to acknowledge that there is some difficulty in overlapping the two approaches. Initially he seeks to differentiate between the case study method and an ethnographic approach (*Applications of Case Study Research* (SAGE Publications, Incorporated, 2003), 46), however he goes on to concede that ethnographic evaluations can be used as part of the evaluation strategy within a case study (ibid., 75).

[430] Ethnographic methods are consistent with other empirical work involving research into young people's faith, theology and involvement in the church reinforces the usefulness of this direction for my own research see, for example, the use of ethnographic methods in Bramadat, *The Church on the World's Turf : An Evangelical Christian Group at a Secular University*; Emery-Wright, "A Qualitative Study Construction of How 14-16 Year Olds Understand Worship; Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian; Anne Phillips, *The Faith of Girls* (Farnharm, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2011).

[431] Paul Atkinson et al., *Handbook of Ethnography* (Sage, 2007), 9; Gobo, "Ethnography," 104; Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3rd Revised edition ed. (Routledge, 2007), 1.

[432] *Ethnography*, 1.

[433] James Spickard, "The Porcupine Tango: What Ethnography Can and Cannot Do for Theologians," *Ecclesial Practices.* 2016, no. 3 (2016).

In recent times, however, the term has developed more inclusively and has become pervasive across a wide range of disciplinary boundaries, often being employed under the rubric of qualitative research.[434] Ethnography can be succinctly described as a 'mode of looking'[435] that aims to:

> '[Bring] ways of understanding into awareness, making them explicit and public, and building a credible argument that what one has learned should be believed by others'.[436]

Agar is particularly informative of the ways in which ethnography has developed. His updated edition of *The Professional Stranger* begins by describing some of these developments, particularly describing the ideas that ethnographic research should no longer be seen as mere description but should include 'some news for the "natives" too'[437] whilst also becoming more of a collaborative exercise in which the researcher works participatively with those being studied.[438] Both of these also allude to the rejection of the idea from the early days of ethnography that the researcher can take an objective view. The widespread understanding now is that the ethnographer needs to take seriously the viewpoint that the act of observing will have an impact on what is seen.[439] However this does not need to affect the validity of findings on condition that the researcher is up front about the assumptions taken into the field and the impact on those being studied. This is known as reflexivity.[440]

Increasingly ethnographic methods have been seen to be able to bring theological insight into view and in this way move beyond the thick description of James Hopewell's work in studying congregations[441] towards something where the goal is more transformative. By way of example, ethnography has been argued to be useful in developing pastoral care,[442]

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[434] Atkinson et al., *Handbook of Ethnography*, 1 - 5; Barbara Sherman Heyl, "Ethnographic Interviewing," in *The Handbook of Ethnogrpaphy*, ed. Paul Atkinson, et al. (London: Sage, 2001), 369; J.P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), iii.
[435] Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 230.
[436] M.H. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (1996), 1.
[437] Ibid., 13. Hammersley and Atkinson refer to this as ethnography providing the basis for action to transform the world *Ethnography*, 14.
[438] *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, 16.
[439] Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 10 - 3.
[440] Ibid., 14 - 6. See more below for my particular approach to reflexivity in this study.
[441] Hopewell describes a threefold rationale for his studies: developing a greater appreciation of a congregations value, reflecting on the way the Gospel is heard and proclaimed and gaining a perception of how congregations draw on 'cultural forms of other human communities'. Hopewell, *Congregation*, 9 - 12.
[442] Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Pilgrim Press, The, 2008); "Care-Full Listening: Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice," *Congregations* 34, no. 1 (2008).

in dogmatics,[443] as ethics,[444] and, most importantly for this study, in relation to ecclesiology.[445]

Case study research does not require particular data collection methods, however multiple sources of evidence are important.[446] Part of the key behind using multiple data sources within a case study is the importance of triangulation. This means that using different data sources allows for assumptions, insights and questions to be trusted or considered against various forms of data. Interviews however are described as being among the most important sources that can be used when conducting research.[447] The value of interviews is that they can provide 'rich, detailed data directly from participants in the social worlds under consideration'.[448] It is possible to differentiate between interviews as used generically in case study research and an ethnographic interview in particular. Indeed merely using interviews as a part of the research does not make it ethnographic in nature,[449] rather interviews can be viewed as being ethnographic when they are utilized where relationships with informants in the field have already been built through time as a participant observer. This allows for a greater rapport in the interview and may encourage the interviewee to be more open. This quality of relationship distinguishes interviewing that can be described as ethnographic.[450] In the light of this my research strategy involved a good amount of time spent as a participant-observer in each Urban Saints group for a number of months first, with the interviews beginning after this when a good level of relationship had developed with the young people in each group.

3.3.4 Analysing Case Study Data

It is commonplace when analyzing the data collected through ethnographic means to use a form of coding as a tool to identifying themes and concepts that begin to emerge.[451]

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[443] Nicholas Adams and Charles Elliott, "Ethnography Is Dogmatics: Making Description Central to Systematic Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 3 (2000).
[444] Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Scharen (Continuum, 2011).
[445] Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*; Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*.
[446] Yin, *Case Study Research*, 42.
[447] *Applications of Case Study Research* (SAGE Publications, 2003), 89.
[448] Heyl, "Ethnographic Interviewing," 369.
[449] Blommaert and Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Beginner's Guide*, 42.
[450] Heyl, "Ethnographic Interviewing," 369.
[451] Robson, *Real World Research*, 149; Clive Seale, *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale, Second ed. (Sage Publications Ltd, 2004), 313. Of the empirical youth ministry studies I have previously mentioned, see Nick Shepherd's *Trying to be Christian* for a good example of coding.

There are many similarities between different systems but I adopted the recommended system of Colin Robson with an addition from Clive Seale. Robson talks of three stages in a coding process that will in turn create categories, relationships between these and then conceptualize and account for these relationships through finding core categories. He names these stages open coding (to form initial categories), axial coding (to interconnect them) and selective coding (to establish a core category or categories).[452] Seale adds to this the possibility of coding schemes being either deductive (coming from pre-existing theories or concerns) or inductive (from the data itself).[453]

My approach made use of both deductive and inductive coding when analyzing the data gathered from my case studies of Urban Saints groups. Potential deductive codes were developed from the normative theology contained in the historical review whilst I also identified codes inductively as they become apparent in the words and practices of the young people and their Urban Saints groups. Combining inductive and deductive codes in this way is helpful in setting up the critical creative conversation that forms the heart of my practical theological enquiry, whilst also staying true to Burawoy's extended case method by laying theory out in advance of the data being generated from the case studies. Thus, through my two-step methodological process, I am able to comment both on the way in which the groups relate to the formal voice of ecclesiology and also the ways in which they can bring insight to the ecclesial conversation.

In practice, when coding and then analyzing the data for the forthcoming chapters I initially coded each case study separately in order to identify the key categories that were coming to light through my research and then, as I began to develop clarity about the key themes from each I carried out a further round of coding in order to identify the core categories that then are carried through into the analysis and form the basis of the operant and espoused theological voices.

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[452] Robson, *Real World Research*, 149.
[453] Seale, *Researching Society and Culture*, 313.

3.4 Issues in Reflexivity

The notion of reflexivity is crucial in qualitative forms of research. Reflexivity is based on the understanding that the researcher can never achieve a truly objective stance.[454] This starting place for reflexivity is also a crucial aspect of the relationship between the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this study - an acknowledgment that the worldview I bring into my research makes claims for ontological realism based on the Trinitarian nature of God but with epistemic humility such that although we strive to fully participate in God and discern this participation we will never achieve this.[455] Indeed reflexivity in research is a 'key dynamic'[456] that through articulating the researcher's assumptions can help to control the tendency to conflate ontology and epistemology in theological research. There are three aspects to reflexivity that pertain to this study in particular. First, personal reflexivity; second, this study as insider research; and, third epistemological reflexivity. I will discuss each in turn.

Personal reflexivity refers to way that all qualitative research is, to some extent, autobiographical,[457] meaning that as researchers we bring our own story, background and beliefs into the research with us. These need acknowledging.[458] In addition, more than simply acknowledging, this autobiographical nature to research shapes the questions we want to ask. The particular interest in the research questions underpinning this study as well as the choice of Urban Saints as an organisational lens through which to address the questions flow out of my own experiences as a youth minister within local churches. In this way I recognize that I am part of the data that emerges from my research and the data is in turn part of my ongoing development as someone who ministers among young people.[459] This is not necessarily a problem in itself but is important as it makes explicit the acknowledgement that the perspective from which I observe and question shapes what I see and choose to focus on in the process of research. As Denscombe helpfully puts it 'the way we look and the sense we give [our data] are part and parcel of the thing

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[454] Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Social Research*, 91.
[455] See above.
[456] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59.
[457] Ibid., 60.
[458] Snape Dawn and Liz Spencer, "The Foundations of Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Research Practice*, ed. Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 20.
[459] Liz Spencer, Jane Ritchie, and William O'Connor, "Analysis: Practices, Principles and Processes," ibid., 205.

itself'.[460] Someone else carrying out research among the same groups as me would bring their own story and assumptions that in turn would shape what they see and how they interpret the data.[461] This personal reflexivity is important as it helps guard against thinking that the theoretical picture we produce is an accurate representation of reality.[462]

Shepherd describes well the impact of insider research as a youth minister carrying out qualitative research within the field of youth ministry. This aspect of research requires an ongoing process of personal reflexivity, as it is in some ways a specific example of the autobiographical nature of research. As Shepherd discusses there are advantages to be gained from insider research. For example I felt able to quickly understand some of the basic ground rules of the group due to my familiarity with youth group ministry over many years. This ability to feel comfortable within the environment allows for an insider researcher to build rapport with participants quickly. This can be particularly helpful and is quite common in research among young people. Similarly sharing religious beliefs with the primary faith outlook of the field can enhance the insider's ability to be sensitive to perceived religious experiences, language and divine activities.[463]

It is important when engaged in social research, and insider research in particular, to guard against over familiarization with the field; there is a need to see the familiar as strange. In order to help facilitate this I followed Denscombe in adopting two stances toward my research. The first of these is that of a stranger. Despite my familiarity with the setting of youth group ministry the immediate distinction of approaching the groups in my research as an observer made my role in the group strange and helped me adopt the posture of a stranger. In addition the internal dialogue I experienced between the way in which things occurred in the groups and my own thoughts as to how I would have done things allowed me to question and observe from this perspective. This was an aid in interrogating my data in order to see the practices of these youth groups as if for the first

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[460] Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Social Research*, 91.
[461] See the differences in Fiddes and Ward's approaches to observing the same situation in Paul S. Fiddes and Pete Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism in St Aldates Church, Oxford," in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids MI and Cambridge UK: William B Eerdmans, 2012).
[462] Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*, 79 - 80.
[463] See Shepherd, "Trying to Be Christian," 61 - 4.

time. The second stance suggested by Denscombe is akin to a film critic who is immersed in the experience and then later analyses that experiences to critique and question. This is a vital process for an insider researcher as it allows, through writing up and consideration of field notes, certain experiences or practices to be seen in a new or different light.[464]

Ironically by being consciously aware of my position as an insider I was perhaps more acutely aware of the need to make the familiar strange. Ritchie and Lewis refer to the kind of posture that researchers should adopt to assist in this process of making the familiar strange as 'empathic neutrality'.[465] This posture involves a deliberate attempt to make assumptions known and transparent. In doing this, when aspects of the research don't fit with these assumptions and prior expectations, the researcher is aware and more able to see the strangeness. Through this process the research can take new directions as the reflexive analysis allows the researcher to focus on that which is now strange. There were a number of critical incidents through my research that came from this process and in turn helped me to maintain my posture as a stranger.[466]

Epistemological reflexivity refers to an awareness of the way in which my approach to this research has shaped what can be known.[467] This is closely connected to the concept of all research being in some way autobiographical since my viewpoint and research questions flow directly from my experiences as a youth minister. In addition my position as a practicing Christian, consistent with my ontological and epistemological assumptions above, mean that I carry with me into my research an assumption that God is at work and might be experienced by young people and leaders through activity of the Holy Spirit in the groups. Consequently I make explicit claims that through these Christian youth groups young people can discover, develop and maintain a personal faith in the Triune God. This assumption draws on my experiences as a youth minister and means that I do not see such claims to faith as merely a social construction of reality but rather with the potential to be connected to the ultimate ontological reality of the Triune God. Whilst this limits my viewpoint to an extent it also, as a consequence, provides me with an ability to discern

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[464] Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Social Research*, 92 - 3.
[465] Dawn and Spencer, "The Foundations of Qualitative Research," 13 - 4.
[466] These were described in chapter 1.
[467] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 60.

the ways in which the young people and leaders understand their participation in the group as developing Christian community.

By integrating the viewpoint of a stranger into this epistemological reflexivity the research process requires constant assessing and reassessing that results in a revising and modifying of methods as I go along.[468] The details of how this occurred in the field are included in the methods section. Here it will suffice to say that the requirements of the particular questions I was pursuing required me to amend my involvement with the groups as well as some of the areas in which I gathered data through the research journey. Each of these aspects of reflexivity are key in the approach I have taken in this research and will be evident through the discussion of methods to come and also within the thick description of the data chapters themselves.

3.5 Empirical Research Methods and Process

To carry out my research with Urban Saints I needed to gain two levels of access, requiring negotiating with gatekeepers in different roles within the organisation.[469] The first of these was through the leadership team of the organisation itself. My rationale for choosing Urban Saints as the organisational lens through which to approach research was due to both personal and geographical closeness - personal as I had good relationships with members of the leadership team through a short period working for the organisation myself[470] and geographical as the head office is based in my home town of Luton.

Since Urban Saints was to be so crucial to this research my negotiations with them began as I was putting together my initial research proposal in Autumn 2011. This contact was made through an email with a follow up meeting with Matt Summerfield, the CEO at that time.[471] These initial contacts were positive and helpful. Matt was interested in the research but wanted the agreement of the full leadership team and Trustees before agreeing. Consequently I presented the aims and plans for the research to the leadership team in October 2011 and subsequently a written proposal was submitted to the Trustees

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[468] Zina O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 216.

[469] Seale describes gatekeepers as the 'sponsors, officials and significant others who have the power to block and grant access to and within a setting'. *Researching Society and Culture*, 229.

[470] From 1999 - 2002

[471] Matt Summerfield was CEO for the duration of my research before being replaced in early 2017.

with the leadership team's support and recommendation. The Trustees agreed and I was able to submit my research proposal with access in general negotiated.

3.5.1 Archival Research

Once my research proposal was accepted and I began the project as a doctoral student I returned to Urban Saints to request access to their archives. The archive is located in the basement of their head office building and at the time was under the care of their Supporter's Director. I was put in touch with her via Matt Summerfield and was granted full access to the archives as required. This openness and ease of access was invaluable. I spent an initial two days in the archives during the autumn of 2012. The detail and quality of the records kept meant I had access to the organisation's very earliest documents and statements in the form of minutes from 1906 onwards and early letters and other record books. I took photographs of pages and extracts that seemed relevant from these records meaning that I could review and accurately reference them later. In addition I was permitted to take home with me copies of more recent material such as magazines from the 1970s onwards where more than one copy was held.

Approximately a year after these initial days of archival research I realised that I needed to clarify some of the issues and check my data so requested and was granted a further two days in the archives. The opportunity to return with more focus was extremely helpful. One aspect of the archives I was especially keen to revisit was to do with the connections with the Church Mission Society (CMS). The significance of this connection was embodied in key men who were crucial to the formation of Crusaders and also were CMS missionaries.[472] It was during these additional days of archival research that I decided to search for these men in the CMS records. This led me to discover that records of CMS missionaries and their letters were held in the Cadbury Research Library, part of the University of Birmingham. I put in a request in late 2013 to visit and look at these archives and was able to carry this out in early January 2014. Some helpful insights were garnered through this process to add depth and nuance to the earliest part of the organisation's story.

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[472] See Chapter 2

3.5.2 Case Study Research

Once I had permission I was able to embark on my research. However I still needed to identify groups that would operate as case studies. My initial plan was to work with three groups. There were a number of criteria that would determine which groups I would approach. Practically they needed to be within a reasonable geographical distance of my home since I would need to travel on a regular basis to visit the groups. Alongside this through my time working for Urban Saints I was aware of developments within the organisation that meant gradually a larger proportion of groups were church-linked rather than independent as at the beginning. Resultant of this it was clear that among my field sites I needed to include examples of both an independent and church-linked group.

Through a combination of recommendations from the Supporter's Director and being given access to the database of affiliated groups I contacted the main leader from St Aidans Crusaders. This leader, Victoria, was also a trustee of Urban Saints which had the added benefit that she was already aware of my research and had been part of the process of granting permission initially. Given that St Aidans were also an independent group tracing their history back to the first decade of Urban Saints life it seemed like an ideal group for one of my case studies. I wrote to Victoria, received a positive response and followed up with a face-to-face meeting. Again this went well and I was granted permission to use the group as a case study site with the stipulation that I was to remember that their main focus would be their ministry among young people.[473]

Alongside this I was quickly offered the opportunity to use Urban Saints Hightown (USH) as a case study as it was a group set up by Matt Summerfield. It had been in existence only a few years and was directly connected to a local church. In addition it was set up with intent of embodying everything Matt envisioned for Urban Saints as a whole following some major changes he initiated within the organisation.[474] Consequently both these groups could be considered 'critical case studies'.[475] As Matt was not the main leader at the time I began my research he put me touch with Stuart who was then leading

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[473] See examples of email correspondence in Appendix B.
[474] See Matt Summerfield interview.
[475] A critical case study is one that has 'strategic importance in relation to the general problem'. Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (2006): 14.

the group. Stuart was open to me being involved and invited me to meet the other leaders, to whom I shared the plans for my research.

A weakness to these two groups was a similarity in demographics – both operating within quite large, middle class areas. Consequently I had hoped to include a third case study site and targeted groups in village locations for this. Unfortunately despite finding three possible groups that fitted my criteria and were still within reasonable geographic access the group leaders (i.e. the gatekeepers) were not responsive. Resultantly and reluctantly I decided to carry out the research with the focus on the two groups but to endeavour to spend more time in each group.

Once access was agreed with the gatekeepers I embarked on my fieldwork. I entered the field with the intention of using observations of group nights and leaders' meetings alongside semi-structured interviews with key participants and some simple document analysis of any publicity or literature produced by the leaders of the group. During the fieldwork these initial plans were followed but with some additional aspects of observation which are detailed below.

3.5.3 Observations

I began my fieldwork with observations, intending to ensure that I built a good rapport with future interviewees through this time already spent in the groups. As is shown in Appendix A I engaged in observations in both groups over the same time period. On occasion this meant consecutive nights with USH meeting on Fridays and St Aidans on Saturdays. The advantage to this was being able to compare and contrast emerging themes from each with the other as I went along. Thus my analysis could begin in an informal manner and thoughts occurring through observations in one group could be considered in the context of the other.

In both field sites I aimed to arrive around fifteen minutes before the young people. I would find the main leader to confirm that I was there, have a quick overview of the evening and talk through any particular plans.[476] I found that my role in the groups

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[476] E.g. some interviews took place on group nights.

developed over the time I carried out the research. The length of time from beginning observations to concluding them allowed for this transition to occur naturally. Initially, out of a desire for neutrality and keeping my influence on the group to a minimum[477] I adopted the posture of an observer-participant.[478] In this posture I positioned myself on the edge of the room, often not really involved in what was going on but trying to take notes and noticing the ways in which the groups operated. Quite quickly however I began to feel uncomfortable in this position. I realised that by aiming to not impact the group through non-participation my presence was actually more conspicuous due to the participatory nature of youth work. The only adults there were leaders who had clear, albeit often unspoken roles to play. Gradually therefore I transitioned more into the mode of a participant-observer and found my own role within each group. In my reflections on this transition in my field notes I termed this being 'conspicuously inconspicuous' as my presence felt less odd the more I got involved.

I wasn't alone in needing to learn to understand my role within the groups. In early observations in both groups it became apparent that the volunteer leaders hadn't yet fully understood what I was there for. This may have been exacerbated by my attempts to be a neutral observer. In Hightown the leader, Stuart, asked me to return to a leaders' meeting and answer some questions that others had about my research and role in the group. In this meeting it became apparent that one or two of the leaders were under the impression that I was there to monitor how well they were running the group.[479] I was able to answer their questions and reassure them that I was there to learn how they did things not assess how well they did things. Similarly, in St Aidans Crusaders after one of the leaders led a Bible study that I observed she quickly turned to me after the young people had left the room and asked 'was that ok?'[480]

These early experiences helped me to reassess my role and how I would access the best data to help address my research questions.[481] My history as a youth minister and the

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[477] Though aware that my being there would impact the way the groups functioned.
[478] There are four potential roles played by the researcher in observations: Complete participant, complete observer, participant as observer and observer as participant. Seale, *Researching Society and Culture*, 229.
[479] One seeming to see me as an equivalent of a school inspector!
[480] St Aidans observation, 7/12/13, p. 3, para 25
[481] As per the discussion of epistemological reflexivity above.

nature of insider research meant that after these experiences I was able to quickly find a role in which I felt comfortable within the groups and I think in return they felt comfortable with me. Achieving this required me to operate much more akin to that of a volunteer leader in the group rather than that of an impartial observer. This transition toward an emphasis on being a participant observer is in keeping with the epistemological approach outlined earlier, in which God is experienced through participation.

The early move toward a more participative approach to observations though more conducive to data gathering was more of a challenge in terms of recording observations in terms of note taking as I was less able to have notebook and pen to hand. Consequently my note taking took place at times on the copy of an evening's running order that was produced each week at USH and therefore less intrusive to be holding. At other times I needed to excuse myself for a few minutes at a convenient moment in order to note down something of interest that I could detail further later on. Sometimes I found myself scribbling detailed notes as I sat in my car before driving home at the end of a group night. The challenge of recording observations became easier the longer I spent in the group and the focus of my observations became sharper through the initial stages of informal analysis that were taking place. Where possible my observation notes were written up on the same night as the group took place while the events were fresh in my mind, though on occasion notes were written up the following day.

In addition to the regular group nights I observed leaders' meetings for both groups and also a number of other activities that I as I went along I realised were significant in addressing the key research questions in each group. In relation to USH I observed a number of Sunday morning services at Hightown Christian Centre, the church to which the group was affiliated, as a number of the young people attended these services with varying frequencies. With St Aidans I became aware of occasional 'prayer teas' that they held with another traditional Crusader group from North London and made sure I attended one of these. I also spent one day of a residential weekend with St Aidans. The dates, timings and locations of these observations are detailed in Appendix A.

3.5.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

As discussed above semi-structured interviews are a good means of gathering detailed data directly from participants.[482] By complementing observations with interviews I was able to provide a means of assessing my initial reflections from the observations whilst also informing these ongoing observations. My plan in both groups was to interview all of the main leaders in the groups as well as a good selection of the young people who were regular group members. I defined those who were main leaders as those who were regularly involved in the groups and leaders' meetings through the first six – eight months of my observations after which I began to arrange the interviews. Each group had some occasional helpers who were there from time to time. I decided not to focus on these as their participation in the groups and relationship with the young people was more transitory.

In terms of the young people I restricted my interviews to those who were over sixteen and volunteered. The age limit was in part to include young people who had more experience in the groups to draw on and consequently would be able to reflect more on their participation but also due to safeguarding restrictions.[483] Additionally approaching the young people as volunteers was vital to me as not only did it mean that those interviewed were not coerced into participating but also that the interviews were carried out in keeping with core values of youth work – voluntary participation being one of these and also equality of opportunity being maintained since any of those aged sixteen or over could offer to be interviewed.[484]

I began arranging my interviews about eight months after my observations had started. This meant that I had developed a good level of rapport with both leaders and young people. I had also by this time started to become aware of some themes and potential categories through the early observations and so was able to include some of these thoughts in the interviews. I introduced the interviews to leaders in leaders' meetings within both groups and then followed up with emails to each of them individually to arrange details. On occasion I then confirmed details in person during a group night or

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[482] Heyl, "Ethnographic Interviewing," 369.
[483] See more on ethics and informed consent below.
[484] The fours values for youth work are normally listed as: voluntary participation, empowerment, informal education and equality of opportunity. See Brierley, *Joined Up: An Introduction to Youth Work and Ministry*, 7 - 8.

with a phone call. In terms of the young people I was given the opportunity to explain about interviews at a group night in each group and to ask for volunteers. Those who volunteered gave me email addresses and followed up with an email to arrange the interview. Interviews with young people generally took place on group nights in the buildings where the groups met. This helped to ensure there were no safeguarding concerns and that the young people were somewhere they felt comfortable. On two occasions I interviewed young people in their home but this was where their parent was a leader of the group and also in the house at the same time. From a practical viewpoint holding interviews on a group night ensured that the young people were there. The leaders chose for themselves when and where they wanted to be interviewed and consequently I carried out interviews in homes, offices, cafes and my own dining room. In general the interviews with leaders lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes, whereas those with the young people lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Each interview was recorded on an electronic device[485] and then fully transcribed in the following days. Being semi-structured the interviews followed a similar pattern but with space for the conversation to flow as the interviewee talked. The interview plans with the major themes of the interviews are included as an appendix. Each interview consisted of a warm up question, the main body of topics and ended with a cooling off question that allowed the interviewee to talk about anything they liked in relation to the group that hadn't come up in our conversation. In this way the interviewees were able to finish the interviews under control and often some fascinating insights came to light at this point in the interview. In addition I became aware that conversation would continue after the formal interview had finished, and often after the recorder was turned off. Even in these conversations helpful data was gathered and with the consent of the interviewee I would take notes of what they had said if the recorder had been switched off. The timetable of interviews is detailed in Appendix A.

3.5.5 Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations

I have detailed above the process of gaining access to my case studies sites through negotiating with various gatekeepers, here I will discuss the issues involved with informed

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[485] Usually a mobile phone with voice recorder.

consent and ethical considerations within the case studies. In each case study all participants were given the opportunity to give informed consent through access to information sheets and by signing consent forms.[486] Due to the nature of youth groups in which the membership can be quite transitory there were occasions where I was unable to get a signed consent from an individual who was only in the group for a week or on very rare occasions. In these situations I was conscious not to include specific reference to them in my field notes. This was more of an issue in USH where the number of young people was higher and it was more common for individuals to bring friends for occasional evenings. The research project was granted ethical approval[487] but in addition I considered the key ethical considerations suggested by Denscombe: avoiding stress and discomfort, avoiding undue intrusion, confidentiality of data and protection of identities.[488]

I addressed each of these in the following ways through my time in the field sites:

- Avoiding stress and discomfort: none of the participants were asked to do anything in the observations that they wouldn't have done in the groups anyway. I found through the research process as well that on a number of occasions rather than stress, the participants found being interviewed a helpful process.

- Avoiding undue intrusion: I sought to do nothing in the observations that wasn't with the agreement and awareness of the key leaders of each group, mostly operating as a volunteer youth leader would. In addition when it came to the interviews I allowed the interviewee the opportunity to set the time and location in order to fit in with when it suited them.

- Confidentiality of data: In keeping with the ethical policy of Durham University participant data has been kept confidential at all times. Recordings of interviews have been transcribed and deleted whereas all written notes and documents are password protected on my personal computer.

- Protection of identities: All participant and group names used in the case study sections in this thesis are pseudonyms in order to protect the identities of those who took part.

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[486] Examples of which are in Appendix C.
[487] See Appendix C.
[488] Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Social Research*, 64 - 7.

Since my research involved working alongside under-eighteens I was required to have a DBS check through Urban Saints. This was done before I began my fieldwork in either group. In addition I needed to abide by basic safeguarding good practice for volunteer youth leaders to ensure my own safety and that of the young people I worked with. This meant that, other than for interviews, I was never alone in a room with under eighteens. With the interviews on group nights where I needed to be in a room with a single young person I ensured that another leader knew where we were and that the room had glass in the door so that we could be visible at all times. Other than these safeguarding considerations I did not expect my research would put participants into vulnerable positions. Since my research was focusing on those who were committed to the groups and regular attendees it was unlikely that they would have negative experiences to share. Indeed most of those being interviewed expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to talk about what they valued in the group.

4. CASE STUDY ONE – ST AIDANS CRUSADERS

As detailed in the previous chapter there is a two-step process required in order to set up the open-ended dialogue necessary to address the main research question at the heart of this thesis. The present and following chapters begin the first of these steps by detailing two extended case studies of current Urban Saints groups. These case studies, by representing the beginning of the first step in constructing the theological conversation envisaged within my use of the four-voice model, begin to express something of both the espoused and operant ecclesiologies within the groups and among the participants in those groups. Consequently, this first step and these case studies begin to articulate responses to the first two additional research questions; namely:

- *To what extent do Urban Saints groups practically operate as 'church' for those involved?*
- *How is the concept of church articulated in the practice and conversation of young people and youth leaders in Urban Saints?*

This first case study chapter focuses on detailing the description of St Aidans Crusaders. This is based on the fieldwork detailed in the methods section of the previous chapter. Despite carrying out the fieldwork for these case studies concurrently so that themes to emerge from both could feed into each other to help in the development of the espoused and operant theological voices, I choose to begin with St Aidans as its longevity provides a logical bridge between the historical review and current practice.

The heritage of St Aidans means it finds its origins in the early days of the organisation as a whole and consequently was involved as the inherent ecclesial imagination became established. As a result this forms a backdrop to this first extended case study.[489] Since the ecclesial imagination is formed out of the ways in which various relationships operate – between individuals and their own faith, within groups, between groups and with specific local churches – these same relationships were the key areas that I initially had in mind as I began the fieldwork process.

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[489] In keeping with the concept of inductive and deductive coding described in the methodology the ecclesial imagination also influenced some of the initial codes used to organise the case study data.

There is an ambiguity inherent within the ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints as it describes a way of forming communal Christian life but exists outside of conventional denominational and institutional church life. Two quotes, the first from a young person who is part of St Aidans Crusaders and the second from a leader, express this ambiguity within current practice. They highlight a discrepancy in understanding of the identity and experience of the group as it meets week by week to offer Bible teaching, crafts and games for children and young people in the city of St Aidans:

> I went to Crusaders and it was my youth group, it was my church for two years.[490]

> We are not a church; we are a Christian youth group.[491]

This extended case study of St Aidans then aims to detail the main themes and practices that form the life of the group and develop an understanding of how these different ways of articulating its identity and role operate in the lives of the participants. How is it that this group is both not a church and yet able to be described as being church for someone at the same time?

The case study proceeds in four sections: first, a brief history of the group; second, an outline of a group night to provide a picture of what the young people and leaders experience week by week as they attend the group; third, I detail what I call the modes of belonging. These are four core categories that were developed through the process of coding the data relating to what creates the connection and rationale for ongoing participation in the group; and, fourth, the relationship with and understanding of the church within the group's participants and practices.

The case study will conclude by describing the ways in which the group provides a key experience of communal Christian life, and therefore becomes a form of ecclesial expression, for many of the participants. This ecclesial expression is not uniform however as different participants appropriate it in different ways as they see fit. In addition the case study articulates different ways in which the group creates ecclesial expression for individuals and is perceived as part of the overall ecclesial life of the local community.

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[490] Sally interview, St Aidans, 21/4/15, p. 10, para 58.
[491] Richard interview, St Aidans 21/10/14, p. 11, para 101.

4.1 Brief History and Overview of the Group

St Aidans Crusaders (affiliated to Urban Saints), as it chooses to be known, celebrated its centenary in 2015. In 1915 when the class[492] was launched it met, as now, on what could be termed 'neutral ground'.[493] However, the class gathered on Sundays at 3pm rather than meeting on a Saturday evening as it does now. In addition, and in line with the history of Urban Saints, at the time of its launch it was for boys only. This class consisted of an hour of prayers, choruses, hymns, scripture readings, a Bible talk and some notices. Some of those leading sections of the meeting would be older boys from the group and there might be conversation of a mid-week prayer meeting, a summer camp or sporting activities to opt in to as well.

One of the earliest leaders of the class was a certain Lawrence Head. In becoming the first Travelling Secretary for Crusaders Mr Head ensured that the St Aidans class became quite prominent within the Union as a whole. The current main leader of the group, Victoria, continues this involvement of St Aidans leaders in the national organisation by serving as a trustee. The location of Crusader head office in the same town as St Aidans for many years also created a sense of significance within this local group.

Through the hundred years of its existence and ministry to young people and children St Aidans Crusaders has experienced in its own story the scope of changes and challenges experienced by the organisation as a whole and described in chapter two. This includes the amalgamation of boys and girls groups and the move from being a Sunday afternoon Bible class to a Saturday evening youth club. However these changes have often been slower to be expressed in St Aidans than across the movement as a whole. The boys' group amalgamated with the girls' group to become mixed gender in 1980[494] and moved to the Saturday evening club night format in 1994[495] despite these changes in practice

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[492] The groups were originally called 'classes' hence my use of this term here. Generally however I will use the current term 'group'.

[493] For Crusader classes 'neutral ground' meant specifically not the premises of any particular local church. For the St Aidans class this neutral ground was the 'The Abbey Institute' (see Crusaders, "The Crusaders' Union Annual Report 1926").

[494] Before amalgamating with the boys the girls class had been in existence since January 1923 (D. L. Myles, ""Hitherto Hath the Lord Helped Us..." The Story of the St Aidans Girls Crusader Class," (1935)).

[495] Dr Victoria Hall, "The History of St Aidans' Crusaders."

being commonplace within Crusaders generally from the early 1970s onwards.[496] The hesitancy to follow national changes is further demonstrated through the way that the current leaders closely guard the independent nature of the group and also retain the name Crusaders long after these characteristics have been changed nationally. This commitment to the traditional characteristics of Crusaders is a significant theme that pervades the life of the group.

The tie to tradition is perhaps not surprising when considering the make up of the core group of leaders that make Crusaders happen each week in St Aidans. The team of adults can be separated between those I would call core leaders and those who might be more accurately titled 'helpers'. The core leaders are those defined by their attendance and commitment to leaders' meetings that take place on Thursday evenings once a month, whilst also being those who are, almost without fail, there Saturday by Saturday during term time when the group meets. This commitment is summed up by one of these core leaders, Robert, who describes the priority he gives to Crusaders, even going so far as to miss weddings to which he has been invited in order to be at Crusaders.[497] The majority of this core team have a long Crusader heritage both in St Aidans and further afield. Already mentioned is Victoria, whose father became a Christian through the ministry of Lawrence Head in the early days of the class. Although Victoria's family moved away from St Aidans for many years the Crusader connection continued through her parents' leadership of boys and girls classes in Wolverhampton.[498]

On returning to St Aidans in 1970 Victoria naturally became a leader in the girls' group.[499] Alongside Victoria is her sister Dorothy who, despite having spent the majority of her adult life overseas, has a similar upbringing and heritage within Crusaders.[500] In addition Robert, mentioned above, is in his sixties and has been involved since joining the group as an eight year old.[501] Other main leaders are a married couple, Richard and Julia, who met through the group when they were teenagers, with Victoria and Robert among their

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[496] See chapter 2.
[497] Robert interview, St Aidans, 21/8/14, p. 5, para 28.
[498] Victoria interview, St Aidans, 12/9/14, p. 1, para 2.
[499] Ibid, p. 2, para 14.
[500] Dorothy interview, p. 1, para 2.
[501] Robert interview, p. 1, para 2.

leaders.[502] Richard and Julia's four children have effectively grown up through Crusaders. Two of these, Alison and Helen, who still attend Crusaders, express their appreciation that Crusaders is a part of their family life together.[503] Alongside these leaders with clear Crusader heritage are two others that I would class as being part of this core group of leaders. These are Peter and Rachel. Despite there being no personal connection between them other than their involvement in Crusaders they share some markedly similar characteristics. They both have experience of long-term overseas mission work for different agencies and also have found it difficult to commit to any particular local church on their return to settle in the UK.[504]

This core group of leaders then seem to exhibit two characteristics; they either have a long Crusader heritage and draw their commitment to the group from this or they appear to have some struggle with settling into church life and thus are comfortable with the form of corporate Christian life and witness found within the independence of St Aidans Crusaders. Outside of this core group is a more transient, larger group of helpers that includes some parents or other family members of local churches and previous members of Crusaders. The involvement of some parents and other family members is a way of welcoming and including them in the group. It is significant that those in this category who are helpers rather than core team tend to be from unchurched backgrounds.[505]

4.2 Outline of a Group Night

The current group structure sees four separate ages meeting in adjoining classrooms of a local high school that they hire from 6:30 – 8pm each Saturday of school term time: Minis for age 5 – 7, Juniors for age 8 – 10, Inters for age 11 – 14 and Seniors for age 15 and over. My observations revolve around the seniors group. During the period of my observations this group generally consisted of up to ten young people, though there is no guarantee how many will be there on any given week; usually approximately two thirds of these were girls.[506]

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[502] Richard interview, p. 2, para 18.
[503] Helen interview, St Aidans, 22/12/14 and Alison interview, St Aidans, 20/4/15.
[504] In particular Peter interview, St Aidans, 14/8/14, p. 1 – 2, para 8 and Leader's Meeting observation, St Aidans, 4/9/14, p. 1, para 3.
[505] St Aidans observation, 18/10/14, p. 2, para 12.
[506] Five of these were over 16 and thus eligible for interview during my time in the group.

The use of a school building as the location for the group retains the original intention that Crusaders' classes meet on neutral ground and do not affiliate with any particular local church.[507] Despite the challenges of needing to bring all the equipment each week and being to some extent affected by the programme of school events, including the variable availability of the sports hall and a Saturday each year in which the school is unavailable due to open days, the leaders value this location.

The children and young people start arriving from about ten minutes before the group begins. Each is required to sign in at the welcome table and pay a small weekly 'sub'. This helps to pay for the hire of the school, snacks and other resources and equipment. The welcome table is manned by two older gentlemen who appear to each be in their late fifties.[508] Shortly after 6:30pm Victoria is keen to ensure everyone heads into the correct classroom to begin the specific sessions for the different age groups. This sometimes takes a few minutes as interaction between the ages often means they are mixed up together chatting, playing around or simply seeing who else is there. On occasion this also involves ensuring that none of the senior girls are in the younger groups to supposedly help with the minis or juniors. Often it takes some effort to remove them from these younger age rooms.[509] Once everyone is herded into the correct classrooms the sessions begin. Although my time was spent with the Seniors it was possible to detect something of a different character to each of the groups. The Minis being very activity based, the Juniors active but engaged, whilst the Inters in the classroom adjacent to the Seniors were rowdy, boisterous and challenging. The Seniors, in contrast, tended to be light hearted in tone but focussed and serious in approach.

The teaching session is planned to last for about forty-five minutes. It is the cornerstone of the group night and seen as the most important aspect of the evening by the leaders. This is reflected in a commitment to always have this teaching section prior to any social time. Even if the young people are disruptive simply opening the Bible with them is seen as vital. As one of the core practices of the group this is discussed in more detail below. Once the teaching is finished the young people can disperse into various free time options that are available. The younger age groups normally make the switch to free time

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[507] See chapter 2.
[508] St Aidans observation 11/10/14, p. 1, para 2.
[509] St Aidans observation, 29/3/14, p. 1, para 6.

earlier than the seniors with the teaching for this oldest group often going past 7:15pm, the planned start time for free time.[510] Often this means that while the Seniors are finishing off the teaching, be it Victoria's formal session overrunning or the informal question time that can emerge out of it, there is an increase in background noise as other groups begin to enjoy free time. When this happens it is common that pairs of younger eyes appear at the door of the classroom peering in to see what is going on. Radio controlled cars that are available as part of the free time activities can be heard crashing in to the door and the thunder of feet as the minis, juniors and inters run between the sports hall and classroom area are also commonplace.[511]

As the Seniors join free time they tend to head to either the sports hall or to craft and food activities that have been set up in one of the classrooms. The sports hall is a large, high roofed building with basketball courts running across it and five-a-side football goals set up length ways to form a pitch about two thirds of the length of the hall in a way that leaves a basketball court free at one end of the hall. There are a number of basketballs, indoor footballs and occasionally badminton rackets and shuttlecocks available for informal games in this first third of the hall. Robert, the leader who has been in St Aidans Crusaders since he was a young boy in the 1960s, tends to be in charge of this area of the room, though his oversight amounts to simply ensuring that the children and young people are playing with the balls and equipment safely. Richard however will normally organise teams for a game of football or rounders with all ages mixed together and involved.

Without fail the free time games and sports in the sports hall finish at 8pm. Robert or Richard ensure this. Often Richard will finish a game with a countdown from ten to zero to add some extra atmosphere to the games finishing off. The young people then head back across to the classrooms or home if they are old enough to go home alone. If I have been in the sports hall I find that by the time I have made it over to the classroom area the corridor is abuzz with parents collecting children, children running back into classrooms to collect their craft or simply running along the corridor while their parents chat with the leaders as some just finish off their craft. In amongst this the Seniors might

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[510] Even running as late as 7:45pm on occasion; St Aidans observation, 13/9/14, p. 2, para 18.
[511] St Aidans observation, 20/9/14, p. 2, para 13.

sit on a table in the craft classroom chatting or quickly getting a drink after the running around of the sport. Some will be hugging the Minis and Juniors as their parents pick them up.

4.3 Modes of Belonging

On my first observation at St Aidans I sat and chatted with Linda, one of the seniors, as she watched the sports going on during free time. In the conversation I asked her why she started coming along to Crusaders and she simply replied that she 'wanted something to belong to.'[512] This idea of St Aidans Crusaders a place to belong stuck with me through the fieldwork. It was this conversation that led me to use the term 'modes of belonging' to describe together the core categories from my data coding that related to how the participants in St Aidans articulated the reasons for the ongoing involvement in the group. For St Aidans these core modes of belonging are named as social space, safe place, intergenerational work and Crusader identity. This section will discuss each of these in turn.

4.3.1 Social Space

Although it comes in the second half of the evening the free time in which young people are able to socialize is regarded highly by both the young people and leaders. The value placed on the availability of the sports hall in the school location demonstrates how significant the free time is. This was apparent in an early observation when Victoria's first words to me were to triumphantly announce that the sports hall was available having been warned it might not be![513] It is seen as an attractive element of the group, something that will draw the young people in and keep them coming along. The importance of the group as social space is that it creates opportunity for friendship to be built and fun to be had. It is also this aspect that ensures the group maintains its 'youth group' feel and for some this is their favourite aspect of Crusaders. For the young people, having somewhere to go and something to do on a Saturday night that was specifically 'theirs', quite apart from the Christian aspect of the group, is significant. As is the

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[512] St Aidans observation, 7/12/13, p. 3, para 24.
[513] St Aidans observation, 7/12/13, p. 1, para 4.

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opportunity to make friends and have a designated place where these friendships can be enjoyed and returned to.[514]

According to the leaders the significance of fun and games is that it provides a reason for the children and young people to be at Crusaders. Robert contrasts the group now to how it used be as a Sunday afternoon Bible class saying that he 'hopes it's more fun and they can enjoy it more.'[515] The inference within this is that whereas Crusaders didn't have to be fun in the past, now it needs to be in order to get people to come along. Richard and Peter reiterate this by talking about how the games are one of the main reasons the young people come along[516] and that one way of measuring the success of the group is whether the young people are enjoying themselves.[517]

The fun and friendship that can be cultivated through the free time and games is highly valued although, as I discuss later, the Seniors tend to get less time for this part of the evening than the other age groups. For some the social space of the group is seen in contrast to the experiences of church and articulated in such a way as to suggest that Crusaders is preferred. Alison and Helen say similar things to each other:

> Its getting more people involved I think because it's a funner [sic] way to do it with like the crafts afterwards and the activities in the gym I think it's better than going to church on a Sunday.[518]

> Crusaders has got the game aspect of it so it's a bit more fun learning I find. There's a lot more interaction maybe like a few more games. At church it's definitely it's a bit more serious.[519]

For others the contrast is not communicated so sharply however the opportunity for fun and games alongside the Bible study is a significant part of the experience. When I asked seventeen-year-old Timothy, the oldest boy in the group, what it was that kept him going along at his age his answer was simple:

> You get to meet loads of people and you get to play football and have a laugh after doing the Bible study. I really enjoy playing the football.[520]

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[514] Timothy interview, St Aidans, 29/11/14, p. 3, para 35 & 36 and Helen interview, St Aidans, 22/12/14, p. 7, para 60.
[515] Robert interview, p. 3, para 16.
[516] Richard interview, p. 6, para 51.
[517] Peter interview, p. 10, para 63.
[518] Alison interview, p. 7, para 89.
[519] Helen interview, p. 5, para 38.
[520] Timothy interview, p. 1 para 8.

The opportunity to meet people, and through that make friends, is important among others as well. The social space of the group allows this to happen. Again, for Alison, this in contrast to her experience of church:

> [At church] we go out to the back and then go into our separate groups so you don't really see the others. With Crusaders you do the games afterwards and, like, socialize with them.[521]

In addition to this Alison seems to use Crusaders as a place to meet her friends and this means she doesn't need to go out during the week.[522] Similarly Sally has found that Crusaders provides her with place to build friendships and she talks about how much she values these friendships by describing the way that she and Linda grew to know each other really well and that Timothy has helped her out with questions on her school work as she is studying the same subject but is in the year below him.[523] For Sally and Linda, who don't particularly enjoy sports, the craft activities provided the context in which friendship could naturally develop. Alongside the space to make friends with each other, the free time and the way the group as a whole operates provides the opportunity for relationships between ages and generations as well. This is discussed further below under intergenerational work.

4.3.2 Safe Place

The group provides something of what I call a safe place for the young people. This is demonstrated in three particular ways. First, for those who are not part of families with long Crusader legacies, part of their rationale for joining Crusaders was that it was a space away from difficult church experiences and / or parents in prominent roles in local churches. Second, as place where they feel comfortable in being themselves. Third, the sense of safe place is shown through the space for young people to ask questions without judgment.

Some of the young people joined Crusaders after experiencing situations in churches they were attending with their families that were challenging or difficult in some way. Sally spoke most eloquently about this describing the way in which her parents both held

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[521] Alison interview, p. 3, para 28.
[522] Ibid, p. 1, para 10.
[523] Sally interview, p. 2, para 20.

positions of responsibility in their local church and, from Sally's perspective, put up a front when at church that was to give people a better impression of the family than there was. She also describes her frustration at being known as the churchwarden's daughter rather than in her own right.[524] The church happened to be the same one as Victoria attended and consequently Victoria invited Sally to Crusaders where Sally values what she calls the lack of 'history' for her in Crusaders.[525] Clearly this doesn't refer to the history of the group; rather she refers to personal history as described above. Similarly both Timothy and Linda come from homes in which the experience of church has been difficult. In each situation parents in church leadership positions ended up leaving the church under something of a cloud.[526] In each situation it seems that Crusaders offered the chance to be in a place where they are accepted on their own terms and can be themselves. Significantly Crusaders also created a place in which the Christian faith could be safely understood away from a context where it was tarnished by the difficult experience. This experience of Christian community suggests that the group is providing a form of communal Christian life that is deemed missing elsewhere, especially in formal congregational life. To use Penny Edgell Becker's congregational typology as a guide, the welcome and belonging that leads the group being a safe place for young people suggests that St Aidans Crusaders provides a family experience that might be missing elsewhere in the participants' Christian life.[527]

The young people feel valued and welcomed regardless of circumstances. This can be through something as simple as not being made to feel that it is a problem when they arrive late. In fact, contrary to it being made a negative, Victoria is perfectly happy to stop the teaching to welcome a latecomer and to ask how they are before summing up the session so far and getting back to the teaching from where she had left off. It never failed to amaze me just how much Victoria knows about each of the young people. She knows their family situation, their interests, the details of their school life as well as their hopes and plans for the future. The consistency of Victoria being the leader for the seniors week

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[524] Ibid, p. 5, para 36.
[525] Ibid, p. 5, para 40.
[526] In a personal conversation with Victoria.
[527] Becker offers a typology of four different congregational models: House of Worship, Family, Community and Leader. Penny Edgell Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Modes of Local Religious Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12 - 5. The family model operates from a cultural basis of belonging and close relationships.

after week ensures that this welcome and value is consistent week after week. The seniors know that at Crusaders they will find someone who is interested in them and happy to see them.[528] In this way they experience the group as a safe place.

Victoria ends the teaching session by asking if any of the young people have any questions. She is always pleased if they do as this fits in with the desire for them to discover and develop their own understanding of the Christian faith. Sometimes there are no questions but on many occasions there are, although the likelihood of questions being asked depends on which young people are present on any given evening. Linda is most likely to ask questions and Victoria always encourages the asking by ensuring time is available to answer, though if it is past the time when the Bible study is due to finish she does offer the other young people the chance to leave. It is interesting that they don't take up this option – perhaps because they realise the importance of this time to Victoria or maybe because they are interested even if they haven't articulated the questions themselves; it is difficult to tell.[529]

On one occasion Linda took advantage of this space to ask questions, and took it to quite an extent. The subject of the evening had been specifically about salvation with Victoria's final point being that 'we have a place in heaven if we accept salvation'. Victoria was about to close the session and move into the other room to prepare and lead the food activity that she was doing when Linda spoke up saying "I have a question". This initial question was whether Victoria thinks there will be animals in heaven and after pausing for a few moments thought Victoria gave an answer in four parts. Interestingly one of the parts of the answers was "I don't know". This and the time taken to answer are typical of the integrity with which Victoria treats the questions of the young people. On this evening she was due to lead the food activity in the adjoining classroom but left this unattended in order to deal appropriately with the questions Linda had, which on this occasion amounted to 'lots more questions'. Victoria invited Linda to ask them and what followed included some impromptu teaching on heaven and hell and a discussion of whether the Bible is literally true. Victoria is clearly in her element here and the Bible study session overruns as a result, leaving only fifteen minutes for free time. I note after

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[528] This was evident almost weekly in my observation notes.
[529] E.g. St Aidans observation,18/10/14, p. 1, para 9.

the session that she is very pleased and that this is more important than any other activity for her.[530] It is a credit to how Linda feels about the group that she is willing to open up with questions in this way.

4.3.3 Intergenerational Work

Intergenerational work that is described as an 'intermingling' of ages is a further mode of belonging and distinct feature of St Aidans Crusaders. The 'intermingling is important' says Victoria[531] and when entering the sports hall for the first time and seeing this mix of ages clearly having fun with the leaders, then experiencing it by joining in, I was struck by the sense that this is something quite unusual.[532] The experiences of Timothy seem to reinforce this sense. He contrasts this aspect of Crusaders with his experiences of local church based youth groups:

> In other youth groups they kind of split the ages up and don't allow the different ages to mingle and just be with everyone… Churches try to divide the ages up into like your Year 10 and you can only be with those up to Year 13s and stuff and your Year 9s and you go with the younger kids and stuff. But it's not like that there should be a time when you get to hang out with everyone and everyone gets a chance to play and be involved with everyone.[533]

On top of this simple mingling of the ages, for Timothy the opportunity the group provides to play in this intergenerational way has the affect of encouraging him to try and set an example for the younger ones. He describes how this has led to seeing himself as 'a bit of a role model I suppose'.[534] This suggests an informal sense of leadership development is going on for Timothy, or at the very least an understanding is developing in him that he can affect the younger children in the way that he acts through the games that make up free time. Sally experiences something similar in the context of the craft activities saying, 'the older ones will help the younger ones do it and I don't know what it is, it just kind of the way that it's not really a question'.[535] The implication here is that this interaction is naturally part of the group's culture.

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[530] St Aidans observation, 21/6/14, p. 2, para 19.
[531] In conversation during St Aidans observation, 21/6/14, p. 1, para 5.
[532] St Aidans observation, 15/11/14, p.2 para 11.
[533] Timothy interview, p. 7, para 78.
[534] Ibid, p. 4, para 40.
[535] Sally interview, p. 4, para 32.

This intermingling that is seen as so crucial to St Aidans Crusaders' identity was evident at its best during a special event that took place in the autumn of 2014. Due to an event at the high school in which they meet that means they can't use it at all for this one week the opportunity is taken for a trip to a local indoor soft play area.[536] This was in a neighbouring town and was a slightly longer journey for me to get there. Whilst travelling I found myself wondering whether any of the Seniors would actually be there due to the nature of the event. Surely, I thought, a group of 16 – 18yr olds wouldn't want to be spending the first part of their Saturday night alongside all the younger ones with no time to themselves. What I found on arrival though confounded these expectations. All but one of the usual seniors were there, alongside two new girls who had come for the first time the previous week when I had been unable to attend.[537]

It was very apparent that the seniors were not there out of some sense of duty or simple commitment to the group and the leaders, but rather were there because they wanted to be. The presence of the younger groups was by no means a deterrent. Helen, one of the seniors, spoke of this as being natural as they all know each other.[538] Additionally, about half way through the evening she took it on herself, unprompted, to gather as many of the group, both older and younger, together and organised a game of hide and seek tag around the soft play area. Almost all of those in attendance joined in with this game.[539]

Watching this I realised that the nature of the weekly mixing means that there is a real familiarity between the ages and generations. This is something modelled over the years. In a similar way to Timothy understanding that he acts as a role model in the free time, Helen sees it as natural that she organises games for the whole group during the trip. She also explains that the generational nature of Crusaders not just in terms of the current group mixing but also over time it means that she is following the example of her parents who are leaders but grew up in the group. In her words she enjoys,

> Getting everyone involved, bring[ing] everyone together so they can play a big game… that's just like, because that's what my Dad has always done as well and my Mum gets everyone involved in a big game.[540]

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536 St Aidans observation, 4/10/14.
537 Ibid, p. 1, para 7.
538 Helen interview, p. 7, para 60.
539 St Aidans observation, 4/10/14, p. 2, para 10.
540 Helen interview, p. 7, para 62.

I found myself in conversation with Victoria and Robert whilst watching Helen draw the group together and organise the game in this way. I commented about the way all the ages are so comfortable with each other. They both agree that this is important and I note that Victoria in particular loves it. As we continue to watch the game now take place under Helen's organisation, Victoria went on to comment on the way that she sees this kind of thing as a form of leadership training for the older ones, learning as they are, to interact with the younger ones.[541]

Both Timothy and Sally talk positively about this in contrast with the way that conventional churches tend to segregate age groups strictly, preventing this kind of interaction.[542] Those who have been in the group since they were younger value the way in which they got to learn from older ones so, now they are the older ones, the idea that the younger groups look up to them come naturally to them.

A further feature of the intergenerational work of St Aidans is the way in which I observed parents of younger children being drawn in to the group. At the end of the evening as parents are collecting children and the clear up has begun there is a clear distinction between leaders who take on what could be called a pastoral role and those who stick to more practical tasks. These are not formal distinctions but rather seem to be how different leaders naturally fit into the post-session atmosphere. The older gentlemen on the door, along with Robert in particular, are involved in the practical tasks of clearing up the tables and chairs. Inside the classrooms some of the female leaders and helpers in the minis and junior sections clear up from the crafts and food. However in the corridor the other main, longstanding leaders such as Victoria, Richard and Dorothy are engaged in conversation with the many parents that are there.[543]

For these leaders this time with parents, though informal and outside of the normal group time, is a significant part of the ministry and outreach of the group.[544] I use the word ministry deliberately as it is more than simply friendly conversation that occurs with these parents that are mostly not from churched backgrounds but who, according to

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[541] St Aidans observation, 4/10/14, p. 2, para 10.
[542] Timothy interview, p. 7, para 78 and Sally interview, p. 3, para 26.
[543] E.g. St Aidans observation, 20/9/14, p. 4, para 32.
[544] Victoria interview, p. 5, para 32.

Dorothy, are increasingly 'hanging around'.[545] One week, after the group had finished and I was helping to carry boxes of Bibles and other games back to Victoria's car with her, she filled me in on a conversation that she had been having with a parent of a few of the children in the younger groups who was concerned that her son had stolen some money from her. Victoria had said that she would pray for her and for the money to be returned or found. Shortly after getting home, whilst we were still clearing up from the group, the parent phoned Victoria on her mobile to say that the money had been found and the son hadn't been responsible for it going missing. The parent was overjoyed and thanked Victoria for her prayers saying, according to Victoria, that the prayers had worked. I noted that Victoria was really excited by this as it happened to an unchurched family.[546]

This connection and ministry with parents is not an articulated, formal aim of St Aidans Crusaders but is how the group has developed.[547] There is a recognition among the leaders that this developing focus on adults, and thus on some of the whole families, is not the norm among youth and children's groups but, in their view this doesn't make them a church – 'even though we're not a church, we do care for parents' says Victoria at a leaders' meeting.[548] There is a feeling as well that this 'not church' status that the group hold dearly actually makes it easier for some parents to be involved than if they were formally a church or a group that is part of the church. Peter spoke up in one of the leaders' meeting to comment on how a new family involved 'might not associate Crusaders with the church' and that this had made it easier for them to feel comfortable.[549]

4.3.4 Crusader Identity

As with each of my interviews I finished my interview with Robert by asking him if there was anything else he wanted to say to me about St Aidans Crusaders – whether there was anything significant or important that had been overlooked in our conversation. His response, without hesitation, was to say 'well what is significant is next year is the centenary.' He quickly expanded on this:

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[545] Dorothy interview, p. 8, para 56.
[546] St Aidans observation, 20/9/14, p. 4, para 32.
[547] Dorothy interview, p. 8, para 58.
[548] St Aidans Leaders Meeting observation, 1/5/14, p. 2, para 18.
[549] St Aidans Leaders Meeting, 5/6/14, p. 2, para 13.

> Of course we don't take [it] for granted that we are going to get to a hundred years and I think that a great witness to God's help is us achieving that and there's a lot of work to be done in contacting people and getting them geed up for what we've got in mind and that is significant. I think that I would also say, we haven't touched on the future of St Aidans Crusaders in terms of where it might be in, even as little as five years time, because the age profile of the leaders is such that we don't assume that people are going to carry on but you know that's something that you can't cater for really.[550]

In these comments Robert encapsulates the sense of pride, achievement and thankfulness to God that exists among the leaders and in the group at reaching the landmark of a hundred years of witness to young people and children. Alongside this however, Robert shares his concern that the group's future is fragile and not something to be taken for granted. As his words above make clear it is the age profile of the leaders that raises this concern.

Anniversaries such as the centenary are important in the life of the group.[551] Those leaders that have long histories in St Aidans Crusaders refer back to the ninetieth and earlier anniversary services and celebrations. These times seem to play a role of reinforcing the identity of the group, especially with its independent nature. They help to communicate something of the legitimacy of the group in the minds of the leaders as they reflect on the past, the longevity of the work, and also look back to a time when Crusaders as a national organisation had a clearer identity and focus than Urban Saints does today. The historical connections and community that was formed through being part of Crusaders are valued and, indeed, missed when no longer present. In addition the current seniors expressed their pride in being part of such a long-standing group when at the Urban Saints organised weekend event called 'Spree'.[552]

Given the longevity of the group, and the way in which the majority of main leaders are those who have been in Crusaders since they were children themselves, the sense of identity with Crusaders is strong in the group. For these leaders the belonging is not simply to the local group but to the organisation, the history and the original vision of Albert Kestin and others from the early days of the movement. Given the changes in the organisation as a whole as it has moved from being Crusaders to Urban Saints the sense I

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[550] Robert interview, p.11 para 16.
[551] St Aidans Leaders Meeting observation 4/9/14, p. 2, para 25.
[552] Observation at 'Spree' weekend with St Aidans 5/7/14, p. 2, para 19.

get is very much that the ongoing involvement in St Aidans Crusaders is a way that these leaders can keep a legacy of Crusader tradition going for a bit longer. This keeps them connected with their past and that which was significant in coming to faith as children or teenagers. This sense of keeping alive the legacy of traditional Crusaders is further evident in bi-annual prayer teas in which an elderly leader from Mill Hill attends and brings news from their group[553] – the relationship between Mill Hill and St Aidans Crusaders has its roots deep in local area Crusader events and in particular a joint residential named 'Cru-made Camp' which was a fixture of the programme for many years.[554]

For the young people whose parents retain this historical Crusader legacy this sense of identity is shared through it being something to which the whole family relates. Both Alison and Helen have been part of Crusaders since they were very young since their parents Richard and Julia are among the core leaders who themselves in part grew up through the group. Both Helen and Alison feel this very acutely but, unlike those for whom Crusaders provides a kind of oasis of Christian community away from the negative family linked experiences of church, this is communicated as a positive thing.[555] They enjoy the fact that Crusaders is part of what they do as a family and although they also attend church together, where the parents are equally involved in the children's and youth work, the sense of belonging to Crusaders is greater.[556] I would go as far as to say that Crusaders is part of the identity of this family whereas church is something they attend together. For this family then since this identity is based on shared values inherent to Crusaders historically the group functions in a similar way to a 'community' rather than 'family' model of congregational life.[557] This suggests that the group is able to function in different ways for different participants as it interacts with other forms of communal Christian life.

For the seniors who are regularly part of St Aidans Crusaders these four modes of belonging serve to create a place of consistency and value. It is these features that dominate their experience of being part of the group and ensure they continue to come

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[553] Prayer tea observation, 16/11/14.
[554] Richard interview, p. 2, para 18.
[555] Alison interview, p. 2, para 16.
[556] Helen interview, p. 5, para 40.
[557] Becker, *Congregations in Conflict*, 14 & 101 - 25.

along week by week. Victoria, who is there each week almost without fail and is the fulcrum around which the group revolves, embodies this consistency. Through Victoria the seniors know they will be welcomed and shown interest. They know their questions will be taken seriously and they will be listened to. The slow manner to which the group responds to change also breeds a sense of certainty in what to expect week by week. For the seniors Crusaders will be there and will be the same Saturday by Saturday. This experience of consistency is often in contrast to the experience of conventional churches for the young people who have had difficult experiences with parents in prominent positions in local churches. In this way Crusaders has, through its consistency become a safe place. This consistency is also the experience of those who have grown up in Crusader families - their testimony that Saturday nights *is* Crusaders suggests that the consistent rhythm of involvement and belonging at Crusaders is an unquestioned part of their family life together. It also speaks of the consistency of it being something they have done since they were small children.

Alongside this consistency, again mostly revolving around Victoria, is a sense of value that the young people find through the modes of belonging provided in Crusaders. This value comes through the friendships built and sustained with peers through the free time and social space this provides, the welcome and interest shown by Victoria in particular and through the way in which the younger groups look up to the seniors. For some, being part of something with such longevity is also significant. I think the sense of value that comes through being part of Crusaders is connected to the independent nature of the group that means the young people know that if they are not there then the group would not be needed and Victoria's lifelong passion would come to an end. Consequently there is a sense of being needed and wanted that maybe isn't so clear through the experience of conventional church for these young people. This contrasts with the experiences of conventional church and asks the question of what is the place and understanding of church for Crusaders and the seniors in particular. It is to this then that I turn.

4.4 The Place and Understanding of the Church

The independent nature of St Aidans Crusaders with the team of leaders drawn as it is from across the churches within St Aidans (with some involvement of those not in any church) leads to a number of ways and understandings of how the group relates to and

interacts with the churches in the city. These different interactions and understandings refer to both specific local churches as well as the church in the broad sense of the combined activity of churches and Christians in the city. This section describes these different understandings and places of church in the life of the group through two themes of ecclesial practices and connections with church. Within each of these themes runs a thread of church critique that operates as a self-sustaining narrative for the group. This in turn helps to strengthen the particular form of Christian community within the group.

4.4.1 Ecclesial Practices

Despite an insistence by the leaders that the group is not church prominent in the regular things that Crusaders does each week are two very ecclesial practices. These are the regular gathering to teach the Bible and offer pastoral care to the young people.

The changes in format of St Aidans Crusaders that took place in the latter decades of the twentieth century, mirroring the changes across Crusaders at the time, meant that the group moved from a traditional Bible class to what is described as a 'youth group' format. Within this format Victoria and the other leaders at the time of the changes were aware that there was perhaps a greater flexibility available to them in how they approached the evening. However, as Victoria recalled in her interview, it was then that they came up with the 'absolute rule that the Bible came first'.[558] Victoria reinforces this point through a contrast with a local church youth group she helped out with for a short time. This group she says had a mostly social format with an epilogue for of brief Bible input at the end. This was proved to be a 'nightmare' to get the young people listening and attentive as they had had everything they wanted from the group and were 'high as kites' by the time the epilogue came around.[559]

Everything in Victoria's thinking, from timings of the group to when food is offered, is designed to create an atmosphere that is as conducive as possible to young people engaging with the Bible teaching. We don't want to 'waste our time' as Christians she says.[560] Richard echoed this describing the Bible study as 'the main point', agreeing that

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[558] Victoria interview, p.2, para 16.
[559] Ibid, p. 3, para 18.
[560] Ibid.

putting the Bible study first isn't simply a pragmatic decision but reflects the whole purpose of the group.[561] Inherent within this, as with the location, is a critique of the way in which local churches work with young people and children.

In a normal session, following an opening activity, Victoria passes round Bibles. Alongside the Bibles some kind of food is often shared as well. This will usually be some kind of cakes, which will often be home made and much appreciated by the young people. One of Victoria's weekly running jokes is that these cakes constitute what she calls 'brain food'![562] The Bibles themselves are branded with the Crusader Union logo on the front and in this way provide a reminder of some thing of the heritage of this group as a Crusader group of old. The teaching tends to focus on one particular passage from the Bible though this will often lead to other verses. In contrast to USH where passages are displayed on the screen,[563] the young people of St Aidans Crusaders are expected to be able to find the passages in the Bible themselves. Help is offered if they struggle, though this need for them to find their own way around the Bible reinforces the high value placed on the teaching input being essentially a Bible study for the young people.

Alongside the 'absolute rule' of holding the Bible study first to ensure the focus of the group is maintained, Victoria is also adamant that an effort must be made to ensure that the whole of the Bible must be taught rather than sticking to popular or easy sections. Interestingly, Victoria made this point by referencing a passage of the Bible itself in a short devotional for other leaders that served as an introduction to a particular leaders' meeting.[564] This desire was also demonstrated through the themes that made up the programme I witnessed during my observations in the group. These ranged from a journey through the big themes of the whole Bible to see how God's plan of salvation runs through it,[565] a series studying the minor prophets (or 'the small books at the end of the Old Testament as Victoria called them),[566] the story of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts[567] and an overview of the gospels through a study of their authors. Victoria's

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[561] Richard interview, p. 6, para 57.
[562] I did note however that Victoria's baking was not of the highest standard! St Aidans observation, 11/10/14, p. 2, para 8.
[563] See following chapter.
[564] St Aidans Leaders Meeting observation, 25/9/14, p. 2 para 12.
[565] St Aidans observation, 21/6/14, p. 1, para 8 .
[566] St Aidans observation, 20/9/14, p. 2, para 10.
[567] St Aidans observation, 7/6/14, p. 1, para 8.

commitment to the whole of the Bible is also shown through the way that she references passages forwards and backwards through the Bible in any session. She showed herself particularly fond of referring back to Old Testament passages when studying the New Testament in order to demonstrate the links and connections between them.[568]

Despite this commitment to variety and breadth in Bible study oftentimes the theme is brought back to personal salvation and Victoria's desire that each young person understands the importance of having made their own profession of Christian faith by the time they have left the group to go to university or whatever else their next step into adult life might hold. In one session she sums up the Bible's message in his way:

> The Bible is God's plan for salvation as well as instructions for how we should live.[569]

This is the main heart of Victoria's desire for the young people and everything else is focussed to serve this. The young people are expected to be able to begin taking ownership of their faith.[570] This is demonstrated in the way that Victoria encourages the young people themselves to discover the answers she is looking for from the passages of scripture being studied. The small number of young people in the senior's section allows Victoria the chance to coax and hint and allow the young people to find things out for themselves, though directed by Victoria. She is encouraging as they sometimes hesitantly nudge their way towards the answer she is looking for. On occasion, despite being comfortable in the group and with Victoria, they are also cautious about giving an answer for fear of being wrong. When they do demonstrate a misunderstanding Victoria is sometimes light-heartedly exasperated in a way that implies she knows they are capable of a better understanding.[571] There is a tension displayed in this that both allows the young people to negotiate meaning within scripture for themselves, yet with Victoria's acceptance of the Biblical narrative as a guiding voice.[572] It is hoped though that the young people learn to read the Bible for themselves with confidence.

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[568] St Aidans observation 15/11/14, p. 2, para 9.
[569] St Aidans observation, 28/6/14, p. 2, para 12.
[570] St Aidans Leaders Meeting, observation, 25/9/14, p. 3, para 27.
[571] St Aidans observation, 18/10/14, p. 1, para 10.
[572] Ruth Perrin, "An Observation and Analysis of Ordinary Bible Reading among British Evangelical Emerging Adults" (University of Durham, 2015), 229. Perrin describes the way that emerging evangelical adults negotiate meaning with scripture with a typology of methods: unquestioning acceptance, reader limitation, uncomfortable resignation, explicable misrepresentation and partial resistance.

This style of guided self-discovery among the young people in the Bible study is extended through work sheets and activities that often accompany or follow the first read through of a Bible passage. These normally require the young people to follow through a section of the Bible themselves, looking for answers to particular questions on the work sheet or in order to know what to do next in the activity. Occasionally Victoria would use me to make up the numbers so that the worksheets or activities could be done in groups of equal sizes. On one such occasion I found myself with two of the boys as we tried to re-enact Paul's first missionary journey by first making a newspaper tent and then following through a worksheet that required us to pack up the tent and move it each time Paul moved to a new place, being careful to record on the sheet what Paul did and said at each place. Whilst I was doing this with the two boys there was a group of girls going through the same activity in a different part of the room.[573] Even through the worksheets and activities, however, the main aim seems to be about the young people acquiring knowledge. There is little attempt to help the young people grow in or understand a wider range of Christian practices.

As with the teaching of the Bible Victoria is instrumental in the pastoral care of leaders and young people across the age groups. As she moves around from room to room ensuring that everything is set up and ready to begin and all the other leaders are clear on their tasks for the evening, she also finds time to notice people as they are coming in and personally welcomes as many as she can. I find it remarkable how much she knows about each individual and family that comes in - asking how an ill family member is doing or whether a problem at school has been resolved yet for example. Alongside this, she is quick to notice any newcomers and welcomes them enthusiastically.[574] There is something in this behaviour that is reminiscent of the role of a parish priest or other church leader, serving to reinforce the participants' sense that their experiences in the group are in some way analogous to church.

This level of knowledge, care and welcome extends into the session itself. I noted on numerous occasions that once we were in the classroom and the session had begun, if a

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[573] St Aidans observation, 7/6/14, p. 1, para 11. This is also a good example of my move toward being 'conspicuously inconspicuous' as a participant observer. See chapter 3.
[574] E.g. St Aidans observation 15/3/14, p. 1, para 6.

young person arrived late she was very happy to interrupt the teaching to ask how they were. Inevitably she would know them well enough to ask after a particular aspect of their life. The young people respond to this warmly and are happy talking to Victoria, seeming to appreciate the level of care and interest she displays.[575] Victoria's longevity in leading the group alongside the way that at least some of the young people will have been in Crusaders since they were very young, growing up and progressing through the age groups, inevitably creates a depth of relationship that makes this interaction between leaders and young person very natural. One of the senior girls, Sally, especially talked of how she valued this. Being often late to the group she was initially concerned about walking in when the session had begun, however Victoria's relaxed and interested nature soon helped Sally to feel valued and welcomed whenever she arrived.[576]

The pastoral care Victoria extends to the young people stretches to providing meals for them if required and also, I discovered when interviewing Timothy, it often involves lifts home as well. In this case the journey of twenty minutes each way to drop Timothy back at his house adds a considerable amount of time onto an already full evening. However on witnessing Victoria's interaction with Timothy after the interview in arranging a lift home I realised that Victoria saw this as an opportunity to go a bit deeper into how Timothy is doing and extend the pastoral care in this way.[577]

In addition to the care of the young people in the seniors Victoria and her sister Dorothy are actively involved in the care of families who bring younger children to the groups. I became aware during my observations of both leaders also babysitting from time to time to help struggling parents. However there is within this a critique of the church as Victoria tells me that she doesn't believe her church is capable of caring for these 'troubled families' with the help they need because they are not the conventional middle-class families that the church is used to. Victoria puts it like this:

> My concern about St Pauls is actually when they have these families that need some slightly better love, care and attention that is not conventional middle class actually whether now they're capable of giving it. Certainly to the adults.[578]

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[575] This includes chatting about exams, family situations and films the young people had seen at the cinema. Examples include observations on 15/3/14, 7/6/14 and 18/10/14.
[576] Sally interview, p. 5, para 38.
[577] St Aidans observation, 29/11/14, p. 3, para 23.
[578] Victoria interview, p. 7, para 40.

These simple and limited ecclesial practices are the heart of the Christian faith within the group. Though being simple and limited, the testimony of those involved is that the practices assist in making the group a place through which Christian faith is stimulated, supported and shaped.[579] This then leads on to consider how St Aidans Crusaders understands its connection with the church.

4.4.2 Connections with Church

For the leaders mission and outreach is the primary way of defining the relationship with the church and their own understanding of how Crusaders fits into the broader picture of Christian activity in the city.[580] Indeed it is the detachment from conventional church that helps to give them this focus. Dorothy shares her understanding that churches tend to cater more for their own young people whereas being independent allows Crusaders to 'do something totally different.'[581] Peter also recognizes that the distance from local churches creates the space to be more focused on outreach. The distinction from church and the fact that the group is not seen as church makes mission easier.[582] However Peter is also vague about his own church commitment and at one time left me with the impression that Crusaders was the only Christian community he operated in at that time.[583] I found that I was regularly told that parents are more likely to be comfortable bringing their children to a school building on a Saturday night than to a church. The young people already there, Richard says, are more likely to invite friends to Crusaders than to church.[584]

Within the framing of Crusaders as mission is a sense of frustration at times that the role Crusaders is or could be playing is not recognized. Victoria, for example, feels that it would be very easy for St Paul's, the large Anglican Church she attends to acknowledge or utilize Crusaders a part of its own outreach to children and young people since it meets within the Parish. However Victoria expresses exasperation at the limited vision within the church that seems restricted to work and ministries that it has launched itself.[585]

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[579] The dynamics of this is discussed in depth in chapter 6.
[580] Peter interview, p. 2, para 16.
[581] Dorothy interview, p. 10, para 70.
[582] Peter interview, p. 4, para 26.
[583] Conversation at group observation, 10/5/14, p. 2, para 20.
[584] Richard interview, p. 5 – 6, para 51.
[585] Victoria interview, p. 6, para 34.

Dorothy also alludes to this. With a sense of frustration she talks of how she sees churches only really interested in their own work. In addition Crusaders' self-understanding as one of mission is enhanced by the sense that through what could be termed crossing church boundaries they are able to meet a need that the churches aren't meeting.[586] This is seen as being in part due to the social status of some of the families that are bringing their children along to Crusaders. There is believed to be a 'niche' of young people who wouldn't go to a church but are happy to come to a youth group and despite the leader's experiencing criticism that Crusaders isn't church-based they remain convinced that there are young people who come and therefore are introduced to the Christian faith who wouldn't otherwise have any opportunity to hear what they might consider to be the 'basics'.[587]

Despite the implicit critique of church the leaders of St Aidans Crusader recognize that at some point the young people do need to be introduced to church. However they also admit that this is not something they are very good at despite the perceived advantage of having leaders from a number of different churches from which the young people could choose.[588] This is a conundrum for the leaders and provides a bit of a disconnect between the self articulated narrative of filling a niche and the ultimate aim of seeing young people entering adult life with a Christian faith that they have chosen and owned for themselves. The main way in which this disconnect is addressed by the leaders is through the language of sowing seeds.[589] By framing the mission and outreach that is at the heart of the group in this way the leaders can hold onto the sense that they are involved in important work even if there is little tangible evidence of young people responding and entering adult life with their own Christian faith.

Even when talking about an extremely challenging period in the Inters when the group was overwhelmed by more than fifty young people attending but with no intention of paying attention to the teaching that forms the first half of the evening Richard is able to hold on to the possibility that seeds were sown that 'will hopefully bear fruit in the future.' Peter reiterates this by stating that 'something got through... some seeds were

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[586] Dorothy interview, p. 11, para 77.
[587] Richard interview, p. 11, para 101.
[588] Richard interview, p. 11, para 97.
[589] Conversation at group observation on 10th May 2014 and interviews with Richard and Peter demonstrate that this language is commonplace.

sown.'[590] There is sometimes a sense of urgency about this as the leaders don't know how long each young person might attend the group and so they need to get the Bible out every week in order that some of these seeds might be sown in their lives.[591] The implication is that something of the scriptures being heard is synonymous with these seeds being sown.

In one leaders' meeting Victoria encapsulated this feeling with a scriptural reference that framed the way in which the work of St Aidans Crusaders could be seen in relationship with the conventional church in the city as well as in the manner of seeds being sown:

> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.[592]

The challenge from this for Victoria was that the Crusader leaders must play their part faithfully but realise that they need to trust God for the growth; they cannot make this happen themselves.[593] The framing of the group as mission is also potentially mis-leading when referring to the Seniors as only one of the current group are from un-churched backgrounds.

The relationship between Crusaders and the church, particularly in the way that the group is deemed to meet a need that the churches are not meeting, is described as an interweaving thing, or as pieces of a jigsaw.[594] The implication in this is that those accessing Crusaders have opportunities to connect in with other aspects of Christian witness in the city or that Crusaders is one aspect among many different ways that particular families are engaging with Christian things. Examples often cited in interviews or discussed positively in leaders' meetings include two different 'Messy Church' events

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[590] Peter interview, p. 9, para 57.
[591] Richard interview, p. 19, para 161.
[592] 1 Corinthians 3:5 – 9 (NIV).
[593] Leaders Meeting observation 5/6/14, para 8.
[594] Dorothy interview, p. 5, para 40.

that are connected to churches in the city.[595]There are families that access both Crusaders and these events. These are then seen as possible ways in which families can access church via Crusaders. Some Crusader leaders are involved with these Messy Church events. It is noted with interest that some who attend Messy Church describe themselves as belonging to the particular host church.[596]

This interweaving sense of connection and even belonging is mirrored in the lives of the young people, each of whom have at least one church that they attend alongside Crusaders, recognizing that each is useful in their Christian development. Sally and Timothy especially spoke of at least three other places that they attend occasionally or regularly, each supplementing the other. Sally, though highly critical of her home church where her parents are involved in leadership roles, even going so far as to say she 'hates church' in reference to that particular church, still spoke of helping with the children's work there and also of two elderly ladies whose interest in her was important and whose deaths in a space of time affected her deeply.[597]

However alongside this and Crusaders, she also talks of the significance of nearby large, well-known youth church that she has started to attend and also of an annual national summer camp in which she helps with the children's work as being important in her development.[598] Likewise, Timothy attends Crusaders alongside a church youth group in a neighbouring town to which a friend invited him. He also helps with the children's work in the church where his Dad serves as Vicar, having previously been on the worship group in the church where his Dad was Curate.[599] It is indeed an interweaving thing for these young people.

4.5 St Aidans in Summary

The place and understanding of the church in St Aidans Crusaders displays an almost paradoxical combination of simplicity and complexity. The simplicity is evident in the narrow range of ecclesial practices within the group. The way in which the young people

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[595] This was discussed in interviews with Dorothy, Victoria and Peter. For more on Messy Church see https://www.messychurch.org.uk/ (accessed 18/10/17).
[596] Leaders' Meeting observation 25/9/14, p. 3, para 26.
[597] Sally interview, p. 7, para 50.
[598] Sally interview, p. 9, para 56.
[599] Timothy interview. p. 1, para 10.

gather together weekly for Bible teaching and pastoral care betrays an ecclesial nature to the group but this remains mostly unacknowledged within the group, despite Sally's assertion that the group became her church during the challenges she experienced in her parents' church. By naming the group as church Sally is suggesting that the modes of belonging create a community that can become a Christian faith sustaining community due to ecclesial practices that are a part of it. Similarly the group retains a simplicity through the focus on the 'basics' that the ecumenical make up of the leadership team demands.

However, this masks a complex understanding and set of relationships that seek to justify the group through seeing it as part of the mission of the church in the city and interweaving with more conventional expressions of church. The way that some leaders have transient relationships with the church whilst also celebrating the crossover between Crusader families and local Messy Church groups further suggests this complexity. The experience of some of the young people who consider themselves part of at least two churches while valuing the input of Crusaders adds to this feeling. Alongside this however, an inherent critique of church that is detected within Crusaders' self-understanding challenges the way that the young people might view the church. The critique also carries within it a self-sustaining narrative that Crusaders must continue to fill the gap the churches are missing.

St Aidans Crusaders is a mixed age group providing various modes of belonging for young people and children whilst also exhibiting various ways of relating to and understanding the church. The belonging experienced through the provision of social space, safe place, intergenerational work and the Crusader identity creates an environment of consistency and value for the young people. The certainty of the welcome and format of the group is of value to those who attend, with the presence of Victoria central to these features. Inherent within the group is a critique of church that is seen in the paradoxical simplicity and complexity in how church is understood and expressed in the group. The regular ecclesial practices of gathering for Bible study and pastoral care suggest that the group is a form of intentional Christian community albeit a narrow one due to the limited range of practices on offer. In contrast there is a complexity in the way the group seeks to place itself in relation to the wider church using images like that of a jigsaw or interweaving.

However the critique of church that runs through the group perhaps prevents this from being fully embraced, though a number of the seniors themselves exhibit this interweaving in their own experience of various church communities.

5. CASE STUDY TWO - URBAN SAINTS HIGHTOWN

This second extended case study builds on the first whilst also offering a different perspective on the subsidiary research questions and therefore provides some distinctive data for the first step of the process of constructing the core theological conversation at the heart of this thesis. By focusing on a group that has formed much more recently, and specifically to embody all that Urban Saints envisions its work to be about now, this extended case study again focuses on the ways in which the group creates belonging.

The different perspective offered will provide a helpful counterpoint to St Aidans. Consequently throughout this description of Urban Saints Hightown (USH) I will be highlighting the key areas of similarity and difference in the dynamics and practices that form the backbone of how the group functions. In particular the way that these dynamics and practices articulate and embody a particular approach to the church will be identified. This case study will then continue to work through the first step of the two-step process outlined in the methodology, focusing in particular on the two subsidiary research questions detailed earlier.

In order to provide the framework in which this thick description of USH can nuance and enhance the developing understanding of the espoused and operant approaches of the church from St Aidans this chapter adopts a similar structure. The chapter begins with a brief history and overview of USH before outlining a group night. Following this I will detail the modes of belonging, highlighting in particular the similarities and differences in these key dynamics between USH and St Aidans. The final section will deal with the approach to and relationship with the church evident in USH through focussing on key ecclesial practices and the two-way flow of relationship between USH and Hightown Christian Centre, to which the group is affiliated.

5.1 Brief History and Overview of the Group

USH is the 'midweek youth group, secondary age youth work of Hightown Christian Centre'.[600] USH meets on Friday nights and is the main mission work that Hightown Christian Centre (HCC) carries out amongst young people. USH is affiliated to Urban Saints nationally. Over the fourteen months in which I carried out observations at USH the attendance varied from a low of eight to a high of over thirty.[601] The average attendance is around twenty-five and is quite evenly split between male and female. The split is also about equal between young people from church families and those for whom USH represents their initial or only point of contact with HCC or any other church.[602] The young people in this category would not have described themselves as Christians when they joined USH.[603]

HCC is a charismatic church in a prosperous, mid-sized market town within commuter range of London. The church describes itself as 'church for everyone'[604] and a 'community of people of all ages and backgrounds who together are exploring what it means to live as followers of Jesus.'[605] It has a membership of about 250, most of whom are professionals living in the town and surrounding villages. Two couples planted the church. One of these couples are the parents of Matt Summerfield.[606] The skills and background of these couples ensured that HCC has tended toward a focus particularly on music and work with young people.[607]

There had been various eras of youth work at HCC before the launch of USH. Matt Summerfield became involved in leading the youth work as a 17-year-old, twenty-seven years ago when a new outreach youth group known as Primetime was launched. It was through this that one of the USH leaders I met during my time with the group, Andrew,

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[600] Stuart interview, Hightown, 19/8/14, p. 2, para 8.
[601] The low was a week where a large number of usual attendees were away on an Urban Saints mission trip, which will be discussed more below. I noted this in Hightown observation, 11/7/14.
[602] At least two girls attend the group who are part of a much smaller village church situated outside Hightown.
[603] This was apparent in interviews with Lucy, Beth, Robin, Christian & Freddie. See appendix A for dates.
[604] http://www.hcc.org.uk/about/, accessed 1/3/15.
[605] HCC Welcome leaflet.
[606] Matt was both Senior Pastor and Urban Saints CEO at the time of my research.
[607] Matt interview, Hightown, 3/12/2014, p. 8, para 30.

became a Christian.[608] When he was in his twenties, Matt found himself overseeing the children's and youth work of HCC as a volunteer, whilst also working full-time.[609]

In May 2000 Matt became the CEO of Crusaders.[610] Shortly afterwards he stepped down from his voluntary role at HCC and the church employed its first youth worker. Matt played a mentoring role for this new appointment, however, when this youth worker moved on after getting married in 2008 the youth work was struggling with only about 8 or 9 young people involved and Matt felt God say it was time for him to lead the youth work again as a volunteer. Matt decided to 'imbibe everything' he wanted Urban Saints to represent and consequently, in October 2008, USH was launched as an outreach to young people from the town.

There was a core team of about eight volunteer leaders that ran USH, all of whom are members of HCC. This and the fact that the group meets in the HCC church building ensures that there is a much clearer direct connection between the group and this particular local church than St Aidans has with any specific church.

5.2 Outline of a Group Night

In a similar way to St Aidans an average evening at USH involved a mixture of free time for the young people and structured input based around biblical themes and aspects of the Christian faith, though as will become apparent the style was quite different. During my first four visits USH ran as two groups, separated by age. USH1 for ages 10 – 14, ran from 7 – 8:30pm, while USH2, for ages 15 – 18, would start at 8pm and finish at 9:30pm. A period of free time meant the two groups overlapped for about fifteen minutes before USH1 gathered back together for a final fifteen minutes. The older young people would continue with free time before beginning their programmed part of their evening at 8:30pm. After these first four visits the format changed and the two age groups joined together to form a single USH evening from 7:30pm until 9:15pm. This format begins with about 45 minutes of programmed teaching input, followed by free time with a final 15 minutes for small groups. This is not the first time the format of the group has been

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[608] Andrew interview, Hightown, 2/9/14, p.1, para 6.
[609] Matt interview, p. 1, para 2 – 6. The following paragraph is also based on Matt's telling of his own story when I interviewed him.
[610] Which became Urban Saints under his leadership, see Chapter 2.

altered. Initially USH ran for two hours with an hour of programmed input followed by an hour of free time.[611]

This change was described as 'how best to run the group for all of the young people involved and with the leaders we have'.[612] This short explanation carries within it concerns over numbers of young people and leaders. There were noticeably very few young people attending USH1 in my early visits and ensuring there are enough leaders proved an ongoing struggle.[613] These changes and the reasons behind them began to point me towards a willingness to be flexible in order to work within situations that arise.

Under the new format, which was how USH ran for the vast majority of my observations, leaders and emerging leaders met at 7pm to set up and run through the plans for the evening. Stuart is the main leader, having taken on the role from Matt after being invited to join the USH team and HCC through working with Matt at the Urban Saints head office. Alongside Stuart are members of the church Judy, Andrew, David and Claire who are each in their late twenties or early thirties. Claire has only been involved since joining HCC in 2013 whereas the others have been leading USH since its earliest days. Like Stuart, Andrew works at the Urban Saints head office. Other leaders came and went during my time – Karen, an older leader who was involved when USH launched but suffered from ill health for a period during my observations; Laura, who re-joined the team after a year's break towards the end of my involvement; and Deborah and Anthony who took on the leadership of the group in the last few months of my observations. All of these leaders are volunteers. There is also a group of older young people called 'emerging leaders' who help and have been given the chance to take on responsibility for aspects of the programme.

On a normal Friday I arrived at 7pm as the building was being set up. Chairs are cleared from the 'sanctuary'[614] and the room is transformed from its normal layout for Sunday morning worship services in which the light, airy, modern room is filled with tightly

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[611] Matt interview, p. 2, para 8.
[612] Email to leaders on 29th April 2014.
[613] Hightown observation, 13/12/13, p. 1, para 4.
[614] This room was called the 'sanctuary' in both a Sunday morning service observation, 16th Feb 2015 and in David's interview. This language refers to the room that is used for Sunday morning services, for the purposes of describing USH however I will refer to it as the main room or auditorium.

packed rows of chairs. Large red curtains are draped from the balcony around the auditorium to create a more enclosed, informal space. This space is dimly lit with a small stage at the front. Contemporary, popular music is playing through the sound system and the USH logo is projected onto a screen at the front. Microphones are checked and available. Upstairs is a lounge area with comfortable chairs. A tuck shop, which will sell snacks during free time, is being prepared. In another upstairs room pool, table tennis and table football are being set up. Other groups and activities from HCC use each of these areas at other times. Pictures and posters on the walls are evidence of this. Once this set up is complete the intention is to gather the leaders for a briefing involving a run through of the plan for the night as well as an opportunity to pray for the evening and each other.

Shortly before 7:30pm a few young people who have arrived early are hanging around outside. The doors open and there is a short period before the programme begins. At about 7:40pm the programmed part of the evening begins and the young people are called into the auditorium. The young people seem to feel comfortable in the room. Stage lights and a video screen draw the young people's focus towards the front. The background music and use of microphones masks any noise from young people who choose to keep chatting and commenting throughout the session. Each night is focused around a particular theme. The only exception to this is special events that are put on occasionally throughout the year. These events, such as the annual talent show, are what David describes as the 'open door' to USH and are designed to make it easy to invite new people.[615] However on a regular evening the teaching gradually builds throughout the session and tends to include a game or activity to introduce the theme, videos, group discussions and a short, informal talk based on a biblical passage.

After the teaching there is a period of free time. The length of this depends on how well the initial period has kept to time and how promptly the leaders call the young people back down for the final part of the evening, which is set aside for small groups. For free time the young people dissipate around the building to a games room containing pool, table tennis and table football alongside a lounge area with comfortable chairs and a tuck shop selling basic snacks upstairs. There is also a chance to play some kind of larger

[615] David, Hightown, interview 13/8/14, p. 12, para 59.

games like dodgeball in the auditorium or often, when Judy is there, an arts and crafts table in the foyer. This is a similar mix of activities, games and time to chat that is on offer at St Aidans however the evening finishes in a distinctive way.

The final section of a regular USH night is small groups. This part of the evening, called 'the Check In', sees the young people split into smaller groups with the number of groups and the young people in each group depending on who is there each week. Groups are formed informally with the young people themselves choosing who to go with. On the whole this means that they are comfortable with the others in their group, though the leaders ensure no one is left out of a group. As the small groups finish at 9:15pm and USH is officially over for another week the work begins to reset the building ready for other HCC activities and events. Once all the chairs are back in place, the draped curtains are taken down and other rooms are tidy, there is a short debrief time with leaders and emerging leaders together. By this time in the evening everyone is quite tired and it is difficult to draw helpful input from most people who are looking forward to getting home. Occasionally this debrief is significant as leaders who have struggled in their small group might be encouraged by a story from a different group or the chance is taken to challenge the emerging leaders about their conduct. Following the short debrief USH is over for another week and the leaders and any remaining young people head home.

5.3 Modes of Belonging

When asked about the aims of USH both leaders and young people give an array of different answers. There is no set, simple answer to this question. USH is a group of multiple purposes and identities. It is a group capable of offering different things to different people at different times. Some of these are articulated explicitly while others can be discerned more implicitly. Central to how some of these aims of the group are articulated are the ways in which different people, young people and leaders, develop a sense of attachment to USH. In keeping with the terminology used in the St Aidans case study this section then describes four modes of belonging. The coding of the data from USH identified that two of these are the same as St Aidans, though expressed distinctly, whereas two are different, though with connections to the modes of belonging in St Aidans. The distinctions and connections will be made explicit throughout. The two

similar modes of belonging are social space and safe place, whereas the distinct two were coded as emerging leaders and significant place for leaders.

5.3.1 Social Space

As with St Aidans the first way in which young people develop a sense of belonging to USH is through the provision of a social space in which they can have fun, spend time with friends or make new friends. In a group night structure that is also similar to St Aidans the social space in USH is mostly, though not exclusively, focused around forty-five minutes of free time that follows the teaching programme. As described above, during free time the young people make us of the various options available to them.

Part of the rationale behind the free time, and indeed the whole of USH, is that it needs to be somewhere fun for the young people. It needs to be a place where the young people are 'just relaxed and they know they are going to have fun'.[616] This is essential says Stuart because '[with] youth work, if you're not thinking fun then you're not going to have any youth work are you – I hope we have lots of fun and laughter.'[617] The importance of fun is high on the agenda on an average Friday night. By way of example at the end of one pre-session run through an emerging leader, Lucy, prayed specifically that the evening would be fun for those coming along.[618] Another emerging leader Robin, who doesn't call himself a Christian, recalls when he first came to the group the leaders 'were fun, they were messing around… kept you entertained and it didn't sort of feel like it got boring towards the end.'[619] This essential element of USH mirrors young people from St Aidans describing Crusaders as more fun than their experiences of church. This connection between fun and how church is considered in the groups is echoed within USH through sentiments that suggest the fun of the group has a role in dispelling myths and misunderstandings about church to challenge those who are Christians and those who are not about their view of church.[620]

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[616] Andrew interview, p. 10, para 42.
[617] Stuart interview, p. 6, para 30.
[618] Hightown observation, 19/9/14, p. 1, para 8.
[619] Robin interview, Hightown, 9/1/15, p. 2, para 14.
[620] See more below.

Alongside fun, making friends is given as one of the most important aspects of USH. Stuart, the main leader at the time, expresses simply the desire for USH to be somewhere 'where friendship grows and develops'.[621] It is clear in talking to the young people that this happens and they regard the friendships they build through USH as particularly significant. They expect them to be 'friends for life'[622] and 'friends that will last forever.'[623] Even when not talking of the friendships formed at USH in such terms they still recognize something different about these friendships compared to those formed elsewhere. Christian expresses this well:

> The people here are quite friendly... and it's completely different than if you've had a day at school or college or in 6th form and it's been all rough, then you've come here and the people that are here are genuinely nice people.[624]

The social space of the group provides a place in which this building of friendship occurs in three ways: First, between young people, second, between young people and leaders, and third between leaders. This final form of friendship building, between leaders, is something I was initially skeptical about. During one observation when I entered the lounge during free time I saw three leaders and one young person sitting on the sofas together. The young person, Michael, was not engaged in conversation with the leaders and was spending the time on his phone whilst the leaders chatted and laughed together. I sat down with them and my initial skepticism subsided somewhat as I sensed that this was clearly an important social space for them just as it is with the young people.[625]

The opportunity to be a part of USH through it providing a social space allows young people who have no interest in the Christian faith to be attracted to the group. During my observations there was a particularly challenging group of up to four boys who were collectively referred to as 'the boys' by leaders during leaders' meetings.[626] These boys were semi-regular in attendance and, when there, were only interested in the free time, putting up with the teaching programme in order to get to the games that were available. On occasion these boys wouldn't stay for the small groups, choosing to keep the group

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[621] Stuart interview, p. 6, para 30.
[622] Robin interview, p. 2, para 16.
[623] Lucy interview, Hightown, 17/10/14, p. 2, para 11.
[624] Christian interview, p. 4, para 32.
[625] Hightown observation, 26/9/14, p. 3, para 19.
[626] Leaders Meeting observation, 5/9/14, p. 2, para 21.

purely as a social space to make use of on a Friday night.[627] This use of the group as a purely social space is affirmed by the leaders despite the lack of engagement in the Christian teaching that is on offer. 'Getting them off the street' on a Friday night is a rationale for USH given by both leader Judy and young person Lucy.[628]

The social space of USH, while being valued as a mode of belonging in its own right is also part of a wider desire to create an environment in which the young people become more open to Christian teaching and input that is also part of the evening. The second part of the prayer mentioned above that Lucy prayed for USH to be fun was that by being fun it would show people how amazing God is.[629] Similarly, Stuart hopes that the group is fun to act as an introduction to church and help to change the young people's perceptions of church:

> It's supposed to be fun and an introduction to the fact that church isn't necessarily the stereotyped image of somewhere dark and stone walls and cold and all that kind of thing... it is running around inside the building and throwing gunge at each other and things like that, that's church.[630]

In this way it is hoped that the social space of USH provides the context in which the young people can experience other modes of belonging and understandings of church. As with St Aidans then there is a barely concealed sense that the practices of the group provide a challenge to and a critique of the church.

5.3.2 Safe Place

As the teaching section was beginning on my second observation at USH, with the young people settling themselves down, I found my attention drawn to the front where a boy was draped across the steps up to the small stage. He had some paper with him and was scribbling notes to himself. Despite the presence of this lad at the front Stuart goes ahead and launches into the evening. The aspect of this that particularly interested me is that while my gaze was drawn to this boy's odd behaviour neither the leaders or the young people seemed at all perturbed by what was going on. Given that there was a group of

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[627] Hightown observation, 6/2/2015, p. 1 – 2, para 8.
[628] Judy interview, Hightown, 18/8/14, p. 5, para 32 and Lucy interview, p. 2, para 16.
[629] Hightown observation, 19/9/14, p. 1, para 8.
[630] Stuart interview, p. 2, para 8.

twenty-two young people with the usual leaders I found this surprising.[631] I soon learnt that this boy has some kind of special educational needs. Through future visits I discovered that he is prone to eccentric behaviour but also that he is well accepted in the group. Despite other situations such as seeing him dancing flamboyantly and comically to the background music whilst games were going on I didn't ever hear or see anyone trying to make fun of him or the situation.[632]

The way the group remains unaffected by these occurrences of strange behaviour is significant in pointing towards the group as a safe place for young people in which they are able to be themselves. The idea of USH being a safe place that allows young people to be themselves is valued highly by the leaders and, despite the stated aims of wanting young people to become followers of Jesus and part of the community of faith, it is often this value of providing an open and safe place that seems to be most important.[633] Andrew exemplified this position to me in describing an experience of two young people having a conversation about whether Jesus existed. He recalled the way that each held different views but the group provided the place in which the conversation could take place without threat or pressure. This was seen to be the reason behind running USH in the way it is run.[634]

The idea of USH as a safe place for young people to express themselves away from criticism and judgment is a recurring theme. Stuart describes USH as a 'safe place for young people who only know Jesus as a swear word';[635] Judy contends that it is both 'a safe place to hang out and a safe place to find out about God if they want to open up';[636] and David thinks of USH as a place that is 'first and foremost a safe place… that you know you're not going to feel any way threatened or made to feel insecure.'[637]

For most young people this ethos and culture of the group as a safe place is experienced in a low key manner such as that referred to by Andrew where the beliefs, opinions and

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[631] Hightown observation, 17/1/14, p. 2 – 3, para 7.
[632] Hightown observation, 26/9/14, p. 2, para 13.
[633] Andrew interview, p. 4, para 16.
[634] Andrew interview, p. 5, para 24. I return to this key event in more detail in the next chapter.
[635] Stuart interview, p. 5, para 23.
[636] Judy interview, p. 4, para 28.
[637] David interview, p. 7, para 32.

questions of the young people are valued regardless of the Christian nature and church connection of USH. Often large parts of the programme contain no particular Christian aspect allowing for young people, whatever their beliefs, to access the subjects being discussed.[638] Perhaps more significantly though is the way that young people are comfortable to express their beliefs (or lack of them!) and opinions even when they know that what they are expressing is against the Christian faith of the leaders and HCC.

One of the emerging leaders discussed this openness within USH when I interviewed him. He used the example of a couple of homosexual young people who had been part of the group, expressing his surprise when he found out that leaders in USH hold the traditional conservative Christian viewpoint that homosexual practice is against Biblical teaching:

> One of the discussions was what is your opinion on homosexuality and it really surprised me that all the leaders were against it… the reason it surprised me was because they were such an open group and I knew two gay people who were coming at the time, and it was fairly obvious they were gay, not in a stereotypical way, but they had come out they were open about it [but] I hadn't seen any negativity about it.[639]

At least to some degree the leaders are keen to communicate to the young people that USH is a place where different views and opinions are allowed - it is a place where the young people can 'genuinely ask questions', says Stuart at the start of one USH evening.[640] Beth's story serves to illustrate the success of this ethos. Having been drawn to USH through the invitation of a friend she describes as the only Christian she knew who was willing to explain to why they believed what they did, she initially felt on the outside before feeling part of the group. Critical among the factors that helped her make this transition was the way that USH allowed her to 'be an atheist in the middle of a Christian church'.[641] During small group discussion time one evening she expressed this same thing succinctly by describing USH as a place where she can be herself and knows she is accepted even when she speaks her mind.[642]

When moving between the rooms during free time, joining in bits of conversations or occasionally playing a game of pool or table tennis, I notice again how comfortable the

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[638] Hightown observation, 14/10/14, p. 2, para 9.
[639] Freddie interview, Hightown, 5/12/14, p. 2, para 14.
[640] Hightown observation, 2/5/14, p. 1, para 9.
[641] Beth interview, p. 3, para 32.
[642] Hightown observation, 28/11/14, p. 2, para 17.

young people are with each other. The youngest boy enjoys picking up a table tennis bat to join in with the older ones, often without asking first. He is not as good at table tennis as they are and, in my view, seems to mess up the game they are having, yet they let him play without complaining, picking up on their game again when he has moved on to something else.[643]

The situation described earlier in which Michael was sat with three leaders while they chatted together further demonstrates the way that the social space, and in this case relationship between leaders and young people, can provide this safe place. In reflecting on the scene I realised that the two or three others who would normally form Michael's friendship group were absent and sitting with the leaders provided a safe place for him to be during free time, even without engaging in the conversation with them.[644]

The safety of the group is communicated through use of words such as community and family. Beth told me about what she sees as the 'community' of the group. When asked what she means by this she explains that there is no 'hierarchy… everyone is equal [and] its not like you see leaders as leaders, they're more people you can get along with'.[645] This is also described as USH being like a family in terms of the way people relate to each other. Both young people and leaders describe USH in this way and value the role that this sense of family plays. For Andrew USH operates as 'a big family' in which the boundaries that might normally be expected in a youth group are blurred because the people 'are not like leader and young person [rather] you are all part of a family.'[646] This potentially makes USH more than a youth group due to the level of love and care in the group. The young people describe this as well. Lucy told me that 'what [USH] mostly means is family; its like a second family.'[647] This is a description of USH that echoes the heart of Matt Summerfield's vision for church as 'the family of God on the mission of God.'[648] As with some of the comments from St Aidans Crusaders there are similarities with the language used here and Becker's family model of congregational life. And as with Becker's typology the family language seems to indicate that the group provides a

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[643] Hightown observation, 7/11/14, p. 3, para 16.
[644] Hightown observation, 26/9/14, p. 3, para 19.
[645] Beth interview, p. 1, para 10.
[646] Andrew interview, p. 2, para 10.
[647] Lucy interview, p. 2, para 12.
[648] Matt Summerfield interview, p. 10, para 36.

'general sense of well-being, acceptance and belonging'. These primarily personal and social group characteristics foster a sense of safety for the young people.[649]

For both USH and St Aidans then the group provides a place of safety for young people. This is expressed pre-dominantly in them feeling comfortable to be themselves and not under pressure from others. This is exemplified in the freedom felt to ask questions and not to be pushed into viewpoints they don't hold. Whereas in St Aidans the safety of the group was expressed through young people who had perhaps had negative experiences of church being able to explore the Christian faith away from these experiences, within USH the safety was in terms more of the group as a place to explore faith whilst being accepted for they are.

5.3.3 Emerging Leaders

As the young people grow up through the group they have the opportunity to become emerging leaders. This involves them taking on some leadership within the group and allows for the way these young people belong to develop as they move towards the oldest end of the USH age range. Becoming an emerging leader is seen as a way of 'growing more' if the young people want to.[650]

After the set up on a Friday night the leaders and emerging leaders gather for a run through of the programme. This takes place in the foyer of the building, accessed directly from the front door. Chairs are brought out into a circle and everyone sits down. Usually the run through is quite loud with jokes and news sharing infiltrating the attempts to go through the programme.[651] Despite this informality occasionally resulting in some frustration Stuart, who at times offers his own comments, generally allows it. The team, both leaders and emerging leaders, are comfortable in each other's presence and this is as much a time to check in with each other as with the programme for the evening. Only on very rare occasions does the meeting lack this upbeat atmosphere and these stand out as unusual.[652]

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[649] Becker, *Congregations in Conflict*, 82 - 3.
[650] Judy interview, p. 5, para 36.
[651] Hightown observation, 3/12/13, p. 1, para 5.
[652] Hightown observation, 28/11/14, p. 1, para 8.

However despite this informality the emerging leaders take the role and responsibility of the role seriously. Each of them take turns to lead different aspects of the evening and are happy to stand in if individuals are away or want to swap tasks for the evening. There are a few aspects of being an emerging leader that create a particular sense of belonging for the young people: responsibility, opportunity to grow and preparation for adulthood. Steve outlines the responsibility involved with the role, explaining that for him to be an emerging leader 'means a quite a lot':

> It means you have to come here early and stay late, it means you have to do all the chairs and set the games room up but it also means that you have to do some of the games, which lead up to the main talk and I think last week some of us led small group time as well.[653]

Robin concurs with this but describes it in terms of having more to worry about:

> When you just come to enjoy it you don't have to worry about the ins and outs and what's happening and running games and the numbers of people coming but once you become a leader you worry if there's going to be enough people to do this game and is there going to be enough people coming like full stop.[654]

For Andrew, the leader who for a period when I was involved coordinated the group of emerging leaders, connects the responsibility that is involved with an opportunity for the young people to grow. He cites the example of Christian who he says was a lad with very low self-confidence but is 'growing bit by bit' through taking on responsibility in the safe environment of Urban Saints.[655] The growth experienced is also in terms of the Christian faith with self-professed atheist Freddie recognizing that the extra responsibility and involvement that goes with being an emerging leader has helped to develop his thinking about the Christian faith and grow in this way.[656]

Oftentimes it will be a leader and emerging leader working together to lead something during the programme but not all the emerging leaders are expected to lead 'up front' items and it is left up to them whether they want to or not. Most of them do and the culture of the group is one that seems to encourage people stepping up and creates a safe place in which to try things out. Certainly for some emerging leaders developing the

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[653] Steve interview, Hightown, 17/10/14, p. 2, para 20.
[654] Robin interview, p. 1, para 8.
[655] Andrew interview, p. 3, para 16.
[656] Freddie interview, p. 9, para 52.

confidence to stand at the front and lead like this is deemed a significant step in their 'journey' and widely celebrated by the leaders.[657]

The level of formal input and organisation for the emerging leaders varied significantly during my involvement in the group.[658] At its best the young people were provided with training through an Urban Saints produced resource. Consequently being an emerging leader had the potential of connecting the young people more with the wider organisation of Urban Saints. When training was offered it was an opportunity that the young people took seriously. During one observation this training was being provided. Both before the group and during free time I noticed many of the emerging leaders were sitting down individually or in pairs with folders working through some aspects of the course.[659]

The content of the training and the impact of being an emerging leader are wider than being a further opportunity to teach the Christian faith. There is also a hope that they prepare the young people in some way for adulthood through providing skills and confidence that they will need as they move out of school and college into university or work. Andrew describes it as something that might 'springboard them to what they'll do going forwards, you know like adulthood or work or college or work or whatever it might be'.[660] Young person Freddie confirms this in talking of the skills he is learning through being an emerging leader:

> I'm getting to learn how to live mix inputs on the stage. I'm learning like new bits of kit so there's a switch box I've never seen before. I'm learning to use radio transmitters for microphones and yeah, it's just it provides so much more than just a place to play some fun games and learn about Christ, it's as a functioning thing it is just fantastic there is so many things that it provides.[661]

The opportunity to be an emerging leader appears to provide a mode of belonging to the group that ensures the young people have a reason to be involved that enhances their experience of USH as they move into their older teenage years. The responsibility of this

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[657] Andrew spoke in his interview about how he loved to see young people growing in confidence to lead from the front (e.g. p. 3 – 4, para 16).
[658] Quite a lot of time at leaders meetings was spent discussing this aspect of USH.
[659] Hightown observation, 4/7/14, p. 1, para 7.
[660] Andrew interview, p. 4, para 16.
[661] Freddie interview, p. 10, para 66.

role provides a context for them to grow as individuals and also to have some preparation for adult life.

Whilst the formal role of and training for emerging leaders is absent from the work of St Aidans the intergenerational life of the group provided informal opportunities for the older young people to take on some responsibility with some seeing themselves as role models for the younger groups. There is then some similarity between these two modes of belonging in that they offer an extension in the ways that the older young people can relate to and understand their involvement in the group. This in turn links back to the way in which Crusaders historically passed leadership on within groups. Consequently the relational connections to and within the groups and Urban Saints are enforced through these modes of belonging.

5.3.4 Significant Place for Leaders

USH provides a significant place in the lives of the leaders. This sense of significance comes across in the leaders' meetings that take place on an ad hoc basis a few times a year. What stands out from these is the way that the core group of leaders enjoys each other's company with the appearance of being involved as much because of the relationships they have as the work they do among young people. I experienced this during a leaders' meeting that occurred as an older couple from HCC took on overall leadership of USH after Stuart had begun a break following the birth of his second child. This couple invited the leaders to their house for a meeting, the first part of which took place over a meal. It was an evening, I noted, that felt more like a family mealtime than a meeting.[662]

Additionally, when interviewed, each of the core USH leaders spoke eloquently of the way in which being part of the team was a significant part of the experience of church relationships for them. In keeping with the experiences described above Judy likens the relationships on the team to feeling like being 'part of a family.'[663] Similar phrases describing being part of the team as 'like a small group'[664] and a place where 'we support

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[662] Hightown Leaders Meeting, observation, 2/11/14, p.1, para 5.
[663] Judy interview, p. 11, para 100.
[664] Claire interview, Hightown, 3/9/2014, p. 8, para 50.

each other'[665] were commonplace. Additionally some the leaders talked of the way in which becoming involved in the group was a precursor to joining the wider life of the church and provided a place of greater connection with God. For example:

> I didn't really come to church... [USH] was almost my way in and it's been a bit of a journey. I never planned it this way, you know as my involvement with [the youth group] has grown so I found myself drawn into the church, come regularly on Sundays... What [USH] gave me the opportunity to do was to feel involved and it was through feeling involved and through doing something I suddenly felt connected to God again in a way that I don't think I'd ever done up to that point and that sort of brought me in and as a result of that involvement I think I've enjoyed church a lot more in general.[666]

This experience of a leader experiencing a connection with God through the group points to the role that USH, despite being a youth group, plays in helping to develop and sustain faith in the lives of the leaders as well as the young people. Andrew continues this theme describing the role USH plays in developing faith as being a 'two-way thing' - as the leaders try to push the young people on they find that they are being pushed on themselves.[667] The leaders value this opportunity to grow and find support through USH, whether through the relationship with each other or, as Andrew describes above, with the young people.

The role of USH in the lives of the leaders spills over into their experiences of church as a whole through HCC. Alongside the experience of David described above, Stuart found that his leadership in USH had the effect of drawing him into the wider life of the church. For Claire choosing to become a leader when new to HCC was key in her developing friendships in the church that helped her settle and the leaders became the people that she 'hangs out with.'[668] After one USH evening that happened to be Stuart's final evening before taking his break from the group I joined the leaders going out for a drink after the session, something which they all agreed they should do more often.[669] The atmosphere of this time however was exactly that of a group of friends who are comfortable with

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[665] Judy interview, p. 11, para 100.
[666] David interview, p. 1, para 4. This moment in the interview was a key critical incident that helped me to see the role of the group in the lives of the leaders.
[667] Andrew interview, p. 9, para 40.
[668] Claire interview, p. 8, para 50.
[669] Hightown observation 24/10/14, p. 1, para 6.

each other and enjoy each other's company. Judy confirms this in talking about how they try to get together during the school summer holidays when the group is not meeting.[670]

Although the leaders talked about this aspect of USH it is clearly a new idea to them as evidenced by the conversation I walked in on during the beginning of a leaders' meeting in September 2014 after I had been carrying out interviews through the summer break. In this conversation Judy was discussing the difficulty there is in recruiting new leaders for USH from HCC and suggested that instead of saying they need more leaders to help with the youth group, maybe she should share her testimony about how much she gets from the group and the benefits of the experience she has in volunteering. When she sees me she explains that my interview with her has helped to change how she sees her role as a leader in the group.[671]

The significance of USH in the lives of leaders is also shown through the way that the lines between leaders and young people can be blurred. On occasion it seems as if the leaders are there to enjoy themselves just as much as the young people. The final USH of the summer term is an event known as the 'Unlaunch Night' due to it being at the opposite end of the year from the Launch Night that began things back in September. It is a fun session that includes games based on the events that have taken place throughout the year. The final part of this night is a thirty-minute disco in the auditorium to re-enact the Christmas Ball. The spacious auditorium is set up as usual, however because there are a number of regular leaders and young people away at ReBuild[672] those that are there are rattling around in the space creating what I feel is an uncomfortable atmosphere as this section of the evening begins.

However despite these lower numbers and my sense of the atmosphere, in very little time the young people and leaders that are there are dancing to the music and laughing and joking together. This carries on through the disco section of the evening until it is time to finish. The end of the disco is accompanied by a palpable sense of disappointment that it is over. I was struck by what I term the 'togetherness' of the group and the way that in this setting the lines are blurred between leaders and young people. In this place

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[670] Judy interview, p. 11, para 100.
[671] Leaders' Meeting observation, Hightown, 5/9/15, p. 1, para 5.
[672] Rebuild is an Urban Saints organised short-term mission trip.

both young people and leaders together are celebrating the year that they have had in USH.[673] In interview Claire highlights this Unlaunch Night as her highlight of the year for exactly this reason.[674]

USH is quite a new group and linked directly to a specific local church and yet it provides a place through which the faith and communal Christian life of the leaders is enhanced. Similarly, the leaders within St Aidans find the experience of their Christian faith enhanced through the tradition of Crusaders. Whilst this longevity of tradition and personal involvement since being young themselves is not part of the USH leaders' experience the group still clearly has a significant impact on their identity as Christians. By providing a communal setting that works to enhance the experience and understanding of the leaders' faith these Urban Saints groups raise fascinating and vital questions about the ecclesial value of what they do.

In a similar way, resultant of these different modes of belonging that the group provides, young people appear to become open to the possibility of the Christian faith. Beth, for example, has moved, she says, from her position of being an atheist to being able to accept some aspects of Christianity. She is though clear that she is not yet a Christian.[675] Beth is not alone in finding that the safety there is within USH to express views and opinions leads, gradually, to an opening up the possibilities for Christian belief and faith. Robin expresses it in this way:

> Before I started coming to USH I wasn't a Christian at all and I didn't really even believe in God or anything like that… I'm [still] not a full on Christian but I am understanding the ideas of Christianity and understand where people's views come from. I've sort of got myself into a position where I am willing to accept the possibility of there being a God without sort of devoting every second to doing it.[676]

Christian's experience matches this and he talks of taking baby steps towards Christian faith resulting in him getting 'closer and closer' all the time to becoming a Christian.[677] Whilst it might be possible to allude from this that USH brings young people to the possibility of the Christian faith but no further this would be unfair. Lucy provides an

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[673] Hightown observation, 18/7/14.
[674] Claire interview, p. 8 – 9, paras 52 & 54.
[675] Beth interview, p. 3, para 28.
[676] Robin interview, p. 4, para 32.
[677] Christian interview, p. 2, para 18.

example of a young person who has made the journey through to being baptised and serving in the life of the HCC on the children's and worship teams. The complex reality seems to be that for young people who come to USH having not considered the Christian faith, being part of USH at the very least presents the possibility of Christianity and in many cases makes this a plausible option to consider. Some however decide, at least for the time being, that it is not for them. Freddie made this clear to me in his interview when talking about his time on ReBuild:

> I'm interested in it… but I'm fairly certain I won't end up believing. In a weird way when I went to Africa on ReBuild the talks kind of made me realise, or think for the time being, that I don't believe God is real.[678]

Even in Freddie's case however we see he is able to articulate his interest in the Christian faith even if he doesn't believe for the time being. The possibility is still there and held open for him. This need to continue to hold open the possibility of the Christian faith is what makes the various modes of belonging described above so significant. Young people are able to be part of the group and continue to belong whatever their current state of Christian belief or faith. By offering a social space, safe place and emerging leader programme USH allows young people to remain involved. Consequently the possibility of the Christian faith can remain open for them. In addition the language of journey and growth is often used to describe the way in which young people become more aware of and closer to accepting the Christian faith.

With these modes of belonging offering a place through which the Christian faith might be experienced alongside the significance of the group in sustaining faith and friendship in the lives of the leaders the potential of USH to be a place of Christian community is raised. With this in mind the next section will describe the place and understanding of the church within USH.

5.4 The Place and Understanding of the Church

The description of the modes of belonging raises the possibility that USH has the potential to become a form of Christian community for the young people and leaders. This suggests that the place and understanding of church within the group is significant.

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[678] Freddie interview, p. 1, para 8.

Central to understanding this area are three things: Ecclesial practices of USH, connections with HCC and the role of residentials. I discuss each of these in turn.

5.4.1 Ecclesial Practices

Similarly to St Aidans there are a number of regular, weekly practices in USH that are reflective of what could be termed 'ecclesial' practices. They are things that people do when they gather together as church. Within USH the main ecclesial practices of the group are Bible teaching, pastoral care and prayer and meditation.

Andrew talks of how each USH night is based around a 'really important message'.[679] This aspect of the evening is often intended to show that the Bible has something to say about current issues the young people deal with. David gives the example of social media and explains how the teaching is in some ways trying to translate the Bible for young people.[680] The only exception to this is special events that are put on occasionally throughout the year. These events, such as the annual talent show, are what David describes as the 'open door' to USH and are designed to make it easy to invite new people.[681] However, as described earlier, on a regular evening a teaching theme gradually builds throughout the session. The intention is that the subject is accessible to at least some degree to all the young people regardless of where they consider themselves to be in relation to the Christian faith:

> [USH is] a place to learn that something that people go through all the time like social media for example, actually the Bible has something to say about it, God does have something to say about it... I mean it's sort of introducing something, a problem that they all have or a question they all have or something they know about their family and relating it to the lesson in the Bible, what does the Bible have to say about this particular subject and can I learn anything from it.[682]

The subject for each USH evening follows through as part of a series that runs over a school term.[683] The relaxed approach to the teaching time as it builds through the games, videos, discussions and short talks is reflected in the interaction of the young people with it. The lack of chairs means that young people are sitting or lounging on the floor

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[679] Andrew interview, p. 10, para 42.
[680] David interview, p. 3, para 14.
[681] Ibid, p. 3, para 12.
[682] Ibid, p. 3, para 14.
[683] For example the 2014 autumn term had a theme of 'pressures'.

throughout this time unless they need to get up and move around for a game or activity. During the short talks the young people might be spread around the room, sitting in groups or all in the centre depending on how they have been required to move for the other sections of the programme. Leaders can be seen in amongst the young people on the floor and taking part in what is going on.

Young people are free to pop in and out of the auditorium in ones and twos during the programme. This tends to be to get a drink or to go to the toilet. They don't feel the need to let the leaders know or ask permission to do this and it normally doesn't disrupt the session unduly.[684] The leaders appear to only take an interest if there are young people who have left the auditorium for too long without coming back in. The talks take place with popular music playing quietly in the background and leaders use microphones to ensure they are heard. This also has the effect of helping to create the environment in which this coming and going of some young people can occur with little interference to what is being led from the front. The combined volume of the background music and leaders speaking through the microphone alongside the dim lighting also allows for young people to chat quietly while things are going on without disturbing others. This sometimes will be young people making comments to each other about the session, but other times it will simply be chat. Again the leaders let this happen unless it is loud enough to be disturbing others.

The sense I get is of an environment designed to allow the young people to connect with the teaching at the level with which they feel comfortable. Robin talks appreciatively of USH as a 'relaxed environment' in which 'the Christianity is not forced upon you it's just talked about, it is up to you whether you believe it or not [or] get involved in the discussion.'[685] There are some limits to the freedom to chat during the teaching session but it is usually left to the debrief meeting at the end of USH for this to be raised. Consequently it was unusual one time when Stuart took one of the emerging leaders to one side to ask him to be quiet during an activity.[686]

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[684] For example Hightown observations 14/2/14, p. 4, para 16; 14/3/14, p. 2, para 5; and 7/11/14, p. 2, para 15.
[685] Robin interview, p. 6, para 52.
[686] Hightown observation, 10/10/14, p. 2, para 15.

In addition to teaching the Bible, the leaders see USH as a place in which they can offer care and support for the young people who come along. Claire sees the potential for this with the group being neither family nor school. For her this is one of the important aspects of USH:

> To be able to talk to them about what is going on in their lives and maybe give a response that is either not necessarily what they want to hear or what they are going to get from other people. Some of the stuff that has been going on it's been really good to be able to just get involved with that and check up every week how they're feeling about it and what's been going on…. I think you should be there for them, so I do think that's really important.[687]

The relationships built through the group as a social space and the small group section of the evening provide the context in which pastoral care is offered to the young people. This offer of pastoral care is rarely formally articulated and yet is clearly a part of the experience of the group for those young people who wish to take advantage of it and who have been in the group for a while. The quality of relationships as a basis for pastoral care is illustrated by Robin who compares his experiences at USH to how he feels about the way teachers deal with situations at school:

> With the teachers you can't really sit down and have a conversation with them… but here like the leaders sort of took the time to get to know you and spend time with you and sort of built up a friendship whereas at school it's just a teacher. And so like the leaders actually made an effort so I felt comfortable talking to them more than all the teachers.[688]

Beth highlights a similar aspect of the group that for her is a development of the way in which one of the modes of belonging to the group is that of family. She refers to a group night shortly after an Uncle of hers had died:

> I was at USH on a Friday evening when I found out about my Uncle. My uncle died when I was at USH and its, I wasn't my normal self and both leaders Judy and Andrew could figure it out and they were like "you don't have to take part in stuff if you don't want to" and then they kind of prayed for me. It's more that they take a caring… sort of parental role to us so if we have a problem we can talk about it to one of them.[689]

The free time provides a context in which much of this pastoral care can take place. On one occasion when in the downstairs foyer of the building Judy had a group of about six

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[687] Claire interview, p. 2, para 13.
[688] Robin interview, p. 3, para 22.
[689] Beth interview, p. 4, para 36.

or seven girls around her taking part in the art and craft activity. In September 2014 Judy, who is an art teacher, began a project to make a collage of the USH logo out of tissue paper.[690] It is a project that was taking months to complete and I noticed that there was very little progress being made. Rather the time seems to be spent talking and is a chance for relationships to be built, strengthened and developed. On one occasion I headed down the stairs from the lounge out into the foyer and saw the group of girls deep in conversation with Judy. I quickly sensed that there was a significant conversation going on that, as an adult male, I needed to be careful not to disrupt.[691]

The desire to ensure that USH is a place in which young people are cared for is understood and expressed as being like Jesus for the young people. This was discussed passionately at a leaders' meeting I attended in response to one of the leaders describing one of the difficult young people ('the boys') as a 'twerp' in an off the cuff remark. This led to Andrew reminding the other leaders that 'Jesus came to the broken and this is those kids' so they must be cared for in USH.[692] This was reiterated when I interviewed him and he talked of how his own journey of experiencing leaders who loved him 'no matter what' had given him a 'compassion for the kids that are troubled and are having a tough time and are a bit more difficult.'[693]

The practice of pastoral care in USH can extend to the leaders who talk of the way in which they support one another. Specifically, an older leader Karen is valued by the other leaders as someone who is like a mum to them.[694] She demonstrates this in very simple ways such as making cups of tea for the other leaders and inviting them to her house over the summer break when the group is not meeting. These are simple acts of care that are appreciated by the leaders to whom they are offered.

The final regular ecclesial practice of USH is prayer and meditation. The pre-session run through usually ends with a request for someone to pray for the upcoming evening. It is commonplace for the volunteer to come from a relatively small number among the group. However on occasion others will volunteer, including those who are self described

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[690] Hightown observation, 19/9/14, p. 3, para 28.
[691] Hightown observation, 26/9/14, p. 2, para 18.
[692] Hightown Leaders Meeting observation, 6/6/14, p. 3, para 24.
[693] Andrew interview, p. 11, para 46.
[694] Comment made at Hightown observation, 5/12/14, p. 1, para 5.

as not yet Christians. These prayers, though stumbling, are celebrated by the group especially if, as was the case for both Freddie and Robin on separate occasions, it is the first time that someone has prayed out loud.[695] For these boys in particular there was the added intrigue that they would not yet identify as Christian. In addition, leaders offer the young people a chance to be prayed for during small groups and there would often be one or two young people who would ask for prayer. On one occasion Michael reported back enthusiastically that the prayers prayed for his family a previous week had been answered.[696] The offer of prayer is also connected to the pastoral care with leaders offering to pray for the pastoral situations that are talked through. Occasionally the role of friendship built at USH is evident in building and sustaining faith for young people outside the group. Lucy and Steve for example meet up outside of the group for Bible study and prayer times together.[697]

Alongside prayer, from time to time, a form of meditative time is included in the teaching programme. Quite early in my time visiting USH Robin, who is not a Christian,[698] asked one of the leaders why there hasn't been any time to 'lie down and listen to music while thinking about stuff' for a long time.[699] A few weeks later I experienced what he was talking about. Towards the end of the teaching in which the theme had been the resurrection of Jesus, Stuart asks the young people to find some space around the auditorium and lie down. As they do this some softer music that I noted as being 'relaxing' begins to play, replacing the usual popular music. The young people are quick to do this and are joined by the leaders. With minimal fuss, quite soon everyone, myself included, is lying down quietly. I was surprised with how little noise or laughing and joking there was as the young people prepare themselves for this. The relative darkness of the room and the relaxed atmosphere created by the lack of chairs and the draped curtains seems to help. Once everyone is lying down and quiet Stuart begins to lead through some words designed to help individuals consider how the theme of the evening might affect them individually.[700]

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695 E.g., Hightown observation 17/10/14, p. 1, para 3.
696 Observation, 5/12/14, p. 2, para 16.
697 Lucy interview, p. 6, para 54 & 56.
698 In his own words he is not a 'full on Christian', Robin interview, p. 4, para 32.
699 Hightown observation, 2/5/14, p. 2, para 20.
700 Observation, 27/6/14, p. 3, para 21.

During this first instance of this happening when I was in the group I tried to take part in the activity so as not to distract the young people that are there whilst also trying to see how engaged the young people are. As I glanced around from time to time I saw the young people and leaders to a person lying down quietly. I noted my surprise at how long this time of reflection lasted and how long the young people were happy to be lying down quietly.[701] It is impossible for me to know the extent to which young people were reflecting on the questions being asked and theme of the evening, however those who were would not have been disturbed by those who weren't. Matt Summerfield refers to these reflective opportunities as possible 'God moments'. They hold the potential of the young people becoming aware of God's presence and can be a 'preparing the ground' so that the young people are more open to the possibility of the reality of God's existence and the Christian faith. Matt also speaks into the uncertainty as to how much or to what extent young people are engaging in the reflective time by sharing his experience that matches mine of young people at least taking the time of silence seriously and for him hearing from young people that they at least enjoy the enforced silent space.[702]

These examples of the practices of Bible teaching, pastoral care and prayer and meditation on the regular weekly USH nights have two main impacts. The first follows on from Matt Summerfield's comment above that the reflective time provides the potential for God moments in which young people become aware of God's presence. I would suggest that these regular practices of Bible teaching, pastoral care and prayer and meditation all contribute in this way. In addition there is some evidence that these practices also serve to teach and train the young people in the things that Christians do to sustain and act out their faith. Steve talks about this in terms of noticing 'little things' that are ways in which he is growing in his faith - these include beginning to pray when he wakes up in the morning before getting ready for school.[703] Robin echoes this by talking of the way he does pray and read his Bible 'on occasion'.[704] Interestingly for Robin, who is not what he calls 'a full Christian' he says that if he was, he would pray and read the Bible more. The significance of this is in the way that USH has encouraged and trained him in

[701] Ibid, p. 3, para 23.
[702] Matt Summerfield interview, p. 6 – 7, para 22.
[703] Steve interview, p. 1, para 10.
[704] Robin interview, p. 5, para 40.

some simple Christian practices of prayer and Bible reading and that he recognizes these as important to building an ongoing Christian life.

The ecclesial practices of USH suggest that, in the same way as the early Crusader classes were in many ways reflective of church without naming themselves as such, there is something church-like about the regular gathering of this group around a few central, simple Christian practices. The way that young people from otherwise unchurched backgrounds pick up on these practices and begin to adopt a rhythm in their usage outside of the group suggests the group has some effect as a community that equips its members in basic Christian living. However the practices are handled in such a way that the young people are able to access them at a level of their choosing. Whilst in many ways the Bible teaching at St Aidans is more formal, the overall sense that it is a vital part of the group is shared. Also as described in the previous chapter the way in which the Bible study is delivered in St Aidans tries to bring the young people along with it as well as Victoria being happy to pause if necessary so that young people can be welcomed or their questions answered. This expresses an informality and flexibility that whilst distinct from institutional church life helps to facilitate the young people's engagement in both groups' ecclesial practices.

5.4.2 Connections with Church

The idea of church is rarely discussed in USH, though the building is known as the church, with particular emphasis on the auditorium as the 'sanctuary'.[705] The young people themselves can joke about the distinction between the different areas of the building as being the church and also about the fact that the building itself isn't the church, the people are.[706]

At different times Stuart can describe USH as being both part of the church[707] and able to do what church is meant to do.[708] However there are deliberate ways in which the young people are encouraged to connect more with HCC itself. A Youth Alpha course began in

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[705] David referred to it in this way in his interview (p. 12, para 59) and it was referred to this way during a Hightown Sunday Morning observation (15/2/15, p. 1, para 2).
[706] Hightown observation, 3/10/14, p. 1, para 2.
[707] Hightown, observation, 4/7/14, p. 2, para 17.
[708] Hightown observation, 14/2/14, p. 4, para 20.

January 2014 and was advertised to the young people of USH on a Friday night before it was launched on the following Sunday evening. By running it on a Sunday evening it was being run as part of or alongside the HCC adult Alpha course and consequently was an HCC event. The course was presented to the young people as an opportunity to take faith more seriously with the implied further rationale that it would connect them with something of the wider life of HCC.[709]

When interviewing Christian he talks about the role this Alpha course played in his ongoing faith development. Describing his faith as taking baby steps forward he credits Youth Alpha as having helped quite a bit, though he is careful to qualify this by saying that he doesn't take massive steps forward. It was his own interest in moving on with his faith though that led him to go along to the Alpha course.[710]

Additionally, Christian is one of a number of the older young people who regularly attends a fortnightly youth hub. Similarly to Youth Alpha this hub is part of the wider structure of HCC but with a specifically youth component. Hubs were launched in 2014 as a replacement for HCC's house group structure. They are described as one of three ways of 'getting connected' to HCC[711] and are designed to be a 'great way to make friends, grow in faith and be a part of what's going on.' They can also be termed 'mini-church'.[712] They are talked about regularly within the Sunday services and people are strongly encouraged to join one of the different hubs. The youth hub though was never formally advertised in USH during my time there.

The youth Hub is run by Matt Summerfield and is described by one of the young people that goes along as being a place where they ask 'quite deep questions and dig into Christianity a little bit more'.[713] The Youth Hub is made up both of young people who call themselves Christians and those who don't but describe themselves as being on a journey. Also it is made up of young people from USH who do not go along to the Sunday

[709] Hightown observation, 17/1/14, p. 3, para 7.
[710] Christian interview, p. 5, para 48.
[711] On the HCC website the other two ways are through Sundays and by joining a team to volunteer in some way.
[712] HCC website (http://www.hcc.org.uk/get-connected/hubs/. Accessed 23/3/15). The aim is for Hubs to be approximately 20 – 25 people.
[713] Lucy interview, p. 3, para 26.

morning services as well as some who are part of Sunday mornings but do not go to USH.[714] Further to this, the Hub has on at least one occasion been the place provided to direct a young person who is getting too old for USH but is not yet a Christian and not connected with other aspects of HCC. In this situation the hub took the place of USH and provided an ongoing connection with the life HCC for the young person in question.

USH is considered to be an introduction to the church. It is a place that is 'not as intense'[715] whilst Sunday the morning worship service includes groups that are 'more church'. Andrew describes 'the flow we really want to see' as being young people moving from USH through other activities to fully participating on a Sunday morning.[716] Judy alludes to this as well, 'once you get them thinking you can kind of point them in the right direction.'[717] The consistency of this desire among the leaders is shown in David using very similar language, saying that 'obviously we want to bring more of the young people into the church, quite simply, we want to see more of them there on a Sunday.'[718] There is some evidence of this happening in a limited way. On visits to the Sunday morning service I was able to observe a good proportion of the young people from USH there and engaged in the service, including about half of those being from unchurched backgrounds.[719] Other young people who were not there when I observed spoke warmly of having been on occasion and enjoying it when they are there.[720]

So the idea is that USH is very much a beginning, an introduction, and is only able to operate as church in some way while it is connected to the church and is able to point people onwards in the flow. In this flow it is the events and activities of Sunday mornings that are most often considered the destination and most fully church. This is the case even though the young people up until the age of seventeen spend most of the Sunday morning in their own group in a different building.[721] The fact that it is on a Sunday morning whilst the adult worship service is going on seems to validate it mostly as being where and when the church can be found. Interestingly though for Matt Summerfield,

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[714] Christian interview, p. 6, para 52 and Robin interviews, p. 6, paras 48 & 50.
[715] Judy interview, p. 2, para 14.
[716] Andrew interview, p. 6, para 26.
[717] Judy interview, p. 2, para 14.
[718] David interview, p. 7, para 28.
[719] Hightown Sunday observations on 18th & 25th January and 15th February 2015.
[720] Robin interview, p. 9, para 64 and Beth interview, p. 1 – 2, para 10.
[721] Hightown Sunday Service observation, 18th January 2015, p. 1 – 2, paras 3 & 10.

whilst Sundays are a vital part of the expression of HCC it is not 'bums on seats' that is essential but rather the young people feeling like they're 'part of this family'.[722]

Despite this, the way in which the group is significant for the leaders and provides a means by which their faith is enhanced through their involvement suggests that this flow is not one directional but rather can move between USH and HCC in both directions. This multi-directional flow was evident at St Aidans as well in the way that the group fulfilled a role in the lives of young people and leaders that added to their faith in ways that institutional and denominational church didn't. This points to contradictions and an ambiguous ecclesial identity at work in the espoused and operant ecclesiologies of the groups. This will be explored further in the chapters to come.

5.5 The Role of Residentials

Two Urban Saints residentials are significant in the life of USH. These are an annual summer holiday to the Urban Saints owned 'Westbrook' centre on the Isle of Wight and ReBuild, a short term mission trip that allows young people to spend ten days helping build a house for a family in South Africa or Mexico. I wasn't able to join either of these trips but in both my interviews with young people and on group nights their significance is talked up. Both of these figured prominently as highlights at an USH leaders' meeting in which part of the time was spent looking back over the academic year that had run from September 2013 to July 2014.[723]

Westbrook is an annual holiday run by Urban Saints but with leaders drawn from various groups around the country including USH.[724] For several years a group of leaders and young people from USH have gone to Westbrook to take part in the holiday that includes plenty of activities alongside opportunities for Christian teaching and worship. As with USH the older young people are able to go as what is referred to as 'service crew'. This means they get to help out and take on some form of leadership as well as taking part in the holiday.

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[722] Matt Summerfield interview, p. 10, para 36.
[723] Hightown Leaders Meeting observation, 5/9/14, p. 3, para 25 & 27.
[724] Judy and Andrew talked about being part of Westbrook (Judy interview, p. 6, para 49 and Andrew interview, p. 10, para 44).

Westbrook creates a space whereby a number of different things might happen for the young people. Christian describes the first of these as 'starting my journey'.[725] He describes a particular evening that, after they had been having fun all day, was focused solely on God. During this time the young people were left with a challenge to either start their journey with God or decide that no, it's not for them. Christian says that for him and some of his friends this is where their journey began. For Robin the Westbrook holiday introduced him to the bigger picture of Urban Saints through meeting people from other Urban Saints groups and churches. He describes two effects of this: first, that it helped him feel part of the wider organisation; and second, that through conversation with a Westbrook leader from a different church he came to realise that the Christian faith was plausible. He put it in this way:

> I was speaking at Westbrook to loads of different leaders from different churches and eventually one of them, like made sense to me and it actually opened my eyes to what the beliefs and views actually meant. It sort of put the points that other people had made into perspective and it made me understand them.[726]

The ReBuild trip to South Africa has a similar impact on the young people that go, though it was interesting that the group of young people that chose to go was made up entirely of emerging leaders. Stuart, the main leader of USH at the time who also led the USH Rebuild team, explains this:

> I'm not going to say we only invited emerging leaders but actually in a sense that's kind of how it played out. They are the guys we're on a journey with, they're the guys we're trying to encourage and that sort of thing so of course they're the ones we're going to be looking at you know an opportunity to grow and move on.[727]

Residential experiences are one of two main ways in which USH is served by its affiliation to and relationship with Urban Saints. The value with which these trips are held by leaders and young people (alongside the impact described above as opening of eyes, starting a journey or bringing understanding) make them a vital experience in the life of USH. They are experiences that the leaders believe would be much harder to come by without them being run and organised by Urban Saints centrally. This is in part because the pressure of the time and effort to organise them is taken off the local leaders but the leaders, also credit the connection with a wider community of Christian leaders and

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[725] Christian interview, p. 3, para 22.
[726] Robin interview, p. 4, para 34.
[727] Stuart interview, p. 13, para 58.

young people. Leaders and young people alike value the extra time and focus that being away can provide.

> Being down in Westbrook you spend time with a bunch of Christian leaders and [there are] times every day when there's a specific kind of meeting where Christianity is being explored and people are going to offer to pray for you and they are going to offer to open the Bible and read some passages to you during the week. Those bigger experiences [offer] opportunities to respond and so typically that's where more responses occur.[728]

> I guess taking us out of the secluded environment… there's not much you can do on a Friday evening but you can do quite a lot in ten days.[729]

Despite these experiences on the residentials being away from HCC they seem to have an impact on the way in which young people connect with the wider church. In the review of the year during a leaders' meeting mentioned earlier, Matt refers to the way a young person's experiences on one of these Urban Saints trips led to him being baptised,[730] whilst similarly Christian says that he started attending the Sunday services at HCC following his experiences at Westbrook.[731] In addition Andrew tells the story of how being at Westbrook was key in the decision of two girls to begin attending the services at HCC.[732] Each of these young people mentioned were in attendance and seemingly engaged on each of three Sundays I attended services at HCC.[733]

ReBuild provides an opportunity for intentionally connecting the young people going on the trip with the wider church of HCC. Though the team who go are drawn from leaders and young people of USH, and it is an Urban Saints organised trip, it is described as the church that sends people on ReBuild, not USH.[734] The reason why this distinction is made is that the church, meaning the adults of HCC, raises the money necessary for the young people to go.[735] This then involves the young people, including those from USH who have no other connection with church at the point of signing up for Rebuild needing to join in events and activities that raise awareness of and money for the trip. This inevitably includes being at and part of the Sunday morning services occasionally. For some young

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[728] Ibid, p. 11, para 54.
[729] Steve interview, p. 3, para 37.
[730] Hightown Leaders' Meeting observation, 5/9/14, p.3 para 27.
[731] Christian interview, p. 5, para 50.
[732] Andrew interview, p. 10, para 44.
[733] This was evident in each of the HCC Sunday Morning observations.
[734] David interview, p. 6, para 26.
[735] For the 2014 trip to South Africa £21000 was raised.

people this causes uncertainty such as what would be appropriate to wear for such an occasion![736] The positive stories however are not the complete picture. Freddie, an emerging leader who was part of the ReBuild trip explained to me how for him the trip helped him understand the Christian faith more but brought to him to a point where he decided he didn't believe it. This hasn't, though, caused him to stop attending USH.[737]

5.6 Ambiguity About Church

In this description of USH, especially of the group's ecclesial practices and connections with HCC, I detect an ambiguity about church that is both opportunity and threat to the mission of USH. The ambiguity is in the way that USH on a Friday night is a place through which faith can be made possible, during which young people are trained in basic Christian practices and where the faith of leaders is sustained and developed but yet is held as very much a second order priority compared to the place of church 'proper' – the Sunday morning congregation. The way in which USH can make use of ecclesial practices and occasional ecclesial language whilst also pointing to church as being elsewhere reinforces this ambiguity.

There is opportunity within this ambiguity as it allows the space for young people to belong without the pressure or expectation that might come with something named church. The ambiguity allows the ecclesial nature of the group to be held loosely; accessed and maybe named by those who are ready to and yet able to be ignored by those who do not wish it to be church. However there is also a threat within this ambiguity that the genuinely ecclesial nature of the group and its practices goes un-noticed and un-acknowledged. That this ecclesiality is unspoken allows the notion to remain that of all the expressions of church available to young people in USH through HCC, it is the Sunday morning one that is most valid or mostly church.

Alongside the ambiguity there is also a fragility in USH that characterises the group and therefore the sense of church within it. This is distinct from the stability provided by the longstanding nature of St Aidans Crusaders. Through the autumn of 2014 the number of leaders available to the group became of great concern. The situation began with Andrew

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[736] Hightown observation, 4/7/14, p. 2, para 17.
[737] Freddie interview, p. 1, para 8.

who had been one of the core leaders, and headed up the emerging leaders stream, suddenly stepping down and no longer being part of the team. Quite early in the autumn term there was an USH night from which Andrew left early after running a game. This was the last I saw of him involved with the group. During the debrief after the session Stuart answered a question from one of the young people about where Andrew is and simply says that he's going through a tough time at the moment, saying that it will be difficult to know what to do with the emerging leaders while Andrew is having his 'troubles'. The tone of Stuart's voice and atmosphere at the end of the debrief was noticeably downbeat at this news.[738] Whilst Andrew's time as a leader ended unexpectedly Stuart himself stepped back from leadership as part of a far more planned and intentional process. With the birth of his second child imminent Stuart had already agreed that he would take a break after the October half term. This was part of the agenda for the leaders' meeting in September before the term began.

Consequent of the sudden and planned loss of two main male leaders a concern for USH and its leaders was whether the group would be able to continue. Stuart first alerted me to this after I arrived for USH on the first Friday in October. Before the young people arrived he told me he needed to talk and invited me into the office of the church to talk in private. It being the first time this had happened during my visits to USH I immediately became aware that it was something important. He tells me that unless new leaders are found the group will close down after the half term break, which was approximately a month away. Stuart is clearly troubled by this and laments the young people who will be lost if the group is closed. It could be an easy decision he says if it wasn't for the fact that 'stuff was happening' and 'young people are on a journey.' He references a key conversation with an otherwise unchurched young person the previous week.[739] David joins us in the office and is clearly aware of the situation explaining that various special events are under threat if the group closes.

This conversation left me feeling quite shaken as by this time I was feeling very much a part of the group and felt like I had built up good relationships with both young people and leaders. I was also struck by the fragility of the work that seemed so important to the

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[738] Hightown observation, 19/9/14, p. 4, para 37.
[739] Hightown observation, 3/10/14, p. 1, para 6 .

young people, played a significant role for the leaders, and could be seen to be the main mission success of HCC. This sense of fragility was reinforced the following week when Stuart explained that 'the church has been given an ultimatum' that if no one stepped up to lead USH then the group will close. At the end of this evening, right at the end of the debrief time, Stuart tells the emerging leaders about the situation and although Lucy says her Mum will help if needed Stuart explains that it is leaders not simply 'warm bodies in the room' that are needed.[740]

Shortly after this new leaders were announced in the shape of an older couple from the life of HCC who agreed to step into the role and lead the team together. They have some history of involvement in youth work but know little about USH or Urban Saints in general. Matt Summerfield however is very pleased they have taken on the role. There was little time for a handover between Stuart and these new leaders, Anthony and Deborah, but they attended the last two sessions before the half term break. The first of these visits however was really a chance of them to check out USH with a view to then deciding if they would take on the leadership role or not. They decided to take it on having been particularly impacted by the team leadership evident and also after a conversation with emerging leader Christian in which he talked of how much he valued the group and that he wouldn't know what to do on a Friday night without it.[741] These things proved persuasive and the leadership crisis appeared to be over.

This appearance of crisis over seems to have only papered over the fragility of the leadership of USH however as Anthony was only able to lead for a term before needing to step down for family and work reasons, leaving Deborah alone out of the two new leaders.[742] Additionally through this time David who had been there every week since my involvement with USH began reducing his involvement in the group to fortnightly. Once again this left USH struggling for leaders. At the time of my fieldwork coming to an end there was an ongoing sense of concern that there was only just enough leaders for the group. Although there was some success in seeing potential volunteers stepping forward following a preaching series from Matt Summerfield focusing on the need for church to

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[740] Hightown observation, 10/10/2014, p. 2, para 17.
[741] Hightown observation, 17/10/14, p. 2, para 13.
[742] Email received 28/12/14.

be the family of God,[743] Deborah had to cancel an USH night in early March 2015 due to a lack of leaders.

These leadership challenges that emerged suddenly and unexpectedly were not the only way in which fragility was demonstrated in the life of USH. On occasion the relationships and whims of the young people suggested a different form of the fragile nature of USH. A few short weeks after being instrumental in encouraging Deborah and Anthony to take on the leadership role as describe above I found myself tidying up the games room with Christian after the small groups finished was surprised to find him telling me a quite different story. As we chatted he told me that he was thinking he might stop going to USH. I asked why and his response was that it was because he senses his friends being less friendly towards him than they were. He seemed particularly down and it strikes me as a massive thing for him to be considering given how important the group has been for him.[744] He didn't leave while I was involved and I also witnessed him participating in a number of Sunday morning services at HCC during this time.[745] The conversation did however leave me wondering just how fragile the group might be for any particular young person at any time, dependent, as it might be on the state of relationships in the group. The journey towards faith within a continued commitment to Christian community of someone like Christian might rest on some friendships surviving the trials of teenage life.

5.7 USH in Summary

USH is a youth group that provides multiple modes of belonging and various understandings of the place of the church. The belonging that is experienced through the group as social space, safe place, by emerging leaders and through the significance in the lives of the leaders operates in such a way as to provide a context in which the Christian faith can become a possibility in the lives of the young people. In addition it offers a place for leaders to sustain and develop their Christian faith. There is considerable ambiguity about the place and understanding of church where the ecclesial practices within USH suggest that there is something of church about the group. However this is widely unacknowledged and the expressed hope and expectation is that the young people find

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[743] Hightown Sunday Morning observation, 15/2/15, p. 1, para 6.
[744] Hightown observation, 7/11/14, p. 3, para 18.
[745] Hightown Sunday Morning observation, 15/2/15, p. 1, para 3.

their way to the Sunday morning service that is deemed church proper. However there is considerable interplay between USH and HCC, as well as the periodic residentials trips that suggest a complex relationship between these different activities that each plays a role in stimulating, supporting and shaping the faith of both young people and leaders in USH. The fragility of church within USH on a Friday night however suggests that relationship and flow between it and other aspects of church within HCC is a necessary sustaining feature of the group.

5.8 Overall Case Study Summary

The two extended case studies together paint an interesting picture of the communal Christian life of these Urban Saints groups. Both groups provide a variety of ways in which young people and leaders connect and belong to them. The modes of belonging have some similarities and some differences across the two groups but in each they serve and represent the key relational dynamics that form the groups. In turn these key modes of belonging also create the environment in which the Christian faith and communal Christian life can be experienced through simple practices that resemble those with church life; hence they can be termed ecclesial practices.

Within this environment created by the modes of belonging and ecclesial practices there is evidence that the creation and development of Christian faith among the young people is encouraged. In addition the groups provide places that are significant in sustaining the Christian faith of and providing identity for the leaders. The way in which this experience of the Christian faith through Urban Saints groups relates to that of institutional and denominational church life varies. For some the group is almost a replacement, at least temporarily; for others the Urban Saints group enhances the experience of church; for some it is like a first taste and for others something of a parallel experience. For some young people the ecclesial nature of the groups is neither here nor there and they enjoy them primarily as youth clubs. There is then significant ambiguity within the extended case studies about their ecclesial status and role.

The data from and descriptions of the case studies demonstrate some continuity with the inherent ecclesial imagination of Crusaders that provides a form of practical normative ecclesiology from the historical review. However the case studies also demonstrate areas

in which the espoused and operant ecclesiologies of the groups contradict each other and are not clear. The chapter that follows this provides a detailed analysis of the themes discussed in these extended case studies in order to interrogate further and bring clarity to the ecclesiological approach within the groups. In this way the next chapter will complete the first step of the two-step methodological process that is directing this thesis.

6. CONTRADICTIONS, AMBIGUOUS SPACE AND MISSION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDY DATA

This chapter will complete the first step in the two-step process of developing a constructive theological conversation through the framework of the four-voice model for theology, described in chapter three. Having detailed the two extended case studies of Urban Saints groups in the previous chapters this chapter will analyse the data from these case studies to clarify its ecclesial significance. In particular this analysis will begin to articulate the ecclesiological voice that can be heard through the interaction of the operant and espoused theologies of the Urban Saints groups. In the final main chapter this practical ecclesiological understanding will then be placed in conversation with the central themes in the Fresh Expressions conversation, as representative of contemporary ecclesiological moves in the UK. In terms of the research questions driving this thesis, this chapter specifically seeks to answer the following:

- *To what extent do Urban Saints groups practically operate as 'church' for those involved?*
- *How is the concept of church articulated in the practice and conversation of young people and youth leaders in Urban Saints?*

In particular this chapter will argue that the Urban Saints groups display what I interpret as an interweaving form of church in which the groups operate in dynamic tension and relationship with denominational and institutional churches, as well as other expressions of communal Christian life. When interviewed, Matt Summerfield, the head of Urban Saints and founder of USH, expressed a dislike for the terminology of 'parachurch' to describe organisations such as Urban Saints. He spoke instead of his preference to think of church as 'the family of God on the mission of God' and that therefore Urban Saints was simply a particular expression of this alongside local churches and other organisations that might usually be termed 'parachurch'.[746] Within this desire to reframe the work of Urban Saints nationally as part of the overall movement of the church as the family of God on the mission of God is a sense of wanting to be able to speak of the affiliated youth and children's groups that are the constituent parts of Urban Saints in a

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[746] Matt Summerfield interview, p. 12, para 44.

language that has some ecclesiological significance, whilst stopping short of claiming the groups are independent churches.

The inherent ecclesial imagination that forms the practical normative ecclesial approach of the organisation[747] demonstrates that the work of Urban Saints carries within it a tradition of forming Christian community in a particular way. Taking this historical orthopraxy alongside the case study data, the way in which the groups' ecclesial approach can be seen as interweaving is made explicit. This approach to church becomes apparent through analysis of what I term the dominant and hidden discourses about church within the groups.[748] These discourses specifically relate to ways in which the groups aim to define church through the use of boundary markers. These boundary markers are used to define the groups as on the outside of church whereas the hidden discourse demonstrates that ecclesial life can extend into the groups.

Through making these discourses explicit, key contradictions and paradoxes at work within the groups' operant and espoused ecclesiologies become apparent. Following this the chapter will detail three practices that act as interruptions in the life of the groups and their participants. These interruptions open up what I will describe as ambiguous space within the groups. This ambiguous space is a space in which ecclesial life is possible and may be present for some of the young people and leaders through a dual movement of distancing and drawing close. These movements provide the means by which the possibility of church in the ambiguous space of the groups becomes a form of mission and a dynamic part of an interweaving approach to the church.

6.1 Dominant and Hidden Discourses, Contradictions and Boundary Markers

Pete Ward has written of what he calls the 'affective gravitational pull of the church'.[749] This pull relates to the way in which people are drawn back to prior, or instinctive,

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[747] See Chapter 2.

[748] Though my usage is quite different I draw the concept of a dominant discourse from G. Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[749] Pete Ward, "Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived : Normativity as Perilous Faithfulness," *Ecclesial practices.* 2, no. 1 (2015): 76.

ecclesiological understandings.[750] Though Ward is writing mainly of academic theologians this analysis suggests the same phenomenon is at work in ordinary Christian life as well. The case studies demonstrate that dominant discourses about church exist in evangelical Christianity that exert a gravitational pull on the leaders, young people and groups. However there are operant and previously unarticulated espoused approaches to church that have come to light within the case studies. These contradict and pull against the dominant gravitational force and allow such hidden discourses to be heard and considered.

Elsewhere Ward has described the tendency in evangelicalism, as it became a more acceptable and perhaps dominant form of Christian expression in the UK, that lends itself to understanding church as being most apparent through a single Sunday service in which all ages and generations are present and participating in the congregation. He terms this 'family church'.[751] It has been the pre-dominant model of evangelical church expression since the mid-twentieth century.

The gravitational pull towards this dominant view of the church results in an ecclesiology that has often been described as minimal.[752] However the hidden discourses revealed in the operant ecclesiologies of the Urban Saints groups contradict this discourse. The dominant approach to the church is maintained through boundary markers that determine the borders of church and therefore of what can be considered inside or outside of the church. Examples of these boundary markers that limit the understanding of church to a minimal expression are evident in parts of the espoused ecclesiology described in the previous chapters. They are brought to light upon analysis of the data through contradictions that open up more complex understandings of church. These contradictions suggest that the boundaries desired by the dominant discourse of minimal ecclesiology are not sufficient to contain the ecclesial life that is expressed through the groups I have studied. The dynamics of the groups in practice exhibit an interweaving in which ecclesial life moves between various expressions of communal Christian life. The

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[750] Ward highlights this by the way that theologians of distinct traditions have each used the recent popular rise in Trinitarian ecclesiology to reinforce the theological basis for their own tradition's ecclesiology. See ibid., 76 - 80.

[751] *Growing Up*, 143 - 58.

[752] Both McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity*; and Hindmarsh, "Evangelcial Ecclesiology," discuss 'minimalist' evangelical ecclesiology.

Urban Saints groups have the potential to be such an expression as individuals appropriate them for this purpose.

The notion of the groups being outside the boundaries of the life of the church was embedded within the inherent ecclesial imagination of Crusaders. The requirements for the initial classes to be clearly non-sectarian, non-denominational, working in harmony with all churches but meeting on neutral ground all served to reinforce this ethos.[753] The echoes of this separate nature, fuelled by being able to belong to the wider network provided by the organisational affiliation, can be heard clearly in the work and self-understanding of both groups through the case study data. However that this approach contains an ecclesial imagination outside the normal boundaries of church life suggests that this normative practice of Urban Saints has always tended toward ecclesial contradiction.

These contradictions and boundary markers are evident for example when Victoria, as main leader of St Aidans Crusaders, is able to say confidently that 'even though we're not a church we do care about families.'[754] This short statement alone demonstrates some of the tension and ambiguity at play in one group's unarticulated understanding of church. The first part of the statement is clear on the claim that St Aidans Crusaders are not a church. In this way Victoria is following clearly the traditional self-understanding of Crusaders that first their classes and then their groups were separate from church but also not a replacement for the church. Other St Aidans leaders echo this understanding. Notably Richard who clearly stated his understanding that the group 'is not a church, we're a Christian youth group.'[755]

However the second half of Victoria's statement carries within it the implicit recognition that although they are not a church there is something in what they do that reflects or replicates the things that churches do or should do. By saying that 'even though' they're not a church they do 'care for families' Victoria is suggesting that caring for families is an integral part of what churches should do and that they are doing it despite not being a church. This in turn recognises that there is something ecclesial about at least some of the

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[753] See Chapter 2.
[754] St Aidans Leaders' Meeting, 1/5/14, p. 2, para 18.
[755] Richard interview, p. 11, para 101.

practices of the group. Probing a little further into Victoria's comments it is possible to detect a critique of the local church that she attends. In referring to the question of care once again she suggests that the church she attends is not really equipped or able to cope with the kind of families that are connected to the Crusaders group.[756] The following section then discusses in detail the contradictions present in the approach of the groups to core practices alongside demonstrating the way that Sunday morning services and Church buildings operate as key boundary markers.

6.1.1 Sunday Mornings and the Contradiction of Practice

The concept of church being restricted to what happens in the congregation on a Sunday morning is commonplace within both groups and also among young people and leaders. Robert, for example, describes St Aidans Crusaders as 'a no church situation' and in his view this is an advantage, making it easier for children and young people to come along.[757] In addition to clearly stating that the group is not a church but rather a Christian youth group, Jonathan goes on to explain that some of the parents and young people wouldn't even realise initially that the group is a Christian place and that this can make 'people maybe feel more comfortable'.[758] One of the young people, Alison, says she doesn't make the 'connection really between the churches and Crusaders.'[759]

Similarly in Hightown there are ways in which the leaders and young people seem to intentionally create a distinction in the way they talk about the group in relation to church despite the direct connection with Hightown Christian Centre. This distinction was implied at a talent show event to which the wider church congregation was invited. In an introduction to the evening that played out like the opening credits to a film projected onto the big screen at the front of the auditorium the talent show was described as being presented by 'USH in association with HCC.'[760]

Consequently what is implied here is a separate identity between the church and the group, that although they will work together, they are not the same. This sense of the

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[756] Victoria interview, p. 7, para 40.
[757] Robert interview, p. 6, para 30.
[758] Richard interview, p. 5, para 49.
[759] Alison interview, p. 7, para 87.
[760] Hightown Observation, 13/2/15, p. 1, para 9.

group being a separate entity from that which is understood as the church is reinforced strongly by one of the newest leaders Claire. Whereas a number of the leaders had been part of the church or leading USH for a number of years Claire had moved to the area a year before, quickly becoming part of the church and volunteering to help with USH almost straight away. When interviewed she was talking about the way in which she saw the freedom for USH to use the church building was a good thing as it helped to blur the boundaries between church and USH for those young people who were not from church backgrounds or families. However when looking to dig deeper into this sense of where boundaries might be I asked her to imagine the church as a circle and tell me where she would place USH – would it be in the circle, outside it or somewhere in between? Her immediate response was clear that she saw USH as outside of the church:

> I think very much at the moment that it is outside and I think Sunday school is very much more integral… And people are more happy to help out with Sunday school because that's actually within the time that they're there on a Sunday whereas youth club is always going to be outside that so I think that's how people see it within HCC.[761]

In addition to the feeling that USH is separate from church Claire also points towards a different aspect of this question in highlighting how she sees what she calls 'Sunday school' as being much more integral. Sunday school here refers to the groups and activities for children and young people that take place each week while the Sunday morning service is happening.[762] This sense of those Sunday morning activities and groups for children and young people being more integral to church than the Friday night USH is a clear sign of the importance of Sunday mornings as a boundary marker. It seems that for Claire certain activities are more church than others by virtue of when they take place. USH on a Friday night, with its sections that seemingly have little explicitly Christian content, is not considered church.

As detailed in the previous chapter other leaders affirm such a view of the group being outside the boundaries of church through their expressed desire to see the young people who come into USH find their way through from the Friday night group to Sunday

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[761] Claire interview, p. 7, para 42.
[762] The term Sunday school is not used in any of the church literature, however this was Claire's description of the groups that meet on a Sunday during the morning service.

mornings. For Andrew this is described as the 'flow' that they really want to see.[763] When

describing this flow he makes it clear that the direction of flow is toward Sunday

mornings and that this is 'more' church or where church is really happening.[764] Similarly

for David the Sunday morning service is 'church proper' and this is where they really want

to see the young people coming along:

> Obviously we want to bring more of the young people into the church, quite
> simply, we want to see more of them there on a Sunday and exploring that
> side…what I hope we do, as it goes through the life of the church, whatever part
> you come in and whether you follow it the whole way through, from being a
> toddler to church proper.[765]

This type of espoused ecclesiology is expressed distinctly in the two groups given their

distinct nature of having no formal church link or being directly affiliated with a particular

church, however the overall sense of church being something other than the group is

quite explicit. The Sunday morning service as the centre of gravity in the life of the church

and thus deemed 'church proper' mirrors the phenomenon of evangelicalism's

preoccupation with creating a sense of family church whereby all ages and generations

must be in attendance at one Sunday service to be said to be 'at church'.[766]

This is part of the dominant discourse about church and suggests that Sunday

congregational church life might be a dominant thread in the interweaving ecclesiology.

Leaders of both groups feel the pull toward this view of church, though it is experienced

in different ways. Whereas in Hightown, as described above they have a clear view of the

flow they wish to see, in St Aidans the desire to introduce the young people to church in

this central, congregational sense is there but without the leaders sharing a clear idea as

to how this works. Richard sums this up well:

> One of Crusaders' aims, and maybe we're not very good at doing this, in an ideal
> world your young person comes to Crusaders, gets involved, is interested in
> Christian things and is encouraged to join a church. I don't think we're particularly
> good at doing that. As they get older maybe that happens… But I don't really see
> that process.[767]

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[763] Andrew interview, p. 6, para 26.
[764] See previous chapter.
[765] David interview, p. 4, para 18.
[766] Ward, *Growing Up*, 143 - 4.
[767] Richard interview, p. 10, para 95.

Whilst these espoused positions reflect the dominant discourse and the gravitational pull toward a Sunday-centric, minimalist view of church they do not take into account the contradiction at the heart of Victoria's statement discussed above – that although these leaders of Urban Saints groups like to situate themselves outside of church the practices contain something of ecclesial life within them and there is a hope to challenge or change the young people's impression of church through the groups.[768]

The evidence from the archival research underpinning the historical review of Urban Saints, and consequently shaping the normative voice for the theological conversation of this thesis, suggests that what the founders of Crusaders did through their Bible classes was to take some of the basic practices that were foundational to congregational life and put them into the drawing rooms and school classrooms in which the groups were meeting.[769] Through a weekly programme, that was described as an order of service, including prayers, the singing of simple hymns and Bible teaching, the early Crusader groups were reminiscent of simple church services.[770] Similarly, while no longer resembling simple church services, both Hightown and St Aidans demonstrate certain practices that are central to their regular weekly work among young people that can be termed 'ecclesial' practices due to an essential 'churchiness' about them.[771]

Historically the classes that made up the Crusaders' Union were based primarily around two practices that mirror central trends inherent within evangelicalism. Bebbington highlights Biblicism and activism as two of the main traits of evangelicalism[772] and these are mirrored in two of the founding tenets of Crusaders – that the groups teach the Bible and they do not accept boys who were also on the rolls of local church Sunday Schools. In doing this the early Crusader leaders shaped the work around two key practices of Bible teaching and evangelism. This normative tradition is an example of what Shepherd refers to as the way that 'youth work can quite literally create places to be Christian'.[773] Despite this ability to create places to be Christian and the mirroring of simple congregational practices the groups were never considered to be a form of the church.

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[768] See previous chapter.
[769] See Chapter 2.
[770] Crusaders, *Handbook for Leaders*.
[771] See both case study chapters for detailed description of these ecclesial practices.
[772] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2 - 3.
[773] Shepherd, "Community Builder," 38.

Similarly, and as described in the case study chapters, the current groups operate a number of regular practices that are ecclesial in nature without explicitly thinking of themselves as church (indeed the dominant discourse actively discourages this): teaching the Bible, prayer, and pastoral care being the most clearly observed of these. The presence of these activities and practices however is not enough for the leaders to think of what they do with young people as church, preferring as described above to think of the group as outside of or separate from the church in the same way as the pioneers of early Crusaders classes did. However this position taken by the groups seems strange when considered in the light of a regular practice at HCC, the church to which USH is affiliated. Here, as discussed earlier the group is directly affiliated with the local church but is generally thought of as being outside the boundaries of the church, or at least more outside than in. One of the reasons for considering the group outside the boundaries of church is the understanding that church, as evidenced in the talk of the flow that USH leaders want to see, happens on Sunday mornings when the congregation is gathering for the weekly service.

By visiting HCC's Sunday morning service on a few occasions during my fieldwork[774] I noticed something that struck me as strange when considered in the light of what I had been told by the USH leaders and in the context of my attempts to understand where the ecclesial boundaries were seen to be by these leaders. During the morning service there was a quite large number of young people present who were also involved in USH on a Friday night. This, I thought, is what the leaders want to see happening. However they were only there for about fifteen minutes before they left to go to their own group for the rest of the time that the service was on. This is perfectly normal, common behaviour for young people in evangelical churches up and down the country, but on this occasion the familiar stood out as strange.[775]

This group to which these young people go for the majority of the time that the service is going on is in essence much like the environment of USH on a Friday night. It comprises

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[774] I carried out three observations in morning services. See methods section of chapter 3 and Appendix A.

[775] This is an example of the approach I took toward personal reflexivity discussed in chapter 3, especially the notion of taking the viewpoint of a film critic.

games, competitions, activities, Bible based discussions and opportunities for prayer. The only thing missing is that there is no free time for the young people. These young people are however considered to be 'at church' whereas those on a Friday night aren't. It seems that the fact it is occurring on a Sunday morning concurrently with the congregation meeting for the service means they can be considered at church. To add to the complexity and contradictions on a Sunday morning the young people meet in a separate building that is about a hundred metres down the road. It seems that the time of the week is more important than the building in defining what is church and what isn't. The implication here is that even on a Sunday morning church is constructed out of the interaction of different groups, in different places, involved together in key ecclesial practices.

Similarly when talking to leaders from St Aidans who also serve in the youth and children's work in their churches they find it difficult to distinguish with great detail the things they do with the young people in what is termed 'church' and the things they do with the young people at Crusaders. The young people themselves often struggled to discern what was distinct about one from the other in terms of what they do.[776] However despite these similarities the language of church is rarely used to describe what is happening on a Saturday evening in the school at St Aidans or on a Friday evening in the church auditorium in Hightown. The dominant discourse of evangelical ecclesiology is evident in this prioritizing of Sunday morning activity even when that activity for young people is barely distinguishable between Sundays and the times that the groups are meeting.

To use the language of Shepherd introduced above, through simple ecclesial practices the Urban Saints groups can become places through which participants are able to be Christian. Consequently a form of ecclesial life is present, though this is often prevented from being made explicit due to the dominance of the Sunday morning discourse surrounding evangelical church life. The language of interweaving provides a way to frame this ecclesial life that breaks through the pull of the dominant discourse and extends into the groups as part of the whole life of the church for participants.

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[776] Alison interview, p. 7, para 87.

6.1.2 Buildings and the Contradiction of Identity and Belonging

Church buildings represent a second significant boundary marker for church in the dominant evangelical discourse. This is played out slightly differently in each case study but with a similar central theme. In St Aidans the neutral location, which is in keeping with the historical heart of Crusaders, is seen as a great advantage. The use of a school building lends weight to what is described as the 'non-church setting' that the group provides. This non-church identity of the location is considered advantageous to the group's outreach aims. Families, it is thought, will feel less threatened by bringing young people to such a location. Similarly, the children and young people will be more likely to invite friends to a neutral place.

In Hightown the building naturally plays a different role, given that the group uses the main auditorium of the church building. In this scenario the use of the building is seen as a great advantage to the group as it allows the leaders to effectively invite young people into 'the church' and then use the space in a way that might challenge the preconceptions about church that the young people are perceived to have. For the leaders of Hightown then the use of a church building is an advantage to mission as they see it, whereas for the leaders of St Aidans the use of a deliberately and distinctively not church location is seen as an advantage to outreach!

There is a further nuance to the use of the building in Hightown however that demonstrates there are, what could be termed, degrees of church within the building itself. The auditorium was on occasion referred to as 'the sanctuary', with the implication that it is the room where church happens.[777] This terminology was used on Friday nights, in interviews with leaders and also by one of the service leaders on a Sunday morning. The expectation with this kind of language is that there is something special about this room in particular. I observed the way that this expectation was built by the use of this type of language and how it influenced the way the young people approached that room. On one occasion some of the young people were laughing and joking with each other before the group began when one of the young people used some bad language. Immediately one of the others corrected him in a light-hearted manner for using such

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[777] See. e.g. David's interview, p. 12, paras 59 and 61, and HCC Sunday Morning Observation, 15/2/15, p1, para 2.

language in a church. To which the first young person responded immediately that they weren't in the church, they were in the foyer![778] What this demonstrates is that in the dominant discourse about church specific buildings, even rooms within buildings, can be used to reinforce the boundaries of church through being synonymous with what church is or where church happens. Similarly they can ensure something is identified as not church.

There is it seems a lack of clarity as to what defines whether something should be considered church or not. This is especially true with the added complexity of Hightown where the group is affiliated to the church and uses the church building for its group nights. It seems that on occasion it is the building that defines whether something is church or not and on other times it is the Sunday morning time slot. The same activities with the young people can be considered as going to church on a Sunday but not on a Friday. Things happening in the 'sanctuary' are church on a Sunday but not on a Friday, though it is thought they are happening 'in' the church even on a Friday. Interestingly little thought is given to the things that are actually being done and whether these might be what allows certain activities or groups to be considered church.

In both groups then it is possible to discern the pull of an ecclesiology that uses in particular the boundary markers of Sunday mornings and church buildings to demarcate what is and what isn't considered church. These groups that aim to share the gospel with young people are not in themselves church as church is understood to gravitate around the centrality of the Sunday morning congregations of particular local churches. This is the dominant discourse of evangelical ecclesiology.

Chapter two detailed the strength of identity and belonging fostered within Crusaders as a movement of mission to young people through the twentieth century. Indeed the way young people and leaders identified with their Crusader group and the national organisation demonstrated a stronger sense of belonging than they felt towards the particular local churches of which they were a part. This is evidenced by discussions of

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[778] USH Observation, 3/10/14, p. 1, para 2.

how local churches needed to understand that Crusader leaders would have little time for 'office holding' in the local church due to their commitment to the Crusader group.[779]

Similarly leaders in both groups express sentiments of this type. Robert told me of how he has often missed church events and even weddings due to his commitment to St Aidans Crusaders.[780] Meanwhile Victoria spoke of the frustration she feels what she does with Crusaders is often overlooked and undervalued in her church because her commitment to it takes her away from serving more in the life of the church.[781] Here then it is the previously hidden discourse that provides a dominant thread in the interweaving of church, as it is Crusaders that drives a greater sense of belonging, commitment and identity. It is not simply the unaffiliated nature of the St Aidans group that fosters this sense of belonging however.

The strength of Crusader identity among leaders that was cultivated throughout the organisation's history was remarkably strong. This was demonstrated especially by some of the strength of feeling around the time of the name change and relaunch as Urban Saints. The long-term leaders at St Aidans hold this identity strongly as well, choosing to retain the name Crusaders and maintain traditional ties to other old Crusaders groups. The presence of leaders from another traditional Crusader group some twenty miles away at a Sunday afternoon prayer tea for the group in which there was no representative from local churches other than the current leaders demonstrates this. The way in which leaders came together for the specific purpose of reaching children and young people away from the concerns of a wider congregational life allowed for a focus that strengthened the identity felt by the leaders. This is very much the case within the St Aidans group, operating as it still does, in this manner. The leaders value what they see as the simplicity of focus that stepping outside or across the normal boundaries of church life fosters. Consequently they develop a closeness of relationship borne out of that focus.

It would be wrong though to suggest that this strong identity and belonging of the leaders only develops when the group is meeting separately from any particular church affiliation

[779] Crusaders, "Crusaders and the Churches."
[780] Robert interview, p. 5, para 28.
[781] Victoria interview, p. 6, para 34 and 36.

as the USH leaders spoke of the significance the group plays in their experience of church. The longest serving leaders in Hightown describe feeling like a house group or a family together as leaders, whilst also expressing frustration at the lack of recognition from the wider church of the role they play and the significance of the work they do.[782] In addition there is something of value attached to role of the wider organisation of Urban Saints. Young people and leaders spoke of their connection with Urban Saints and the way that they enjoyed being part of something that is 'all over the world.'[783] The use of Urban Saints hooded jumpers to distinguish the emerging leaders and the way that groups from USH have regularly joined Urban Saints mission trips and holidays reinforce this. In some ways it is this parachurch affiliation that helps to create the separate identity from church. This can create a sense of boundary marker from the Urban Saints side - the groups are separate from church as they are an Urban Saints or Crusaders group and at times each thread can be seen to be more or less significant for participants.

Young people from both groups summarise a clear sense of belonging and identity. A seventeen-year-old boy from Hightown told me he wouldn't know what to do on a Friday without USH as 'Fridays were USH'.[784] Helen in St Aidans used very similar language when she spoke of 'Saturdays being Crusaders'.[785] For both the young people and leaders then it seems the identity they feel with the group is important. Its importance is derived from it being 'their' place and this sense of it being their place is fostered by the way it operates outside of congregational life with its more focused purpose and objectives. This is often expressed as a stronger or closer form of belonging than felt within the local church congregation. Claire describes it this way after joining the USH leadership team soon after joining the church itself. The other leaders she said quickly became the people from church she considered friends and with whom she would enjoy spending time.

So whilst church is mostly deemed to be what happens around the activity of the Sunday morning congregation, the leaders and young people derive a deeper sense of Christian belonging through their involvement in the groups. At times it is the ability to identify with the wider organisation of Crusaders or Urban Saints that helps create this deeper

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[782] See previous chapter.
[783] Expressed this with some exaggeration by Robin in his interview, p. 7, para 58.
[784] Christian interview, p. 8, para 78.
[785] Helen interview, p. 1, para 10.

belonging, whereas at other times it is more through the relationships that are valued through the shared experience of the groups together. Furthermore this deeper belonging and identity is intimately connected for the participants in the experience of their Christian faith. The identity and belonging of the groups helps to develop and sustain Christian faith in ways that complement or are distinct from experiences of formal church. This hidden discourse reaffirms the groups as places to be Christian and as such offers a resistance to the pull to church as defined through buildings and Sunday mornings as in the dominant discourse.

These sections have demonstrated contradictions at the heart of the interaction between the espoused and operant ecclesiologies of the Urban Saints groups. I have framed these contradictions in terms of boundary markers to define the limits of church. These form a dominant discourse in the case studies that claims the Urban Saints groups are not church. However, there is also a hidden discourse in which ecclesial life extends into the groups as they provide places of Christian community through which Christian faith is developed. There is evidence that this is true for both leaders and young people. Consequently, whereas boundaries of time and physical location are placed around church these boundaries are contradicted by the practices and belonging of the Urban Saints groups. The practices and belonging developed allow the groups to operate as places to be Christian. It follows then that, in keeping with the normative voice of the ecclesial imagination, there is something of ecclesial life that is extended into these Urban Saints groups. The espoused and operant theologies make clear though that the groups are not intended to replace traditional church life, however they enhance and extend ecclesial life for many of the participants.[786] The hidden discourse then reveals simultaneous understandings of what creates church and what I have termed the interweaving becomes apparent, with different threads more or less dominant for different people at different times. This nuanced complexifying of boundaries is the focus of the next section and further details the interweaving approach to the church.

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[786] And for Sally provide a replacement for a period; Sally interview, p. 10, para 58.

6.2 Complexifying the Boundaries: Interruptions, Ambiguous Space and Mission

The contradictions between the dominant and hidden discourses about church suggest a more complex ecclesial understanding emerges from the espoused and operant ecclesiologies of the case studies. It was Dorothy from St Aidans who provided the language to interpret such an approach by describing the relationship between Crusaders and the church in the city as being 'like a jigsaw' and an 'interweaving thing'.[787] In these comments she is placing the work of the Crusader group as interconnected with and part of the overall picture of the work of the church locally. This section begins to develop the way that such an interweaving approach is at play. Specifically this section discusses practices of interruption that provide the environment through which the ecclesial practices of the groups are experienced. These interruptions mean that the groups can be understood as ambiguous spaces that have the potential of ecclesial life. Finally this section will argue such ambiguous spaces provide a means by which the missional aim of the groups is fulfilled.

Despite the dominant discourse detailed above, participants in the groups do at times articulate the idea that the groups have some form of ecclesial identity. Stuart, the main leader for much of the time in Hightown, is able to describe USH as being 'part of the church' when talking to the young people.[788] He is not alone in this description – Andrew uses identical language in saying that USH is a 'massive part' of the church.[789] On other occasions USH can be described as one of many 'avenues of the church'[790] and 'within church'.[791] Young people from each group at different times talked of the groups in terms of being church for them. Sally from St Aidans discussed at great lengths challenges she had experienced as the daughter of prominent leaders in a local church and how in this context Crusaders had been her church for two years.[792] From a different perspective Beth in Hightown used the term 'our church', intentionally differentiating it from 'a church' to tell me what USH meant to her. For her it was their church because it felt like a

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[787] Dorothy interview, pp. 5 & 6, para 40.
[788] USH Observation, 4/7/14, p. 2, para 17.
[789] Andrew interview, p. 6, para 26.
[790] David interview, p. 4 para 14.
[791] Matt Summerfield interview, p. 10, para 36.
[792] Sally interview, p. 10, para 58.

family.[793] These comments point to the hidden discourses that challenge the dominant discourse of ecclesial life that is represented by markers of time and location. The hidden discourses come to the surface in groups through certain practices that create the interruption to the dominant discourse at work.

6.2.1 Practices of Interruption

The hidden discourse of church that is discernible in the midst of the contradictions evident in the operant and espoused approaches to church within the case studies demonstrates that the Urban Saints groups can provide places for participants to be Christian. The role of ecclesial practices within this is evident and is in keeping with the methodological approach that affirms the way that youth groups can operate as communities of practice.[794] In this way these practices are central to the young people's experience of the groups and become the social context in which the young people can begin to understand what it is to be a Christian.

The ways the groups operate allow the young people to access and try out these practices within the safety of a youth group setting. However it is other regular practices of the groups, though less easily identifiable as ecclesial, that are key in the creating space through which the Urban Saints groups might become part of an interweaving expression of church for the young people and leaders in the group.[795] These other practices can be named as welcome, encouraging questions and creating fun. Each of these can be seen embodied in one or more of the modes of belonging detailed in earlier chapters. These are the practices of interruption and they cut across the dominant discourse in order that an ambiguous space might be created in which the hitherto hidden discourses might be heard.

The importance of welcome as it is practised in the groups is framed by the young people as being either better than they had received in church or more wide ranging than they

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[793] Beth interview, p. 1, para 6.

[794] See also Kenda Creasy Dean's critique of contemporary youth ministry for not engaging young people in authentic Christian practices and consequently offering a watered down version of Christianity. In her work drawing young people into core Christian practices is framed as a way of both renewing their faith and consequently that of the whole church community. Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 1 - 26.

[795] This mirrors Kathryn Tanner's use of non-Christian practices being reborn to different effect within the church and by non-elites. See Chapter 3.

were expecting. By framing welcome in this way the practice is shown to be significant in the young people's experience of the group and also something that opens them to the possibility of faith through other practices of the group. There were times when the practice of welcome formed a literal interruption at St Aidans. I noted on several occasions during my observations in St Aidans the way in which Victoria was exuberant in her welcome of young people into the group and in particular her commitment to welcome even when young people arrived in the midst of Bible study. Consequently Victoria's practice of welcome interrupted even her own opinion that the Bible study is the most important aspect of the group! Seventeen-year-old Sally reinforced the value of welcome interrupting other core practices when I interviewed her:

> If you are late to something people kind of ignore you as if you're not there but she is interested in you and she will often ask questions later if she feels she needs to follow it up. But it's quite nice to know that you're not just sliding in on the sidelines… No she's like hi how are you, how's you're week been, is there anything we need to know? No good, this is what we've been doing and this is what we're going to do. And she doesn't really bat an eyelid that I'm late, or if anyone is late.[796]

Resultant of the interruption of welcome Sally is then able to participate in the Bible study focus of the group. In Hightown on the other hand the practice of welcome was expressed in conversation with one of the young people. Freddie, who would not term himself a Christian, recounted a situation with surprise in which two openly homosexual young people were welcomed into the group without judgment despite the leaders expressing in discussion on a different occasion their opinion that homosexuality was counter to the teaching of the Bible.[797] This experience of the practice of welcome for Freddie had the effect of interrupting his preconceptions of Christianity and consequently helped to turn him towards consideration of Christian faith. The interruption here is in terms of Freddie's instinctive view of Christians and the church.

Connected with the practice of welcome are two other practices that act to allow the young people to feel comfortable in the environment of the group. The practice of encouraging questions from the young people, even if these challenge the expressed beliefs of the leaders or the wider community of the group, was evident regularly in Hightown where the small group time was set aside in part to allow space for questions

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[796] Sally interview, p. 5, para 38.
[797] Freddie interview, pp. 2 – 3, para 14.

from the young people. I experienced this in a small group when an emerging leader who was not a Christian strongly questioned the likelihood of the resurrection having happened. In St Aidans Victoria was always visibly excited by the occasions that the teaching aspect of the group overran due to the young people wanting to stay and ask questions.[798] This is one of the aspects of the groups that made safe place one of the modes of belonging. By encouraging questions the groups adopt a posture and creates an environment of exploration in which participants, whether already Christian or not, regular churchgoers or not, are seen as together investigating the claims and practices of the Christian faith.

In a similar vein the practice of creating fun helps to develop an environment in which young people are comfortable and consequently open to the ecclesial practices on offer. The practice of creating fun is deemed essential to work with young people by Stuart who says that 'if you're not thinking fun you're not going have youth work are you'.[799] Andrew from Hightown connects the practice of fun to the desire to see young people being drawn into the church community and the Christian faith:

> At HCC we are a bit crazy and we are all about having fun and enjoying God and revelling in this amazing story and we want to do that through our young people as well and it doesn't just happen with Friday night, it happens right through from a younger age group. And we want them to be able to worship and to be able to speak openly but we don't want them to think that church is this boring thing that happens once a week because its not and the relationships they have and the friendships they have are something that will keep them going and going and going and they are life changing friendships and relationships.[800]

Similarly in St Aidans the fun and games that are part of the free time are considered a crucial aspect of the missional endeavour and desire to reach out to young people by making it easier for new people to come along and feel comfortable in the group or for those already there to invite their friends confident that they are going to enjoy themselves.

Taken together creating fun, asking questions and welcome are each practices designed to, in the words of Shepherd cited earlier, create a place for young people to be Christian through encountering the more explicitly Christian practices. Indeed these practices are

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[798] See examples from chapter 4.
[799] Stuart interview, p. 6, para 30.
[800] Andrew interview, p. 6, para 26.

seen as ways of interrupting the young people's preconceptions about church. Even though the leaders rarely connect the more ecclesial practices of prayer, Bible study and pastoral care to being an expression of church, they do make that link with these interruptive practices. Stuart, for example, wants the young people to know that church is fun:

> [USH] is supposed to be fun and an introduction to the fact that church isn't necessarily the stereotyped image of somewhere dark and stone walls and cold and all that kind of thing… it is running around inside the building and throwing gunge at each other and things like that; that's church. Not just sitting reading the 'Thees' and the 'Thous' and the 'Thou Shalt Nots' from a big dusty book.[801]

The groups are able to appropriate these practices that are not specifically Christian or ecclesial and put them to use for the purposes of the group. It seems that for the young people these types of practices help them to become open to the more clearly Christian ones. Robin, for example, through his conversation with me when interviewed talked through the way that friendships built with young people who were already part of the group helped him feel comfortable and consequently more interested in and open to the explicitly Christian practices and aspects of the group.[802] In turn he described to me how he has adopted some of these practices sporadically into his life outside of the group.

> [My first experiences of USH] were fun, like we were messing around with [leaders] that was really funny and all the activities were fun they kept you like, kept you entertained… It was a break from the normal and you got a chance to meet new people and have fun, make new friends… I'm not a full on Christian but I am understanding the ideas of Christianity… I will pray to God on the odd occasion.[803]

The way that these practices of welcome, asking questions and creating fun are means by which young people become open to the more explicitly Christian practices demonstrates the missional potential of these appropriated practices. This resonates with what Kathryn Tanner refers to as a 'slippery give and take' between Christian and non-Christian practices in which some practices of the church are 'non-Christian practices done differently, born again to unpredictable effect'.[804] This means that we must expect ambiguity in the practices that make up Christian communities but also we must not be

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[801] Stuart interview, p. 2, para 8.
[802] Robin interview, p. 5, para 40.
[803] Ibid.
[804] Tanner, "Thelogical Reflection and Christian Practices," 230.

too concerned by the ambiguity as it leads back to theological reflection and in turn can be transformative for the community.[805]

In the case studies it is this ambiguity in the context of the groups operating as communities of practice that makes it possible for something of the church to be experienced by the young people as it extends into the space created within the groups. It is also through these practices that the Christian faith and experience of God can become possible for the young people. Making the Christian faith possible through participation in community is a second way in which the groups are able to exhibit something of church for the young people. This also allows for the interruptions being significant for young people from both church going and not church going families.[806] The next section discusses how these practices of interruption open up ambiguous space in the groups into which the ecclesial life can extend. Participants can then appropriate this ambiguous space into an interweaving expression of church as they use it as a means to sustain and develop their Christian faith in community.

6.2.2 Ambiguous Space and Mission Focus

The practices of interruption create an ambiguous space in the groups resulting from the way they disrupt the dominant discourse. Despite the clarity in the origins of Crusaders that the role of the work was missionary in nature and the similar ways in which this is expressed in the work of the current groups, both Hightown and St Aidans demonstrate a degree of ambiguity about their identity. This is the case among leaders and young people. In addition it refers both to the ways in which the group understands itself in relation to church and the ways in which those involved access and use the groups.

These varieties in description and uses of the group by both young people and leaders were detailed in the case study description as the 'modes of belonging'.[807] By way of reminder, in both Hightown and St Aidans young people access the group as social space and safe place. Alongside these shared modes of belonging Hightown also demonstrates belonging through the emerging leaders programme and by creating a significant place

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[805] Ibid., 231 - 2.
[806] As evidenced by the make up of young people in both groups.
[807] See Chapters 4 and 5 for detailed descriptions of these.

for leaders; St Aidans however adds intergenerational work and the strong Crusader identity to the modes of belonging. The young people and leaders from both groups connect with and belong to the groups in these various ways and can also move between these modes of belonging at different times for different purposes.

Resultant of these various modes of belonging is a degree of ambiguity about the identity of the groups. As the young people attend and move between the different modes of belonging they can appropriate different identities for the group. Within the flow and movement of these different identities is the opportunity for young people to experiment with belonging in different ways. This takes place within the safety of the group that, because it has a multitude of identities each at work in an ambiguous way, is a place in between – it is not school, home or church. Neither is it simply a youth group or a Bible study group.

The space is ambiguous in part because there isn't the language to adequately define it due to it being space that is outside the boundaries defined by the dominant discourse. However it is in this ambiguous space, directly as a result of the practices of interruption that, as discussed in the USH case study chapter, young people become open to the possibility of the Christian faith. Possibility is the word, drawn from one of the young people themselves, that I use to understand the experience described in which young people with no Christian faith or church involvement find themselves becoming open to the possibility of Christianity.[808]

The creation of ambiguous space is exemplified in a description of a small group time by one of the Hightown leaders in which he details a conversation that he allowed to take place in the group. I include the whole section here to allow for the sense of what happened to be retained:

> One conversation, which is probably the best conversation I have ever seen there. One of the kids from the estate, real real tough case, I had him in my small group at the end of the session and he's absolute 'God doesn't exist, you know hate him'… and that's kind of his view on it. And we had another guy who was 14 or so who comes from a church background and we were talking about does Jesus exist. And this lad was straightaway 'no he doesn't exist, I can't see him, I can't touch him, so how does he exist.' And the other guy was 'well I believe he does exist

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[808] See Robin's interview cited above.

because it says in the Bible' and they ended up having this conversation and the rest of the group were looking at them and waiting for explosions because this lad has a real bad reputation for causing trouble… for five minutes they just had this conversation of yes he does, no he doesn't and it wasn't antagonizing or disrespectful or anything, it was just [an] amazing moment to watch and I thought this is why we do this. This lad would not be able to have that conversation anywhere else and he is able to do that and that was probably one of my highlights… For him to have the conversation, to have the courage to have that conversation, in front of a group of people who do believe was a huge moment for him… and if those kids come to Christ or not we're still playing a huge part in their life.[809]

Central to this conversation is the way that the leader sat back and allowed it to continue, concluding that this is why they do USH. By allowing the conversation to run in the way that he did without imposing himself or what he might have considered the correct answer into it, a certain ambiguity was cultivated. By encouraging questions and creating space in which these questions are welcomed, an ambiguous space in which beliefs and practices that are considered part of church and something of not church can come together in dialogue.

The experience of these young people is that they join the group with little or no initial interest in the Christian practices and teaching that form central aspects of USH. What we see instead is the ambiguous identity of the group allowing these young people to join and find their way into the group through the social space it offers in its role as a youth group. This in turn provides an environment in which friendship can be built and cultivated. It is in this cultivation of friendship that the identity of the group moves beyond that of a youth group towards becoming the kind of safe place in which young people are able to open themselves up to the possibilities represented within the Christian heart of the group. In addition to this though, as demonstrated previously, the experience of both leaders and church-going young people is that they find the ambiguous space of the groups helpful in providing an environment in which their faith can be developed and enhanced.

The safe place of the group is exhibited in the way that questions are welcomed and young people feel able to be themselves. Beth exemplified these experiences in a small group time at the end of a session when, in the context of a discussion, she stated that

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what she loved about USH was that it was a place where she could be herself and not be judged.[810] The creation of a safe place within the group in which young people can ask questions and listen to opinions whilst also presenting simple Christian teaching and practices results in young people considering the Christian faith in ways they might not otherwise have done. They describe this in terms of the Christian faith 'becoming possible' or of them 'becoming open' to being Christians.

This kind of language is used regardless of whether the young people have fully accepted the Christian faith. Some describe themselves as now being Christians whilst others do not. Among those who do not are some who say they have considered the Christian faith and, whilst they are still thinking things through, they do not expect to decide to become a Christian as well as those who use the language of journey to describe where they are in relation to the Christian faith. In this language the young people talk about moving towards becoming a Christian or taking 'baby steps'.[811] They can also talk of not yet being a 'full Christian'. In these ways whilst they are clear about moving towards becoming a Christian there is some hesitancy about making this definitive move. However the group creates a community in which this in between, ambiguous position can be held and negotiated.

These findings suggest the groups are creating places through which young people begin to consider the Christian faith. This offers an interesting counterpoint to the findings presented in the research underpinning the *Faith of Generation Y* report.[812] This researched Christian run open youth groups that had little or no formal presentation of the Christian faith and no regular Christian practices or structured opportunity to ask questions and express belief. The hope of the leaders in these groups was that through building relationships with the young people the leader's Christian faith would be expressed and that this in turn would encourage the young people to consider the merits for the faith for themselves. However, the authors report that instead of encouraging an openness to the Christian faith among young people, the relationship with leaders who are confident in their Christian faith serves to allow the young people to be confident in the beliefs they already have rather than considering the possibility of the leaders'

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[810] USH Observation, 28/11/14, p. 2, para 17.
[811] Christian interview, p. 2, para 18.
[812] Collins-Mayo, Mayo, and Nash, *Generation Y*.

beliefs. The research goes on to describe the general faith that these young people have as being an immanent faith in friends, family and themselves.[813]

Going further the authors of the Faith of Generation Y report lament the lack of Christian communities to which the young people could belong. These communities are seen to be places where the Christian story is clearly told and Christian practices are learnt. The way in which the data from the Hightown group differs from the findings of the Generation Y research but with the group centered on intentional teaching and practices seems to reinforce this assertion. What the Generation Y research demonstrates though with its discovery of a lack of understanding of a traditional Christian faith among the young people interviewed is what Charles Taylor refers to as the shift in social imaginary.[814]

The ambiguous space of the Urban Saints groups provides a place in which the possibility and plausibility of a Christian social imaginary might be considered. The atmosphere created by the practices of interruption is relaxed and one of exploration and experience for those who wish to investigate the claims of the Christian for themselves and their own life within the safety of a youth group community. The result of this is that young people who grew up in church-going families,[815] those who arrive in the groups with little understanding of the Christian faith[816] and even a number of the leaders[817] find that they are able to use the groups to develop, sustain and enhance a Christian faith. In this way the ambiguous space in the groups provides space from expectations and facilitates the groups' role as mission-focussed; this mission however is to all participants regardless of previous levels of Christian faith.

Mission has been central to the self-understanding of Urban Saints for the majority of its existence. The ethos of those who shaped the organisation viewed it as a missionary movement seeking to reach young people with the gospel.[818] Similarly the leaders of today express clearly the aim of reaching young people who are not already part of the

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[813] Ibid., 32.
[814] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007). The social imaginary is a pre-theoretical 'common understanding which makes possible common practices' ibid., 72.
[815] E.g. Sally.
[816] E.g. Robin.
[817] E.g. David.
[818] See Chapter 2.

church as a key aim of both groups. However it is fair to say that the way in which this works out is more complex and the clear focus of the early days has become somewhat diffused among other understandings of what the group is for. So, for example, USH at its launch in 2006 was intended to be 'absolutely missional territory'[819] and is still described during my time with the group as 'primarily an outreach'.[820] When reflecting on the role of the group in the life of the church the leaders are also able to claim the group as the 'main mission success' in the church.[821] Whether this is accurate or merely part of a self-sustaining narrative on the part of the leaders is to some extent irrelevant as it is the self-identity of the group that is significant in these statements and sentiments. The prominence of mission as the original intent of the group in Hightown and among the current ways of expressing the purpose of the group is strong enough to suggest the echoes of the earlier sole focus on mission that shaped the origins of Crusaders.

The leaders of St Aidans Crusaders also frame their purpose in terms of mission work though their preferred term to describe this is 'outreach'.[822] In addition, for the St Aidans' leaders the mission identity of the group is furthered and sharpened by the nature of the group as being separate from the church. In a comment acknowledged as being a broad generalization, but also typical of the ethos and attitude of the leaders, Dorothy expresses her view that churches are usually more interested in the children they already have whereas the group being outside of church helps it to maintain a clearer focus on those that the church isn't reaching.[823] This is what they mean when they refer to the group as meeting a need the churches can't meet, or filling a niche.

This analysis of the case study data reframes this mission focus by suggesting the groups offer a space in which participants can affirm the possibility and plausibility of Christian faith against both the prevailing social imaginary and gravitational pull of the church. The social imaginary is the underlying, often unquestioned, foundational way in which the world is understood by a particular society. Charles Taylor charts the shift in this underlying understanding and suggests that the shift is not from belief to unbelief but

[819] Matt Summerfield interview, p. 2, para 10.
[820] Stuart interview, p. 2, para 8.
[821] USH Leaders meeting observation, 2/11/14, p. 2, para 12.
[822] For example, in Peter's interview he describes the group as 'a form of outreach' or Victoria's in which she comments that the group could be the 'outreach arm of St Paul's (the church she attends).
[823] Dorothy interview, p. 10, para 70.

from one kind of belief to another. It is a shift from belief in some kind of outside force that controls the universe to a time that is driven more by a belief that derives from the internal world of the individual.[824] This is akin to the Generation Y understanding of the young people's faith in friends, family and their immanent self. In this view, humankind shapes the world and so the things we have faith in have shifted from something external and in control to the immanent frame that derives from our own selves.

The testimony from the young people, particularly in USH, suggests that there is something about the group that challenges this underlying social imaginary and begins to open up the possibility of transcendence and belief in God. Jason Lief has written on the implications of Charles Taylor's thought for youth ministry and among his suggestions is the potentially controversial idea that church must be willing to let young people go.[825] However on a close reading what he is suggesting is actually something akin to the ambiguous spaces provided by the youth groups in my cases studies. He talks of the need to give young people 'space to doubt, [and] to ask questions'[826] in the way I identified was a practice in both groups.

In addition Lief encourages what he calls the creation of space through which young people can step out from under the expectations of the world and the church in order to narrate their own identities.[827] This stepping out allows for a dual movement of distancing from and drawing young people close to the life of the church. Both aspects of this dual movement however serve the purpose of developing a sense of belonging and possibility in the lives of the young people. The first of these movements, distancing, refers to the role the groups play in the lives of young people who are from families involved in the life of local churches. For these young people the Christian faith and involvement in church is something that they have, on the whole, grown up with. It has become the normal experience for them. In these scenarios the groups act to distance the young people from the church. This distancing allows them to consider for themselves the claims of the Christian faith. Sally from St Aidans described this process eloquently in telling me about how she needed to find somewhere that wasn't the church where her

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[824] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.
[825] Jason Lief, *Poetic Youth Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and stock, 2015), 14 - 5.
[826] Ibid., 105.
[827] Ibid., 123.

parents were in leadership so she could consider the Christian faith without being identified simply as a key adult's daughter.[828] Drawing close on the other hand describes the way that young people begin to feel connected in some way to the church or broad Christian community through the creation of fun, welcome and encouraging questions that open up the ambiguous space of the groups.

It seems that this is what the young people experience in the groups when they talk about how they are able to be themselves[829] and feel accepted in ways they aren't in either church or at home.[830] Lief then moves on to endorse the importance of play and 'reclaiming a sense of playfulness'[831] for young people. In these ways Lief creates a framework whereby many of the practices outlined above that are core regular practices of these youth groups, and therefore contribute to the operant ecclesiological voice in this analysis, are vital to the task the church must play for and on behalf of young people in the secular age. The potential ecclesial space of these Urban Saints groups can become part of the ecclesial life of participants. They are however not considered or intended to be fully church for those who attend. The ecclesial life becomes apparent through practices of interruption and by interweaving with other forms of communal Christian life that help to develop and sustain Christian life and identity for individuals.

It is true though that these potential ecclesial spaces, characterized as they are by creating the safe spaces for young people, still have some boundaries within which the young people are required to operate. The frustrations with the three difficult lads at Hightown demonstrate this and there are challenges when the underlying boundaries are tested. The dynamics and overall culture of the group, however, operate to sustain and reinforce these kind of implicit boundaries. The group is a safe place for young people to explore and to be themselves insofar as they participate as expected within the group. The example cited at length earlier in this chapter of a conversation between one believing and one unbelieving boy highlights this well – as long as the unbelief and questions were expressed within the accepted terms of the group they were deemed positive. This is the kind of multi-layered demarcating of boundaries in evangelical life

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[828] Sally interview, p. 7, para 50.
[829] Beth interview, p. 3, para 32.
[830] Sally interview, p. 5, para 38.
[831] Lief, *Poetic,* 129.

described Mathew Guest in his study of St Michael-Le-Belfry Church.[832] In this study an innovative group on the margins of the church sought to renegotiate their evangelical identity through renewing their cultural relevance in a new form of worship that embodied a critique of the approach within the main church congregation.[833] Guest details that 'what counts as legitimate and who counts as included'[834] became key issues that the group wrestled with. In terms of the potential ecclesial spaces of the Urban Saints groups the answer suggested here would be those willing to participate and open to the possibility of being on a journey, individually and together.

6.3 In Summary

This chapter has built on the extended case studies of two Urban Saints groups by providing an analysis of the data from those groups. This analysis constitutes the completion of the first step in the two-step process of setting up the theological conversation that is required to answer the core research question driving this thesis.

Specifically this chapter has developed the argument that Urban Saints groups live with what I term an interweaving approach to the church. This approach is discerned through analysis of key contradictions and paradoxes between aspects of the espoused and operant understandings of the church within the case studies. These contradictions revolve primarily around boundary markers of church that are defined by Sunday morning services and church buildings. This allows the groups to identify as outside of the church, a position that is held to be advantageous. This is the dominant discourse about church within the groups. This analysis has however identified a significant hidden discourse in aspects of both espoused and operant approaches to the church that complexify this picture and suggest that through the practice and belonging of the groups ecclesial life can be extended into them. This challenges the boundaries of church.

By complexifying the boundaries of church in this way the dominant evangelical discourse is interrupted and an ambiguous space is created in the groups. The interruptions take place through core practices of welcome, encouraging questions and creating fun. These

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[832] Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Paternoster, 2007).
[833] Ibid., 134 - 67.
[834] Ibid., 135.

simple practices interrupt expectations and confound boundaries helping to create an ambiguous space in the groups that gives the participants the chance to explore, discover and sustain Christian faith through the ecclesial practices that are within each group. In this way ecclesial life can be extended into the groups as some participants make use of the groups in this way. Others however choose not to use the groups in this way and they remain youth groups with Christian content. Even though the groups do not self-identify as churches, and indeed seem to prefer the dominant discourse in which they are outside the boundaries of church, the way that there is the potential for ecclesial life to be extended into the groups suggests that they can become part of an overall experience of church for some participants. This is what I call the interweaving approach to the church.

The next chapter will take this developing understanding of an interweaving ecclesiology and put it into conversation with the ecclesiological approach of Fresh Expressions within the Church of England.

7. THE WORK OF URBAN SAINTS AND THE CHURCH: TOWARDS AN INTERWEAVING ECCLESIOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter represents the second step in the two-step methodological process as detailed in chapter 3 and is central to this thesis. In the chapter I will argue that the operant and espoused ecclesiology discerned through the extended case studies of Urban Saints groups offers a constructive contribution to contemporary conversations around the church and mission in the UK. In particular the chapter will place this operant ecclesiology into conversation with the ecclesiology of the Fresh Expressions movement, as representative of contemporary moves in church and mission.[835] The operant ecclesiology of Urban Saints is an interweaving approach to church. This describes the way that individuals in Urban Saints groups consider the groups alongside a number of other communal Christian activities, groups, and relationships as forming church for them. This interweaving approach is not individualistic but values highly the various communal Christian experiences that become part of the overall picture of the church.

Specifically the chapter will move through four sections arguing that the data from Urban Saints history and practice points to the constructive contribution of an interweaving ecclesiology. First, I will detail both the foundations of the approach and how an interweaving ecclesiology might be regulated. In particular this section demonstrates how the approach is distinct from the intention of Fresh Expressions. Second, I argue for how this distinctive interweaving approach reverses the direction of ecclesiological thinking. This is in contrast to the foregrounding of the church within Fresh Expressions. Third, I will discuss the ambiguity of the Urban Saints groups that mean they are potential ecclesial spaces. This ambiguity is vital in resisting the pull of the church and retaining a mission focus alongside an ecclesial dynamic that can find fulfillment as the groups interweave with other ecclesial relationships and activity. Finally, I argue that there is a responsiveness and flexibility inherent within these potential ecclesial spaces that serves mission within the life of the groups. By detailing both similarities and dissimilarities

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[835] Fresh Expressions developed from the Church of England report *Mission-Shaped Church*. The report has been particularly noteworthy for the number of published copies sold. Over 30,000 copies of the report had been sold by 2012 according to Moynagh, *Every Context*, 51.

between the interweaving approach and Fresh Expressions the chapter concludes that the operant ecclesiology of Urban Saints and its groups offers constructive resources to those interested in pioneering fresh expressions and other new forms of the church.

7.1 The Foundations of an Interweaving Approach

The interweaving ecclesiology of the Urban Saints groups is built on numerous ways in which the groups and the individuals that make up the groups interact with other Christian activities locally and nationally. This is on both an institutional, organisational level and relationally, based on the choices of individuals in how they work out their communal Christian life.[836] In particular the young people and leaders of Urban Saints groups construct their experience of church through active, simultaneous involvement in more than one expression of Christian activity. These different expressions are interwoven to create a unique tapestry of ecclesial activity that becomes church for each individual. This section details below how this is in contrast with the mixed economy approach of Fresh Expressions and also the missiological concept of the two structures of God's redemptive mission. Consequently I will argue that the interweaving approach offers a nuanced and distinct understanding of church despite the Urban Saints type of work and ministry being largely absent from discussions of the streams from which Fresh Expressions and other new forms of the church flow.[837]

That leaders and young people view the Urban Saints groups as vital to the development and experience of their Christian faith suggests an ecclesial dynamic is at work. In particular the relationships in the groups are viewed as stronger than experienced elsewhere, both in other communal Christian experiences and, for the young people, other social environments.[838] Among the leaders this strength of identity to the groups and the way in which the groups added to their individual and communal Christian experience was unexpected.[839] What became apparent however was that the groups were seen as part of a simultaneous communal Christian experience and an overall part

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[836] This echoes the language of Elaine Graham who finds it more helpful to talk about intentional Christian community than church due to the nature of the term and the way it better describes the function of such groups and their practices. See Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 147. For discussion of this in a youth ministry context see Shepherd, "Community Builder."

[837] See for example the introduction to Moynagh, *Every Context*. This is discussed in more detail below.

[838] See the 'Modes of Belonging' detailed in Chapters 4 and 5 in particular.

[839] An early interview with David, an USH leader, provided a critical moment that alerted me to this.

of the ecclesial life of individuals.[840] Within St Aidans' Crusaders this operant ecclesial experience was interpreted through a scripture reference:

> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned each to his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters in anything, but only God, who makes things grow.[841]

As St Paul expresses, it doesn't matter who performed which roles in the life of the Corinthian believers the important thing is that God is able to grow people's faith. This interpretation of different roles being played simultaneously by different groups, churches and activities is a key building block within the interweaving approach to church.

Communal Christian experience outside of the life of parish or other local churches is not unique to Urban Saints' form of work with young people. Indeed the historical review of Urban Saints detailed how the organisation exemplified an inherent evangelical ecclesial imagination that drew on various ecclesial experiments of the post-reformation centuries. In particular the pioneers of Urban Saints aligned their work with that of mission societies that became common in the nineteenth century.[842] By framing their work as missionary work among particular young people those involved were free from some of the expectations of church life.

This missionary work of Urban Saints can be viewed through the reflections of twentieth century missiologist Ralph Winter as one of the forms of God's redemptive mission.[843] There are and have been since the times of the early church, Winter argues, both modalities and sodalities in the overall life of the church.[844] A modality is a 'structured fellowship where there is no distinction of sex or age'.[845] Local churches and

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[840] Young people who only attended USH described the church to which it belonged as their church, whereas lifelong members of St Aidans struggled to differentiate the roles that the group and their church played in their faith and life. For others the group was identified as their church experience for a period (e.g. Sally).

[841] 1 Corinthians 3:5 – 7 (NIV).

[842] See Chapter 2 for the influence of CMS in developing this identity.

[843] Ralph Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," *Missiology* 2, no. 1 (1974).

[844] The language of modal and sodal expressions of church is not uncommon in current discussions around Fresh Expressions. See, e.g. Beth Keith, "Experiences of Pioneers: Revealing a Journey," (Church Army, 2011); Steve Hollighurst, "From Modality to Metaphor: Finding Ways to Speak of Different Modes of Church," *Church Army's Research Unit Special Bulletin* 2012.

[845] Winter, "Two Structures," 127.

denominations can identify with this form. Sodalities, however, are characterized by likeminded Christians banding together for specific purposes.[846] For Winter sodalities and modalities are separate forms of communal Christian experience. In their separation they can be seen as a duality sitting at opposites ends of a spectrum. In general, and certainly within the history of Urban Saints, the expectation is that there will be a trajectory in which those reached through sodalities find their place within the modality of a local church.[847] The operant interweaving ecclesiology however, despite demonstrating the need for relational connections between these two forms of Christian communal experience, shows that individuals operate within these two forms simultaneously. Victoria, the main leader of St Aidans, described how her faith as a younger woman had developed in different ways through involvement in Crusaders, Scripture Union, YWAM and different churches.[848] Sodalities it seems have something to add to the ongoing communal Christian experience. They are part of the interweaving of church within the life of those in the Urban Saints groups.

A framework with similarities to Winter's thinking developed out of *Mission Shaped Church (MSC)*.[849] As a way of holding together a variety of different expressions of church within the Church of England a mixed economy approach was proposed. This is defined as a mutual partnership of parochial and network churches using traditional and fresh approaches, sharing ministry in larger areas.[850] The concept of the mixed economy formalizes a core tenet for those advocating new forms of church - as society diversifies a one-size-fits-all approach is deemed unsuitable.[851] Consequently each fresh expression of church is likely to be for a particular interest group or network.[852] This anticipated mixed economy creates the prospect of choice regarding church becoming a core component of

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[846] Ibid.

[847] See Chapter 3, but also echoes of this in the espoused expectation of both case studies.

[848] Sally Nash describes something similar:

'Thinking back to my adolescence I was involved with a church youth group, an independent Crusader group (now Urban Saints) and the Young Sowers league, as well as the school Christian Union... I think I learnt about mission from Church, worship and the Bible from Crusaders, the Bible from the Young Sowers League and the importance of peer support from the Christian Union. Young people today may have a similar experience.' Sally Nash, "Introduction," in Youth Ministry: A Multi-Faceted Approach ed. Sally Nash (London: SPCK, 2011).

[849] *Mission-Shaped Church.*

[850] Ibid., 8.

[851] Ibid., 12. See also http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/whatis/approach (accessed 1/7/16).

[852] Thus reflecting something of the sodalities in Winter's approach, through with a stronger ecclesial identity.

ecclesiology.[853] Resultant of this thinking the parish model for church in the Anglican context can no longer be the sole model for church life.[854]

In the mixed economy fresh expressions of church are expected to have equal weight and legitimacy within the Church of England. This requires that different forms of church exist simultaneously with equality and mutual understanding in the denominational structure. Here the mixed economy is distinct from Winter's thinking as individuals are not required to move from fresh to inherited forms of church but rather the fullness of church experience is anticipated within either form. However, as with Winter's missiological approach, the proposed framework is not sufficient to contain the operant interweaving ecclesiology of the case studies.

The interweaving is neither a continuum between two points on a spectrum nor an institutional equality but rather a flexible and fluid approach to church life in which individuals move between different expressions of communal Christian life and develop their experience of church accordingly. In this way the different groups and expressions of church do not need to have separate institutional equality, rather significance is attached to each as individuals appropriate them within an overall bricolage of communal Christian experience that creates church for them.[855]

Consequently the interweaving approach can be more responsive to the networks through which individuals live their lives, as well as holding in tension both network and geographical connections within an overall picture of the church.[856] Whereas the mixed economy model of Fresh Expressions limits the way in which church can be expressed to either an inherited parish church or a fresh expression that is aiming to become a mature church, the interweaving approach allows for a practical ecclesiology through which a larger variety of Christian communal experiences can be understood as part of the church

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[853] As per Ward, *Liquid Church*, 72 - 7. This strongly critiqued, albeit in a slightly caricatured form, in Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 104 - 5.
[854] Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh*, 7.
[855] The idea of a bricolage approach to church has been suggested, with some critique before. For a description of 'ecclesial bricolage' see Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 175. Bretherton offers a critique of the concept: Luke Bretherton, "Beyond the Emerging Church," in *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church*, ed. Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster 2007), 46.
[856] Thus responding to criticism leveled at Fresh Expressions.

without requiring they aim to each be a mature church expression. This adds helpful nuance to the current ecclesiological conversation and makes sense of how some Christians are practically expressing their church life.

The value placed on relationships in each place is what motivates and enables individuals to hold these different communal Christian experiences simultaneously. The decisions made as to which different groups or activities to interweave to create an experience of church is in large part based on the importance placed on the relationships within those places.[857] An interweaving approach to church is then an inherently relational ecclesiology – based on relationships both individually and organisationally. Whilst the concept of a relational ecclesiology has been suggested following research into new forms of the church in the USA, what is being proposed here is something distinct.[858] The relational ecclesiology suggested by the interweaving approach of Urban Saints' work is one in which church becomes constructed through a variety of different activities, meetings and practices bound together in relationship. Some of these, such as congregational life, could be defined as modalities in Winter's categorization, whereas others such as the Urban Saints groups resemble sodalities. Some of these building blocks are simply relational and not formally organised so do not fit neatly into either category, or operate in a way that blurs the boundaries between them. It is then an approach in which neither sodalities nor modalities need have priority but where these different expressions of God's work in his church are able to operate together in creative tension as individuals move between and commit to a variety of expressions and communal activities.

The argument so far however does leave the question as to how such a relational interweaving ecclesiology is regulated? To respond to this, relational dynamics proposed from reflection within Fresh Expressions are helpful. In seeking to detail how the relationships between forms of church in the mixed economy operate, the significance of two relational movements has been proposed. These movements are an inward move toward greater depth within each specific community and an outer move toward deeper

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[857] See Chapters 4 and 5 for more on the value place by leaders and young people on the relationships they form in the Urban Saints groups.
[858] Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church* (Minneapolis, MN: The JoPa Group, 2011).

relational connectivity with the wider Christian church locally and beyond.[859] These two dynamics intend to speak of a central core that anchors a particular Christian community in the nature of the church, locally and universally. The inward move refers to the need for a particular local expression of the church to ensure a focus that drives the community to return often to core practices that define the way of the Christian faith.[860] The dynamic of connectivity refers to movement that sees the particular community understand itself conceptually and in practice as related to the wider Christian church. Both of these dynamics are expressions of the koinonia of genuine Christian community.[861]

On a surface level neither of these dynamics might appear inherent to the activity of Crusaders historically or to the practices of Urban Saints groups today. Indeed the history of evangelicals with their drive toward parachurch innovation and activism seems to mitigate against either of these ecclesial dynamics. This understanding would, I suggest, miss insights from the ecclesial imagination that acts as reminder of the practical normative approach to the church within Urban Saints' story. Far from being satisfied with a minimal version of the koinonia of the church, evangelicals have often sought deep community with each other, locally and more widely as they develop networks that support their work. Similarly Fresh Expressions' literature envisages the outward dynamic being expressed through connection not simply to parish, diocese and denomination but by shaping churches around networks the report acknowledges that this means they will likely be less denominationally bound and will tend to have relationship or connection with one or more resourcing network such as New Wine, Soul Survivor or the HTB group of churches.[862] Indeed a fresh expression of church might have more in common with churches outside of its area rather than within its deanery or diocese.[863]

The story of Crusaders in particular with its 'non-sectarian' stance from the outset but with a desire to work alongside all churches locally demonstrates the value of

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[859] These dynamics are named, slightly awkwardly, as intensivity and connectivity. They are discussed in response to the critique of new forms of the church that they are not authentically church. What follows relies on *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 154 - 76.
[860] The Eucharist and Baptism are ascribed particular significance among these practices: 'The most intense form of Christian community is found in gathering round the proclamation of the Gospel, and in the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper', ibid., 155 - 6.
[861] Ibid., 154 - 5.
[862] This is happening in some situations. See Wier, "Sustaining Young Churches."
[863] *Mission-Shaped Church*, 66.

connectivity within the operant ecclesiology of the organisation. As exemplified with the St Aidans group today, by drawing leaders from across the churches in the town the group is able to trace lines of connection with a range of churches and Christian traditions. In working together in this way there is affirmation of sharing core aspects of the Christian tradition.[864] However the connectivity they display moves in two directions, not just through connections with the different denominations locally but by still valuing and making use of the historical Crusader networks.[865] These two directions in which the dynamic of connectivity is worked out through St Aidans demonstrate ways in which the group can be considered part of the church. This points to the church overall as being like a jigsaw.[866]

In addition, the inward ecclesial dynamic offers a reminder to those for whom the Urban Saints groups operate as part of an interweaving church that they must seek deep relational connection to others in the context of core Christian practices. Within this the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are highlighted as the central identifying practices of the Christian church.[867] This is absent from the simple ecclesial practices of the Urban Saints groups, consequently reinforcing the notion that the groups alone are not sufficient to be considered churches.[868] In order to be authentically part of the church those who appropriate Urban Saints groups into an interweaving ecclesial expression need to ensure that they are moving inwardly within a communal Christian expression that holds the practice of the Eucharist as central.

This move forces the work of Urban Saints to avoid isolation and reasserts the value of interweaving. This need to move out from the specifics of an Urban Saints group in order to move in the inward dynamic of a Eucharistic community demonstrates the connectedness of both inner and outer dynamics in an interweaving ecclesiology.

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[864] In this way the St Aidans group carry within them practical echoes of the concept of deep church. See Andrew Walker and Robin A Parry, *Deep Church Rising: Rediscovering the Roots of Christian Orthodoxy* (London: SPCK, 2014); Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton, *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church*, 1st Edition ed. (Paternoster Press, 2007).

[865] This is demonstrated in the way that the historical relationship with another Crusaders group is maintained through the biannual prayer teas. See chapter 4.

[866] 'Like a jigsaw' is another way of expressing the interweaving approach from the case studies. See chapter 4.

[867] *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 154 - 6.

[868] See chapter 2 for reference to a decision early in Urban Saints' existence to not allow for communion in their groups so as not to threaten good relationships with local churches and out of respect for denominational differences in approach.

Helpfully then the Fresh Expressions conversation holds within it a means of regulating the interweaving approach, whilst the interweaving approach takes these dynamics and expresses them in a broader more flexible way that is constructive for the ongoing conversations within Fresh Expressions. This flexibility then provides a more dynamic response to the challenges of societal changes such as the network society described in the rationale of *MSC*. In addition this approach allows for certain activities to maintain a mission focus without being caught up in questions of whether they are a mature church expression or not. These things are discussed in more detail in sections to come.

By seeking to include the work of Urban Saints within these inward and outward ecclesial relational dynamics the definition of church assumed becomes broader than that of any denomination.[869] This non-denominational approach has been part of Urban Saints' work from the very beginning and indeed is inherent in their ecclesial imagination. It is interesting therefore that debate around the topic of denominations is part of the reflection on new forms of church. At times these new forms of the church are described as being ecumenical,[870] other times non- or post-denominational.[871] Within the Church of England this denominational flexibility is sometimes critiqued and perhaps seen to be threatening the status quo.[872] In resisting the definition of church in the cause of mission to young people however the work of Urban Saints has managed to navigate this through developing the interweaving, relational approach to church and denominations described here and demonstrated through their story. In addition using these inward and outward dynamics to regulate the interweaving approach highlights explicitly the idea of different roles in church life being played by different activities, yet God working through each.[873]

Doug Gay has suggested that a hermeneutical spiral is at work within new forms of church.[874] Among the five stages of this spiral he suggests there is an auditing and a retrieval. Auditing is a process of working through what is helpful and necessary within

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[869] By extension these insights might therefore be valid for other organisations usually branded as parachurch, not simply Urban Saints or other youth ministry organisations.

[870] See Doug Gay, *Remxing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2011), xiv.

[871] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 205 - 6.

[872] See Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 95.

[873] As per the St Aidans interpretation of 1 Cor 3:5 – 8 above.

[874] Gay, *Remixing*, xiv - xv.

current forms and practices in order to hold onto what is good.[875] Retrieval refers to a process of mining church tradition in order to re-discover hitherto discarded or forgotten practices and traditions that will enhance the new form of church.[876] The description of the process as a spiral refers to the necessity of this being an ongoing process. This, he suggests, results in an ongoing re-mixing of church. It is a concept that is helpful here, however whereas Gay's hermeneutical spiral suggests that the movement is between the present and the past, the interweaving approach at work in Urban Saints allows for an ongoing process of experience, experimentation and practice in which the possibilities of rich interaction with other current forms of church is part of the re-mixing. Regulating this with the inner and outer koinonia dynamics ensures the core aspects of church remain.

What is being experienced is a mixed economy in the Christian practice of individual believers through matrices of different groups, activities and congregations that make up their ecclesial life. This is a post- or non-denominational experience. The experience of those in Urban Saints groups suggests that this is a way in which individuals relationally construct church. In this way church experience is adapting to the network dynamics of society but in a broader, more complex way than *MSC* allows for with its proposal for single network churches. The mixed economy of church is too narrow, failing to take account of the ways in which individual Christians live in and express the people of God on the mission of God.[877]

7.2 Reversing the Direction of Ecclesiological Thought

The ecclesial ambiguity of the Urban Saints groups is in contrast to the drive toward the ecclesial certainty of developing mature churches within Fresh Expressions.[878] By creating spaces that are ecclesially ambiguous yet containing ecclesial potential, Urban Saints groups do not begin with church but become part of the church through the interweaving ecclesiology. This reversal of thought refrains from pre-determining what church might look like. Rather the intention remains to provide a means through which individuals can

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[875] Ibid., 1 - 18.
[876] Ibid., 19 - 47.
[877] To use Matt Summerfield's phrase about the church within Urban Saints. See his interview p. 10, para 36.
[878] The desire for ecclesial certainty is illustrated by the ongoing discussions about how fresh expressions of church legitimately count as church. See for example the eight criteria set out in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 114. These are critiqued in favour of a set of ten indictors in Lings, "Small Things," 18.

connect with Christ and simple Christian practices in community. This opens ways that the interweaving ecclesiology of Urban Saints can contribute to the ongoing pilgrim nature of the church. By resisting set church forms this provides a timely and useful contribution to ongoing conversations about church and mission in the UK.

The interweaving ecclesial approach operant within Urban Saints' way of working is able to offer a missional resistance that counters the rush toward the church within Fresh Expressions. An interweaving approach contains the potential for endless varieties in the way that church is expressed whilst, in addition, developing an environment through which church can be seen to mould and change as required to maintain connection within contemporary life and culture. This means rather than starting with the church, the interweaving approach reverses this to begin with individual's connection with faith in Christ and from here looks to how the church appears.[879]

One of the challenges when thinking about the place of the church in the work of Urban Saints was illustrated well in some of the data coming from the St Aidan's case study. As a youth group that was non-denominational and drew its leadership from across the local churches whilst remaining independent of any particular church it was clear that some from those local churches, including local clergy and other leaders, struggled to see how the group 'fitted' into the city's ecclesial scene.[880] One leader who bemoaned this lack of support or recognition expressed this succinctly by suggesting to me how easy it would be for the group to be seen as an outreach or mission activity for the parish, located as it was within the geographical boundaries of the parish, but yet the church didn't acknowledge the group's work as such.[881] Another leader described this more generally through her sense that churches were only really interested in their own work rather than anything that took place outside of their own leadership.[882]

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[879] This is interestingly similar to Rowan Williams' ecclesiological point of departure discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

[880] By describing the group as 'independent' I refer to the way in which it does not come under the leadership or authority of any local church or denomination. I do not use the term to imply that the group has nothing to do with local churches as it could be said that there is good relationship with a number of churches through the group's leadership team.

[881] Victoria interview, p. 6, para 34.

[882] Dorothy interview, p. 10, para 70. Similar sentiments were expressed about USH despite the group being located within the ministry of a particular church – here the concern was that the church didn't understand or appropriately value the work that was being done in the Urban Saints group.

At the heart of these frustrations is an issue around understanding where the church begins and ends. This is an issue regularly raised in the contemporary ecclesiological discussion. In the Anglican context of Fresh Expressions the question of parish proves a regular sticking point. When analyzed, this sticking point comes from pre-conceived understandings of what constitutes church in the first place. Examples of this are found within the responses to *MSC* that look to make the case for the traditional parish structure of Anglican Church life. In these responses the authors write from the perspective of understanding the contemporary ecclesiological conversation as constituting an attack on the parish system as the moves toward network and mission shaped church are promoted.[883] In defending the parish system however what comes across is often that the parish system *is* the church.[884] In addition this focus on the parish becomes centred on the building of the parish church. John Milbank in particular seems to suggest that the fullness of church can only be experienced within the walls of such a consecrated building in a specific place built for this specific purpose.[885]

Leaving aside how this understanding sidelines even other denominations and churches with long histories and tradition, what this view exposes is a pre-conditioned understanding of the shape that church must take which prejudices the author to other ways of thinking about church. In this view therefore the boundaries of church are set by the boundaries of the parish structure: geographically, structurally and philosophically.

The attempts to define what counts and doesn't count as church within this ongoing conversation can be seen as an attempt to institutionalise experimentation and variety.[886] Two challenges are noted in particular around these definitional attempts. First, that there is a contradiction between missiological and ecclesiological imperatives. In other words by seeking to make church mission-focussed and defining the ways in which this can happen mission can all too easily become church-focussed, consequently the church and Kingdom of God can become conflated.[887] Second, by seeking to define specifically

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[883] *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 26 - 8.
[884] Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 95 & 113 - 4.
[885] John Milbank, "Stale Expressions: The Management-Shaped Church," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 1 (2008).
[886] Pete Rollins, "Biting the Hand That Feeds: A Apology for Encouraging Tension between the Established Church and Emerging Collectives," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (London: Canterbury Press, 2008), 71 - 2.
[887] Hull, *A Theological Response*, 1 - 4.

what can be counted as church in order that new forms of the church can be seen as part of the institution a form of control is exerted over the experimental and new ecclesial forms.[888]

Much of the ongoing ecclesiological conversation then has become about how to maintain some form of definition of what constitutes the boundaries of church as the church seeks to close the gap with popular cultures. Recent contributions to the conversation however have called for what they term a generous ecclesiology in which boundaries are perhaps more uncertain.[889] This uncertainty arises out of understanding ecclesiology as an ongoing conversation between church, world and the Kingdom of God. There is a sense of a necessary give and take between institutional understandings of the church and discerning the Kingdom of God in the world. In this view the church is deemed a pilgrim people, journeying beyond its own institution as it seeks God's activity in the world.[890] Aspects of this approach were expressed within *MSC* but perhaps lost along the way as the church-planting imperative took precedent.

Pete Ward however invites a different direction of thought. By building on the Pauline concept of being 'in Christ', and contrasting this with the commonly used evangelical terminology of being 'in church', Ward suggests a reversal of the usual thinking. Individual believers are joined to each other, says Ward, because they are joined to Christ. To use another Pauline image, it is through being in Christ that individual Christians find themselves becoming part of the body of Christ and consequently the church. The challenge here is to think the other way round from that which has become the norm, especially in evangelical church life with its congregational focus. The standard thinking suggests that it is by being in church and through participating in congregational life that one is joined to the body of Christ. Ward however, through his imaginative reversal, is able to propose that through being joined to Christ individuals are part of the body of Christ and therefore the church.[891]

[888] Rollins, "Biting the Hand That Feeds," 84.
[889] Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green and James Heard, ed. *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World and the Kingdom of God*, (London: SCM press, 2013).
[890] Julie Gittoes, "Where Is the Kingdom," in *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard (London: SCM Press, 2013), 112 - 6.
[891] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 36 - 7.

> We are joined to Christ and therefore joined to each other, and as we express this corporate life of Christ we are church.[892]

Shifting the starting point from pre-conceived and static ideas about the church to the notion of being in Christ means not accepting that church as it is or has been structured is the only way to express 'the corporate Christ'. It is this possibility of change that those who defend the parish in the light of Fresh Expressions of church seem to deny.

Ward acknowledges that this reversal of the order of thinking around church results in less well-defined and more 'fuzzy' boundaries. As with the ambiguity within potential ecclesial spaces of Urban Saints groups however this is perceived as a positive characteristic as these fuzzy edges represent the 'growing point of the church'.[893] This is similar to the sentiment stating that any attempt to plant churches should be on the 'bleeding edge' of church life.[894] Also critical in this direction of thinking is the possibility that certain activities, groups and relationships can become church for individuals insofar as they provide a means or a context through which the individual is able to experience something of what it is to be in Christ through relationships and practices.

This is not to say that in each relationship, group or activity the church is fully realised and expressed but rather that the possibility of church is present and can become apparent as Christ is communicated and experienced. Taking this concept further then allows the spaces created by activities such as Urban Saints groups to hold within them the possibility of being church whilst not being defined organisationally or structurally as church. This is expressed by the young people interviewed in the various ways in which they describe the groups as allowing them to open up to Christ and the concept of Christianity in a safe environment.[895] It also helps to articulate how the groups can form one of numerous expressions of church in their lives. Whilst holding the possibility of church they also allow young people to participate and belong to them without the additional expectation that might come from something labeled as church.

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[892] Ibid., 38.
[893] Ibid.
[894] Ross and Dadswell, "Church Planting," 28.
[895] See chapter 6.

The post-Christendom ideal in which church is understood more in terms of a movement rather than an institution is also significant here.[896] If church is a movement then it is not possible to hold onto static concepts of what constitutes church. In turn this makes it necessary to hold loosely to any understanding of where the boundaries of church might be. Any boundaries that there are will need to be fuzzy at best. It is, however, not only those who write to defend the parish system that risk solidifying boundaries that should remain fuzzy or fluid. As has been noted in the critique of Fresh Expressions, that which begins as a fresh, innovative, grassroots movement runs the risk of institutionalizing the very things that created the movement in the first place.[897] This potentially has the effect of re-casting solid boundaries, but merely putting them in a different place than before.

Arguably, as the wealth of literature and reflection on Fresh Expressions and contemporary evangelical ecclesiology continues to grow, this solidifying of boundaries that should remain fuzzy can be discerned.[898] John Hull's concern, picked up by Martyn Percy, that there is scope for almost anything to count as church in the thinking of Fresh Expressions has perhaps led to this drive to define.[899] However the consequent reinforcing of boundaries is unhelpful. The ambiguity present within the potential ecclesial spaces of Urban Saints groups studied is a helpful reminder of the importance of fuzzy boundaries and resistance to defining some activities as definitively church or not church. The thinking of Pete Ward aids this resistance.

The inherent freshness that comes from youth groups with the regular turnover of young people and the natural connection with the sharp end of popular culture[900] assists these groups resist becoming institutionalized. This also provides an environment that is conducive to allowing questions and conversation to naturally shape the form that the

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[896] Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 139 - 40.

[897] See, e.g. Martyn Percy, "Old Tricks for New Dogs: A Critique of Fresh Expressions," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (London: Canterbury Press, 2008), 35 - 6.

[898] I am of course am aware here of the irony that I am adding to the wealth of reflection in this area! However the development of a list of questions that should be answered in order to decide if something is a fresh expression of church only serves to reinforce this possibility.

[899] Percy, "Old Tricks for New Dogs," 36.

[900] To paraphrase Graham Cray's comment about young people as the first generation of a new cultural era. See Graham Cray, *Youth Congregations and the Emerging Church* (Grove Books Ltd, 2002), 7.

communication of the gospel and the expression of the church can take.[901] In addition the resistance of Urban Saints groups to be defined as churches or to be understood as inside the life of the church helps maintain a form of missional resistance whilst not denying the potential ecclesial space of the groups. Reversing the ecclesiological thinking serves this missional resistance whilst providing a theological rationale for understanding how a particular group or activity can be part of the interweaving church.

Consequently, groups such as the Urban Saints groups can play a role in thinking of the ongoing pilgrim movement of the church. It is noteworthy though that this contribution to the contemporary ecclesiological conversations comes from beginning by getting alongside young people in order to communicate the gospel with them, rather than starting with the church. Ironically, by starting with the church through frameworks such as that of church planting, those involved in Fresh Expressions might be limiting the expressions of church that are available to them.

In contrast Doug Gay describes a church in which moves of renewal are inevitable. The church, he says, is always being made and remade by the Spirit. This is a church that is 'always pilgrim, always a community of disciples, always learning how to be the church'.[902] The idea of a pilgrim, or wandering ecclesia, is echoed and developed by Julie Gittoes. Gittoes, drawing on the work of Daniel Hardy, is able to talk of a church that needs to 'walk around embodying a presence on the actual land'. The church should be a community that is carefully attentive both 'to God and to the world'.[903] Rather than being mutually exclusive, 'the life of the Church and the fabric of modern society are bound together relationally and with mutual influence'.[904] In this binding together it should come as no surprise that through the shifting and changing of society new spaces appear into which the church can move.[905] The suggestion is these fresh moves in creating Christian community among young people are significant not simply for youth ministry

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[901] See the importance of questions and conversation from my case studies and their analysis, and also above in this chapter.

[902] Gay, *Remixing*, 93. Ward expresses something similar in the opening words of Liquid Church: 'The Church of God must not stand still. In every age, inspired by the Holy Spirit, God's people have found new ways to express their fellowship and mission.' Ward, *Liquid Church*, 1.

[903] Gittoes, "Where Is the Kingdom," 113.

[904] Ibid.

[905] Specifically in the context of youth ministry this is what Mark Senter refers to when he highlights the way that new social situations preempt and prompt fresh moves or 'revolutions' in youth ministry. See discussion in Chapter 2.

but also as, over time, they stretch the boundaries of church life and create new ecclesial space into which the church can move, thus echoing the reversal of ecclesiological thought described above.

Doug Gay, in borrowing a phrase from Geoffrey Wainwright, describes this kind of pilgrim church as an 'assimilative tradition'. This, Gay goes on to say, is inevitably a hermeneutical vision for the church in which the church is constructed by remixings of disparate and different traditions, fuelled by an ecclesial, and I would say inherently evangelical, culture of innovation and experimentation.[906] This hermeneutical vision for the church is enhanced by a conversational image developed by Merold Westphal.[907] Westphal draws on the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans Georg-Gadamer in service of the church. This leads him to pose the idea of the church as conversation in which, citing Gadamer, through dialogue we do not merely put ourselves forward 'but are transformed into a communion in which we do not remain where we are.'[908] This is the 'church in dialogue', which is Graeme Fancourt's vision for a church that addresses the post-modern condition.[909]

As a result of this line of thinking the interweaving ecclesiology of Urban Saints groups enhances conversations around new forms of the church. This means retaining the idea that the church should not be the priority in missional moves. A reversal of thought provides a rationale for prioritizing mission without overlooking the church, yet not allowing the church as it is to overwhelm the aims and desire for mission. It is an ecclesial understanding that recognizes the need for fuzzy edges and a growing edge of church life, retaining a missional resistance in so doing. Further, this line of thought leads to the suggestion that an interweaving approach that reverses ecclesiological thinking is able to serve the ongoing pilgrim life of the church. The operant ecclesiology of Urban Saints is offered as an example of this.

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[906] Gay, *Remixing*, 93; Gay is citing Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 269.
[907] Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? (the Church and Postmodern Culture): Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church*, ed. J. Smith (Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 135 - 46.
[908] Ibid., 117.
[909] Fancourt, *Brand New Church*, 106 - 12.

7.3 The Value of Potential Ecclesial Spaces

This section turns to consider the specific identity of the Urban Saints groups within the reversal of thinking that the operant interweaving ecclesiological approach requires. Ambiguity around church is a vital part of the discourse within Urban Saints because of their commitment to be focused on mission among and to young people.[910] Within this ambiguity however the groups can be understood as potential ecclesial spaces that hold in tension church and not church elements – they are not church and yet intentionally resemble something of the church. Through this creative tension the groups are able to respond to the particularities of the lives of the young people they are working with, expressed often in questions and conversations, whilst retaining a commitment to the core simple ecclesial practices that hold within them echoes of the wider life of the church.

Consequently the groups can operate on the outside of the church in order to retain a mission focus, resisting becoming too church-shaped, whilst resembling the church enough for young people to catch the ecclesial nature of Christian faith. Where this is caught the ecclesial potential of the groups can become part of an interweaving expression of the church. As such they offer a different approach to mission than that proposed by Fresh Expressions. These potential ecclesial spaces retain a missional focus without being caught up with broader ecclesial questions. Consequently they do not need to aim for ecclesial maturity and as such can maintain a missional resistance that prevents the church from becoming overbearing.

The leaders of Urban Saints talk of how holding a non-church identity, being on the outside of what is considered church, is helpful in remaining focused on the things they deem most important: mission and discipleship of young people through relationships, Bible study and other simple Christian practices. These leaders are on the whole deeply committed to the church, whether the single local church connected to USH or the many local churches to which the St Aidan's leaders are connected.[911] In addition they express a desire for the church to be more than it is. There is a tension held between expressing

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[910] Ambiguity comes from contradictions and paradoxes in how the groups talk about the church – see previous chapter for details.
[911] Only one leader interviewed from across both groups was not currently committed to a local church.

that the church is both vital and yet not as effective as could be. These leaders, however, see their work with Urban Saints as an extension of their ecclesial life and identity.[912]

Consequently the work with young people in Urban Saints groups is not detached from the church, though neither is it fully identified as church. There is, though, a desire among the leaders and young people for much of what they value in the groups to be recognized as an expression of the church. Whether it is the close community built and expressed in friendships that were seen between and across generations, the way that Christian faith is encouraged and developed or that young people are given opportunities to lead and experiment in using their gifts, there are aspects of the groups that are understood as having an ecclesial heart.[913]

This ecclesial heart though is not an essential aspect of the groups. For some individuals Urban Saints groups operate as youth groups with some Christian input. This points towards the limits of the ecclesial identity of Urban Saints' work and also the value of maintaining their inherent ecclesial ambiguity. By retaining a non-church identity the Urban Saints groups are able to provide spaces that can be an extension of the experience of church, provide a place to experiment with or taste something of church or simply remain a welcoming youth group for young people to attend.[914]

Being comfortable with this ambiguity and space releases the Urban Saints groups and their leaders from wrestling with questions of what makes something a full or mature expression of church. It allows them to maintain a focus on what they see as their role in God's redemptive mission.[915] This assists in retaining a mission focus and is in contrast to Fresh Expressions and other new forms of church that set out with the intention of forming churches. The Urban Saints groups maintain their ecclesial potential without striving for that potential to be fulfilled within the group itself, but rather as the groups and the individuals within them, interweave with other expressions of communal Christian life and practice.

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[912] This is supported in Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, trans. Harald Hegstad (Cambridge, UK: James Clark & Co., 2013), 91.

[913] Some of these things were identified as feeling 'more church than church' in the case study data.

[914] Each of these were expressed in my data and are carried in the modes of belonging and ecclesial practices described in the case study descriptions.

[915] To echo the language of Ralph Winter discussed above.

The idea of potential is used within the Fresh Expressions literature in order to expand on the way in which new forms of church are seen to develop. A two-stage process in envisaged:

> A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.
> - It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.
> - It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.[916]

In this summary the desired outcome is clear – the new form of church will move beyond potential to become a mature expression of church in its own right. This is to be expected given that *MSC* is framed as a report into church planting.

Elsewhere the listening, service and incarnational mission described above as the first move of a fresh expression coming into being is detailed in terms of conversation. This conversational framework for how a church can come into being is seen as a 'double listening' to both the gospel and local culture.[917] At other times the conversation is understood to be three-way between church culture, local culture and the gospel.[918] The intended outcome of this two- or three-way listening is that the attention to the mission context should come first as mission precedes the church. Listening to the local cultures shapes what emerges, whereas the voice of gospel and church tradition is to validate what emerges.[919] Applying the notion of *Missio Dei* to the church is popular within new forms of the church and Fresh Expressions. It is this that becomes the place from which the church 'derives its self-understanding'.[920] Since this understanding of mission demands that context is now the determining factor by which church takes shape Anglican ecclesiology can no longer be defined exclusively through parochial life.[921]

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[916] See http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/introduction (accessed June 26th 2016).
[917] *Mission-Shaped Church*, 104.
[918] Ibid., 91.
[919] Ibid., 105.
[920] Ibid., 20. *Missio Dei* is a reminder that mission is 'first and foremost an activity of God'. This has increasingly become the popular way of rooting the mission of the church in the work of God. See Moynagh, *Every Context*, 121. For claims that proponents of new forms of church have mis-understood and mis-applied *Missio Dei* see *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 122 -6.
[921] *Mission-Shaped Church*, 106; Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh*, 7. For a strong critique of this see Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*.

In this way *MSC* tries to background the church by placing the mission and the context of the mission initiative as having prior importance to the form of church that develops. A desire for uncertainty in ecclesial forms is explicit in its contention that the church planting it is advocating shouldn't be church-centred.[922] This backgrounding of the church is made difficult though given that a church is the intended outcome of what is planted. By having a clearly articulated outcome in mind the 'conversation' in church planting becomes imbalanced.[923] The risk within this pre-determined conversation is twofold. First, that there is little genuine dialogue between the gospel and the local culture because an idea of what will be formed is already implicitly held in the minds of the church planters.[924] The second risk is that it potentially limits the missional work of God inherent within His nature to forming churches. This mirrors the critique of Mission-Shaped Church that it in fact offers a church-shaped mission.[925] There is a danger then that by starting with the desire and intention to start a new form of church, boundaries are placed too tightly around the potential work of God through the Holy Spirit.[926]

In contrast, the potential ecclesial spaces of Urban Saints groups, by not aiming for the church as outcome, can allow the contexts of the young people to shape each group's mission. This shaping by the context happens in large part through the questions and situations young people bring with them to the groups. Conversation with the young people creates space that, through engagement with the simple ecclesial practices, has some ecclesial potential.[927] In the Urban Saints groups conversation is more than a mere concept or framework, rather it is a tangible ongoing practice facilitated through encouraging questions.[928] It is also a practice that helps to create and provide the space through which the Christian faith and encounters with God becomes possible. The conversation is enhanced and retains the nature of a two-way dialogue.[929] Meanwhile the

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[922] *Mission-Shaped Church*, 85.

[923] There are similarities here with critiques of relational youth ministry where youth ministers entering the relationship with an agenda of influence. See Root, *Revisiting*, 79.

[924] Ross and Dadswell, "Church Planting," 69.

[925] Hull, *A Theological Response*, 36.

[926] This is recognized within some Fresh Expressions literature through reference to different forms of God's mission. See ibid., 28 - 32; Moynagh, *Every Context*, 128 - 30.

[927] This is similar to the work of Nick Shepherd who describes youth groups as places of 'faith generation' for young people, see *Faith Generation: Retaining Young People and Growing the Church* (London: SPCK, 2016).

[928] See the previous chapter for the role of encouraging questions as a practice of interruption.

[929] As per the small group conversation between an atheist and a Christian teenager, see chapter 6.

ambiguous identity of the groups is retained and something of the church is possible in the midst of the missional dialogue that takes place.

The core practice of encouraging questions, and thereby facilitating ongoing dialogue with the young people and their worlds, operates as an interruption to the pull of the church and resists a misleading dichotomy between that which is church and that which is not church. Without the aim of creating a church the Urban Saints leaders are freed from the questions that this demands and are able to focus on their core aim of creating spaces that are conducive to share the gospel and Christian practices with young people. In contrast Fresh Expressions have moved to develop set lists of questions that need to be answered to decide if something does or does not count as a church.[930]

This emphasis within Fresh Expressions betrays to some degree the heritage from which the moves toward these new forms of church has come. The drive to planting fresh expressions of church is described in part as a move to close a gap between church and contemporary life in order to be more effective in the missional challenges within a society in which increasing numbers did not attend church. This move to close a gap was itself influenced by the development of alternative worship, especially among teenagers.

Alternative worship sought to incarnate Christian worship in the particularities of youth cultures. John Hall has argued that the rise of alternative worship was a result of a push back against failed 'hit and run' forms of evangelism.[931] Hall goes into some detail to show how some of these leaders were key in the development of alternative worship and youth congregations, which, he goes on to say, have had a significant missiological impact. While the role of youth congregations is somewhat controversial within the youth

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[930] "From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011 - 2013," (The Church of England: The Church of England Research Programme, 2014). This enhances the outline for church maturity encouraged within *MSC* known as the 'three self' principle in which mature fresh expressions should be self-propagating, self-financing and self-governing (see *Mission-Shaped Church*, 120 - 3).

[931] Hall, "Rise of the Youth Congregation." Martyn Percy has described a similar situation in a more idiosyncratic way by framing these responses as 'fads' before framing the contemporary moves in ecclesiology as a continuation of this, see Percy, "Old Tricks for New Dogs," 29 - 31. Here Percy describes the various responses as fads through descripiton of a fictional couple who move from one fad to the next.

ministry literature[932] Hall's work places them in a wider context through his suggestion that they have had a transformational effect on missiological frameworks for church. This wider context is echoed in the thinking of Graham Cray who frames the work of youth congregations as a missiological response to changes in culture and context.[933]

This move toward developing alternative worship among and for the cultures of young people was a move to close the gap between the church and contemporary life. It is this move that has been taken into Fresh Expressions and other new forms of the church. Significantly this move is identified both by tracing the themes but also through individuals who have moved from being pioneers in the alternative worship scene among young people in the latter decades of the twentieth century to being influential thinkers and practitioners within the Fresh Expressions movement.[934] The potential ecclesial spaces of Urban Saints groups however suggests that this different tradition of work with young people has something distinct but of equal value to offer in developing church and mission for contemporary life in the UK.

In order to help in the development of fresh expressions of church a new form of ministry, known as Pioneer Ministry, has been created within the Church of England. This in recognition of the challenges inherent in developing new forms of church and of the skills required for the type of leadership necessary in this kind of missionary church building. To a degree those who led the moves into alternative worship among young people provided the model for pioneers.[935]

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[932] As per the strong critique from Ashton and Moon cited in the introduction. There are also significant calls for integration between young people and the wider church community to counter the separation encouraged by youth congregations. See, e.g. DeVries, *Family-Based*; Gardner, *Mend the Gap*; Nel, *Inclusive*; "The Inclusive Congregational Approach to Youth Ministry," in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

[933] Cray, *Youth Congregations*. The thinking of Cray is particularly significant given the role he has had in developing the formal thinking behind the development of 'fresh expressions of church' in the Church of England and the Methodist church and the Mission-shaped report that goes alongside and sets the framework for these.

[934] e.g. Jonny Baker, Pete Ward, Doug Gay and Graham Cray.

[935] Indeed there is a strong connection between the two with Jonny Baker heading up one of the key pioneer training centres. See 'Church Mission Society', "Training Designed by Pioneers for Pioneers," https://pioneer.churchmissionsociety.org/pioneer-mission-leadership-training-course/about/. Accessed 23/1/17.

Pioneers can be lay or ordained leaders who are mandated with the development of fresh expressions of church.[936] They are seen as entrepreneurs who will embody the double listening envisaged as the starting point for developing fresh expressions. In practice they operate in a variety of ways – some within traditional parish life, some outside and others in roles that straddle both. These are understood as working modally, sodally or in a mixed environment.[937] Those who work modally and in mixed settings experience the challenge of working within a traditional church structure whilst trying to pioneer something new, whereas those who work sodally feel more positive about the church and are supported by network based organisations.[938]

Part of the tension experienced by Pioneers working within traditional, modal church settings is a tension between understandings of church – they are working towards a fresh expression vision in which the new initiative intends to become a mature church for those involved, whereas the parish it is connected to struggle to see it as such or misunderstand what the Pioneers are trying to achieve. In contrast those working sodally speak positively of the relationships they have and a certain freedom is implied within the facilitative connection to the network organisations.

The significance of the Urban Saints groups operating as potential ecclesial spaces within an interweaving approach to the church could be helpful to pioneers in the light of this research into their work. In the context of the Pioneers working modally this approach could help to address the challenge they face in understanding what they are doing. This is particularly important in the light of recent research into fresh expressions of church that demonstrates a significant proportion of them are not operating as independent churches but rather have dependent relationships with host or sending churches. The vision of the three-self existence is not working out in practice. This practical shift in the vision for Fresh Expressions itself suggests a more complex interplay of relationships in the way that church is being worked out in contemporary life. Within this then the potential ecclesial spaces of the interweaving approach have a helpful perspective to add nuance and depth to these different ways in which church is being lived and worked out.

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[936] 'Fresh Expressions', "Pioneer Ministry," https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/pioneerministry. Accessed 25/1/17.
[937] Keith, "Experiences of Pioneers: Revealing a Journey," 2 - 3.
[938] Ibid.

7.4 Responsiveness and Flexibility of an Interweaving Approach to the Church

This final section details that through the value of being potential ecclesial spaces the Urban Saints groups have both responsiveness and flexibility built in to their operant interweaving ecclesiology. By highlighting the similarities and dissimilarities between these potential ecclesial spaces and the approach of Fresh Expressions I will conclude the argument of this chapter by showing that an interweaving ecclesiology is well equipped to handle change rather than maintain the status quo. This ensures the usefulness of this approach in ongoing conversations around church and mission in the UK.

The interweaving ecclesiology is built on the evangelical ecclesial imagination inherent within Urban Saints' history.[939] This ecclesial imagination is in essence a further way of expressing the interweaving ecclesiological approach in which modalities and sodalities in the life of the church are held in creative tension by mission focused evangelicals such as those operating within Urban Saints. Characteristic of Urban Saints' ecclesial imagination is the possibility that the forms taken by the groups, relationships and networks that are part of it can be re-imagined if and when necessary. This re-imagining can be seen through the story of Urban Saints in developments of how the groups run and in the young people who attend the groups. It was also seen specifically through observations within USH as the group reformed twice in order to connect more effectively with the young people. In this re-imagining certain things are held as being of central importance.[940] This importance doesn't however prevent the groups from being responsive to the changing lives of young people.

This responsiveness is related to the evangelical characteristics of activism and innovation – innate traits that lead evangelicals to try new things in their desire to share the gospel with those around them.[941] This leads away from set structures and forms of Christian life and community and towards the kind of relational outworking of the ecclesial imagination. There is something of this mirrored in the contention within *MSC* that the

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[939] See Chapter 2.
[940] E.g. Bible study, pastoral care, welcome and fun. See the modes of belonging, ecclesial practices and practices of interruptions from earlier chapters.
[941] See chapter 2.

form of the church and the content of the gospel need to be separated in order to communicate appropriately within contemporary society.[942] This idea has been strongly criticised for failing to acknowledge the extent to which these things are inextricably connected and that the form the gospel message takes is as significant to its communication as the content itself.[943]

Within the Urban Saints groups however the ecclesial imagination allows for responsiveness in which this relationship between form and content is negotiated. By not aiming to create mature churches but retaining some ecclesial potential the groups are able to hold lightly the form of what they do in communicating the content of the Christian faith. In addition to this the way in which young people articulate the safe place the groups provide for them indicates the form and content of the gospel are held together in a flexible, responsive manner. The content of the gospel becomes the ability of the good news to be flexible, allowing the young people to approach it, as they are, confident in the safety of the group. Yet, because these groups are not becoming mature churches this does not need to be the entire content and form of Christian life and faith.

To develop the concept of the responsiveness and flexibility of Urban Saints operant ecclesiology it is instructive to look at the similarities and dissimilarities between it and Fresh Expressions' approach; these become explicit when the evangelical ecclesial imagination is mapped against central characteristics of what Michael Moynagh calls *'New Contextual Churches'*.[944] Moynagh draws together a number of trends and characteristics shared by Fresh Expressions and other new forms of the church; he lists these as follow:

- Missional – in the sense that, through the Spirit, they are birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church;
- Contextual – they seek to fit the culture of the people they serve;
- Formational – they aim to form disciples;
- Ecclesial – they intend to become church for the people they reach in their contexts.[945]

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942 *Mission-Shaped Church*, 91.
943 Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 1 - 27.
944 This is Moynagh's catch all term to bring together various strands and movements experimenting with new forms of the church. See Moynagh, *Every Context*, x.
945 Ibid., xiv. A very similar list of characteristics is also available on the Fresh Expressions website.

The similarities with Urban Saints' ecclesial imagination can be mapped against the first three of these of these characteristics. The history of Urban Saints demonstrates the way that Crusaders began from a heart to reach boys from the upper-middle classes of British society that were not attending or being reached by the churches of the day. By inviting the boys to Bible class activities in the drawing rooms of upper-middle class households the groups were contextually appropriate to those boys. And though this specific cultural appropriateness diluted throughout the century the organisation has been in existence, the case studies demonstrate that there remains an operant culture within Urban Saints of allowing the context of the young people to take precedence over the religiosity of the activities. This is the heart of the practices of interruption – practices that allow the lives of the young people to interrupt activity that had otherwise been described as the most important priority in the group.[946] In addition, the aim of Urban Saints has always been to develop disciples, well formed in the foundations of Christian faith.

Where the dissimilarity is evident however is in the final characteristic – the intention of these groups to become church for those involved in them. This was never the expressed intention of Urban Saints. Indeed the move toward church was always strongly resisted with the language of missionary society preferred to understand the nature of the work. As Urban Saints and other similar youth ministry organisations proliferated through the twentieth century the term 'parachurch' became more popular. Whilst it is possible that the reason the early classes weren't described in the manner of Moynagh's ecclesial characteristic is that the vocabulary wasn't available to do this at that time,[947] the organisation and its groups have resolutely resisted any attempt to be identified as creating church. The ecclesial ambiguity of the case studies, of being outside of and yet somehow part of the church, has been the preferred approach. Indeed it is this very ecclesial ambiguity that is able to provide a constructive contribution to today's ecclesiological questions and conversations.

This key area of dissimilarity between Fresh Expressions and the approach of Urban Saints is central to the issue at hand of responsiveness and flexibility. Hull alludes to this where

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[946] See chapter 6..
[947] Mark Scanlan, "Youth Ministry Creating Ecclesial Space," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 14, no. 1 (2015).

he cautions that the extent of *MSC's* vision may be an abundance of café churches.[948] What he means by this is that in seeking to hold the form of the church lightly whilst still intending to develop mature churches a uniformity of church model may result, albeit a different uniformity than that of the parish model. In contrast the ecclesial imagination allows for different forms to develop by holding lightly the ecclesial status of each gathering and group. The ecclesiality comes in the interweaving, not within each individual activity. This again allows for different groups and expressions of communal Christian life and activity to play a role within a larger whole of the redemptive work of God.

In moving away from the ecclesial imagination carried within Urban Saints and by desiring to form mature churches as the outworking of mission Fresh Expressions have lost something of value - the missional responsiveness to people that is still evident within Urban Saints. By starting out with the question of how the church can reconnect with people and close the gap between the institution and popular culture, the debate has primarily become about structures of the church.

It is in some ways this trend that creates the challenges for Pioneer Ministers, especially those working within parishes when trying to work towards developing new forms of church. The drive to define and enshrine what is being developed as church in its own right potentially stymies the missional initiative and pioneering drive. In addition it might limit the ability of the new form of church to respond flexibly to the context and people to which it is ministering. The practical wisdom of the interweaving approach with its potential ecclesial spaces that hold the identity of church more lightly helps to navigate these challenges.

Whereas questions about whether something is church have become the focus around which the contemporary ecclesiological conversation has revolved, the driving force behind the formation of Crusaders, and still at the heart of the current Urban Saints groups, is how to engage young people with the gospel message and story, and through this develop Christian faith through personal encounter with God. Urban Saints groups have become places of developing and nurturing Christian faith whilst not being formally

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[948] Hull, *A Theological Response*, 35.

churches nor intending to become such. That the groups, however, can play this role in the lives of the participants suggests an ecclesial dynamic has developed from the mission-shaped imperative and actions.

This possibility of ecclesial dynamic without aiming to be fully or institutionally a church is vital. At the heart of this dynamic is the idea that 'every work done by a Christian in the name of Jesus is an expression of [the church]'.[949] Furthermore this line of thinking begins to break down the barriers between that which is considered church and that which isn't. In turn this allows the ecclesial ambiguity inherent within Urban Saints to help regulate the rush to create church that dominates contemporary approaches to mission in the UK. They can do this however as part of the ecclesiological conversation. In this way they can assist the development of approaches to church that have 'a structure and a culture designed not to enshrine stability but to handle change'.[950]

7.5 In Summary

The historical and current practice of Urban Saints' work among young people contains practical wisdom that makes an important contribution to current evangelical conversations about church and mission in the UK. Through analysis of the practical normative approach to the church contained in the historical work of Urban Saints and the operant ecclesiology of current groups an interweaving approach to the church is discovered. Young people and leaders from Urban Saints groups make simultaneous use of a variety of communal Christian activities in order to construct their experience of church - this characterizes such an interweaving ecclesiology.

By holding different activities, groups and local churches in tension through simultaneous involvement, this ecclesial approach values both sodalities and modalities. Further, they are not seen as mutually exclusive or different ends of a spectrum but rather each are experienced as part of a current bricolage of church. In addition, this contrasts with the mixed economy concept of Fresh Expressions. The interweaving approach offers flexibility and fluidity, allowing individuals to construct a church experience out of a variety of different communal Christian activities and relationships – some of which might be

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[949] Hegstad, *Real Church*, 91.
[950] Jackson, *Hope*, 185.

considered mature church expressions and others, such as an Urban Saints group, which are not.

In contrast to a focus developing mature churches, with consequential discussions as to what this looks like, the interweaving ecclesiology begins with a different focus. This allows for the reversal of the direction of ecclesiological thought. The starting point for the interweaving ecclesiology is the desire to create connection between individuals and the Christian community through simple ecclesial practices. The motivation for creating this connection is that individuals experience something of faith in God. This is what is expressed in the case studies as those who are not yet Christian becoming open to the possibilities of Christian faith through their interactions in the groups. This starting point implies that the church and the form the church takes is not the starting place, but rather the church appears or is created as individuals form connections that stimulate Christian faith. Theologically this is described as the experience of being in Christ creating the connection with the body of Christ and therefore the church. This reversal, by not pre-determining what the church will look like, creates an environment through which the church can be open to its own growth and development. It can be, in the words of Bob Jackson, a church that embodies change. It can be the pilgrim church walking carefully in an ever-changing world to find its way.

Within the interweaving approach then the role of the Urban Saints groups can be understood as creating potential ecclesial spaces. These are spaces that carry a resemblance to the church strong enough for young people to get what the group is about and for those involved to incorporate it into an interweaving expression of church. This resemblance is characterized by the regular use of key simple ecclesial practices that are non-negotiable aspects of the groups. In this way the groups contribute to the experience of church in a particular way for both young people and leaders. However by identifying as not being churches the groups are able to sit in an ambiguous space that can be both church and not church. The practices of interruption assist in ensuring that the church-ness of the groups doesn't dominate whilst also retaining responsiveness to the young people themselves. Consequently the ecclesial practices are experienced in a manner that is sensitive to the questions and lives the young people carry with them. These ambiguous potential ecclesial spaces stand somewhat in the gap between the

church and contemporary society. This is in contrast to fresh expressions that are aiming to close the gap. It is however the in-the-gap character of the Urban Saints groups that helps to facilitate the young people's experience of the ecclesial practices and the groups retain a missional resistance to the church becoming overbearing.

This role of the groups as potential ecclesial spaces is entirely in keeping with the evangelical ecclesial imagination that Urban Saints exemplifies through its history. By creating a form of church that is based on an individual experience yet includes a matrix of relationships and networks through which the individual experiences is interpreted, the interweaving ecclesiology makes space for expressions of church that are not organisationally, institutionally or denominationally part of the church. The ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions displays both similarity and dissimilarity with this ecclesial imagination. Whilst the forms of communal Christian gathering that are formed naturally by evangelicals with their inherent activism and innovation tend toward mission and forming disciples in a contextually appropriate way they generally have not aimed to be mature forms of the church. This is where Fresh Expressions and other new forms of church are distinct from the ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints.

In addition this distinction serves the need to be responsive and flexible to young people in the Urban Saints groups. This responsiveness and flexibility is vital to constructing an ecclesiology that can hold within it a culture of change in order to retain connection with contemporary life. The regular ability of work such as Urban Saints to re-imagine itself whilst retaining its essence is an example of this. Consequently the interweaving ecclesiology offers a more responsive and flexible approach to church that can enhance and develop the conversations about church and mission in the UK. This interweaving ecclesiology adds nuance and depth to the Fresh Expressions debate.

8. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This thesis has argued that an interweaving ecclesiological approach, drawn from the operant and espoused ecclesiology of Urban Saints group work with young people and leaders, makes an important contribution to the Fresh Expressions debate. Through a detailed historical review of Urban Saints, in depth extended case studies of current Urban Saints groups and putting these into open-ended theological conversation with the ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions, I have argued that an interweaving ecclesiology can maintain a focus on mission that is not centred on the church, yet still creates ecclesial life for participants as they experience the possibility of faith in Christ.

My point of departure was a research puzzle that was formed from my experiences as a local church youth minister and a short time on staff with Urban Saints. This puzzle revolved around the relationship between youth ministry and church; specifically focussed on the contribution that ways of forming communal Christian life with young people in youth groups might make to the wider life of the church. This broad research puzzle was then crystallised into research questions through the historical review of Urban Saints. In this review I identified an inherent ecclesial imagination that created a form of Christian life and tradition through Urban Saints' early years as Crusaders. This form of life had an ecclesial sensibility to it since it revolved around developing individual faith, but expressing that faith in small local gatherings of like-minded believers and a wider national (sometimes international) network or fellowship. In Urban Saints these different aspects of the ecclesial imagination were expressed in the push toward young people making confessions of faith, the commitment to the local group and a larger network of prayer meetings, leaders conferences, camps and other activities that accompanied group life.

The strength of this ecclesial imagination created a strong identity and kind of faith tradition among many of the participants. The ecclesial imagination and identity was formed outside of the streams of conventional denominational and ecclesial life with the organisation self-identifying as a missionary movement from its earliest days. This work influenced church life though as churches and denominations were influenced by

Crusaders' methods of working young people. The uncovering of this ecclesial imagination was a key moment in articulating the research questions that formalised the general research puzzle and have driven this thesis:

- *In what ways might the practices and ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints and its groups inform and be informed by contemporary approaches to ecclesiology in the UK?*

This main research question was broken down into three subsidiary questions that are constitutive of the main research question:

- *To what extent do Urban Saints groups practically operate as 'church' for those involved?*
- *How is the concept of church articulated in the practice and conversation of young people and youth leaders in Urban Saints?*
- *What resources are there in a contemporary ecclesiology that can inform and complement the work being done in Urban Saints groups?*

In order to explore these questions that arise from practice this thesis locates itself within the discipline of practical theology. Specifically a methodology was developed based around open-ended theological enquiry employing the complex conversational theology of the four-voice model as a framework. This methodology allows for the insights of different forms of theology to contribute to each other and was based on a two-step approach of first drawing out the operant and espoused theologies through extended ethnographic case studies before placing the findings of these in conversation with the more formal ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions. The first step, based on extended case studies, provides answers to the first two subsidiary research questions whereas the second step answers the third subsidiary question and in turn develops a theological framework through which the main research question is addressed.

The extended case studies of two current Urban Saints groups detailed key ways in which young people and leaders belonged to the groups and identified central ecclesial practices that created a context in which Christian faith could be stimulated, shaped and sustained. This faith impact of the groups was evident for both young people and leaders, however equally important was the social space of the groups. The coming together of

different modes of belonging alongside the ecclesial practices of the groups and the different ways in which the groups and their participants related to other aspects of the life of the church meant that the groups' identity was not clear cut. Critical incidents during the research process alerted me to the nuanced way in which the groups operated and the different forms of espoused and operant theologies at work. The way in which the groups were clearly places that stimulated and sustained faith among both young people and leaders became apparent, yet so did the way that the groups operated outside the usual streams of ecclesial life – and that this outside identity was felt by them to be helpful. This challenged my assumptions that the groups' ecclesial identity would be a simple yes or no, either / or question.

Analysis of the case studies then focussed on the inherent contradictions and paradoxes that were at work in these different modes of belonging and ecclesial practices. These contradictions were expressed in terms of a dominant discourse that described the groups as being outside of the church and consequently as having no ecclesial value, whereas the case studies uncovered a hidden discourse – one in which the groups were able to operate as a form or expression of church in some ways for some of the participants. In addition, generally, the participants for whom the groups operated as an expression of church understood it or used it in this way in relation to other activities. These other activities included the wider life of Urban Saints, a variety of local church involvement, school groups and the informality of Christian friendships. Within this interweaving of activities the role of Urban Saints was seen to be offering something unique. In many ways this demonstrated practical examples of the inherent ecclesial imagination of Urban Saints at work.

Because the groups could operate and be understood as church in some ways for some of the participants, the ecclesiology at work is ambiguous but bursting with potential. Urban Saints groups can then be understood as potential ecclesial spaces. This potential was, at times, hidden behind the dominant discourse about church, but became apparent to participants as this discourse was interrupted. The interruptions came about through regular practices within the groups (welcome, creating fun and encouraging questions) that opened up space for individuals to engage more with the previously hidden ecclesial life of the groups. Within this ambiguous ecclesiology that revolves around potential

ecclesial spaces the groups are not intending to become churches or to hold the identity institutionally or organisationally of a church. However, they can become part of the ecclesial life of the participants as they connect with other forms of Christian life and in this way are part of the bricolage of activities that act to sustain and enhance faith. This is the interweaving form of church that encompasses the operant and espoused ecclesiology of the Urban Saints groups and represents the first step of the open-ended enquiry adopted within the chosen methodology.

In the second methodological step, the interweaving form of church is placed in conversation with Fresh Expressions. As a flexible form of church life that does not require each initiative to become a mature church the interweaving ecclesiology provides a unique contribution to these conversations about church and mission. It does this in particular by resisting a form of mission that centralises pre-existing ideas about the form of the church. The foundation of the interweaving approach is the understanding that church is constructed by individuals appropriating a variety of Christian activities (formal and informal) and relationships, as they are helpful to sustaining and developing their own Christian faith. This interweaving contrasts with the central tenet of Fresh Expressions that retains a single, self-sufficient church approach.

In addition an interweaving approach nuances the relationship between sodalities and modalities in church life by demonstrating how they should be viewed neither as being at either end of a spectrum that people move along, or as parallel but distinct forms of Christian life, but rather a flexible and fluid approach in which individuals move between different expressions of communal Christian life and develop their experience of church accordingly. This is in agreement with the Fresh Expressions ideal that there should not be one-size-fits-all expression of church but also critiques the structured approach to its ecclesiology.

However, resources from within Fresh Expressions are found to help regulate the interweaving approach, recognising that such an approach might lead not only to rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach but also unintentionally an anything-goes approach. In response the theological conversation suggests that the twin inward and outward relational dynamics proposed for Fresh Expressions are also useful to the interweaving

approach. These relational dynamics are discussed to ensure that individuals and each distinct group or activity is pursuing deep koinonia relationship inwardly with those in the group but also outwardly in relation to the wider life of the Christian church in the locality and beyond. In addition these relational dynamics point toward the need for the koinonia of the church (whether interweaving or not) to be focussed at some point on the foundational sacramental life of the church, in particular the Eucharistic meal.

In order to work effectively the interweaving approach reverses the usual direction of ecclesial thinking. Whilst maintaining that church planting should not be ecclesio-centric or start with the church, the approach of Fresh Expressions inherently favours the church and results in spending a wealth of energy on defining what makes a particular initiative a church. Urban Saints groups however are not pre-occupied with these ecclesial-boundaries but nevertheless draw individuals into a life of faith. Consequently they can constitute the church insofar as they are able to draw individuals into relationship with Christ and therefore His body, the church.

Ultimately then the interweaving approach offers a naturally flexible and responsive approach to the church that can contribute to the development of fresh expressions of church and mission-shaped ecclesiology in the UK. The flexibility and responsiveness is held within the way that the groups or activities can focus on providing spaces with the potential to connect participants to Christ whilst not needing to concentrate on the questions of whether they are fully church. A focus instead on the inward and outward relational dynamics is the means by which participants experience the church. This possibility of an ecclesial life without needing to aim at institutionally becoming a church is vital and challenges the predominant approach of Fresh Expressions. The ecclesial ambiguity of Urban Saints and its inherent interweaving approach can then help to regulate the rush to form church that is characteristic of the contemporary conversation around mission and church in the UK.

In summary then this thesis proposes that an interweaving ecclesiological approach that is inherent in the youth ministry of Urban Saints provides a constructive contribution to the understanding of church and mission for both youth group ministry and Fresh Expressions. The conclusions reached offer a possible theological framework through

which those who work with young people can operate in relation to the church, neither needing to be seen as outside the church nor having to see their work as creating a youth church or congregation. In addition, in contrast to the way that much of the current youth ministry literature deals with the church, the interweaving approach offers a flexibility that neither assumes nor imposes a single, set ecclesiology on the work with young people. Indeed, through the reversal in ecclesiological thought proposed the focus remains on providing places through which young people can be connected with the possibility of Christ. These can then be potential ecclesial spaces as they interweave with other forms of both formal and informal corporate Christian life.

Similarly, if adopted by Fresh Expressions the ecclesiological framework proposed by this thesis releases each missional endeavour from being burdened by expectations that it becomes fully church. This will equip pioneer ministers and others with the flexibility needed to respond to contemporary life and create opportunities for Christ to be presented and met. By recognising that what is considered church can be developed out of an interweaving of activities, groups, congregations and relationships that bring individuals into the reality of Christ, a vision for what the church can be will be enlarged.

These conclusions, whilst offering detailed and appropriate responses to the core research questions, leave some issues open to further research and exploration that might add further insight into the concept of an interweaving ecclesiological approach. Key to further research would be two questions in particular that would effectively widen the research into the ecclesiological ideas at the heart of this thesis:

- Do other forms of youth ministry implicitly operate from a similar approach to the church or is it the missionary origins of Urban Saints that lends itself to this approach?
- To what extent is an interweaving ecclesiological approach also discernible in the current practice of Fresh Expressions?

I find the first of these questions intriguing as the ideas expressed in this thesis have resulted in helpful and interesting conversation when presented at conferences. Indeed the specific concept of an interweaving ecclesiology resonated with other youth ministry

researchers and practitioners from a diverse range of traditions.[951] This anecdotal response suggests further research into this area would prove fruitful. In addition, hints at this kind of approach to the church are evident at times in stories told within youth ministry literature. Take for example Jonny Baker reflecting on his experiences with a ministry called 'Oxygen' in which he describes a 'dynamic network of young Christians spread out as an expression of church'. There was, he says, a 'fluid nature of loyalties and alliances across the churches', but that this did not seem to matter to the young people themselves.[952]

Similarly, in the midst of increasingly downbeat statistics and headlines about the state of local church youth ministry[953] there are signs that some are starting to think more broadly about how to respond. The London diocese, for example, has recently launched 'Capital Youth' as an initiative to revitalise work with young people across London. This strategy will initiate and resource activities across as well as within parish boundaries in a multifaceted vision for how the church engages in evangelism and discipleship of young people.[954] One part of this strategy is a vision to engage young people with existing and fresh expressions of the church. This leads naturally onto the second of these questions.

In this thesis St Aidans Crusaders leaders acknowledged the way that some of the families they worked with were also actively engaged in various Messy Church events in the city. Since Messy Church is a form of Fresh Expression the question naturally arises as to whether there is a similarly operant interweaving ecclesiology happening within Fresh Expressions. Exploring this question would help to discern the extent to which the intention for each fresh expression to become a mature church was being fulfilled, or if in reality the new initiatives were operating in a more fluid, interwoven way. In addition this question might help to further illuminate whether the impact of Fresh Expressions was primarily among those who were not previously involved in church life, or whether they were offering a further context of Christian engagement for those already participating in

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[951] I presented the concept at the 2017 Ecclesiology and Ethnography Conference in Durham.
[952] Jonny Baker, "Youth Ministry Changes More Than You Know," in *Global Youth Ministry: Reaching Adolescents around the World*, ed. Terry Linhart and David Livermore (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2011), 51.
[953] Youthscape, "Losing Heart: How Churches Have Lost Their Confidence in Working with Children and Young People," (The Youthscape Centre For Research, 2016).
[954] https://www.london.anglican.org/mission/youth-ministry/capital-youth/. Accessed 24/10/17

church life. Qualitative research into this question could for example help to build on and illuminate the findings of quantitative research that, although acknowledging a limited sample, refuted the claim that fresh expressions of church primarily attract bored Christians from existing churches.[955] What is missing from this research though is an understanding of the way in which participants interact more broadly or not with the wider life of the church and to what extent Christian faith is stimulated and sustained solely within a particular fresh expression or more fluidly in relation to other events and activities as well.

This thesis then has provided a framework that contributes to understanding the church for youth ministry and that contributes the ongoing Fresh Expressions debate. It also raises further questions that, if explored, could develop this framework further.

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[955] Indeed only 25% of attendees were thought to be churched Christians. "Church Growth Research Report: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions and Church Plants Begun in the Period 1992 - 2012," (Church Army's Research Unit, 2013), 22 - 3.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK

Group Name	St Aidans Crusaders	Urban Saints Hightown
Date of First Visit	7th December 2013	13th December 2013
Name of main group leader	Victoria	Stuart
Group Night Observations (number of occasions and hours)	19 occasions / 40 hours	25 occasions / 65 hours
Leaders' Meetings Observations	4 meetings / 10 hours	4 meetings / 8 hours
Other Observations	'Spree' residential trip / 10 hours Prayer tea / 2 hours	3 x Hightown Christian Centre Sunday morning service visits / 6 hours
Observation totals	72 hours	79 hours
Leader Interviews (detailed below)	5 interviews	6 interviews
Young Person Interviews (detailed below)	4 interviews	6 interviews
Interview totals	9	12

St Aidans Observations Details

Type of Observation	Date of Observation	Notes of interest
Group nights	7/12/13	First observation
	25/1/14	
	15/3/14	
	29/3/14	
	10/5/14	
	7/6/14	Start of 4 weeks of consecutive visits
	14/6/14	
	21/6/14	
	28/6/14	
	13/9/14	Start of new academic year. I was ill for 24 hours before this visit & not at my best
	20/9/14	
	4/10/14	Social trip to Kidsfunzone, plus start of 3 consecutive visits

	11/10/14	
	18/10/14	
	15/11/14	Arrived late due to bad traffic returning from a family event during the day.
	22/11/14	
	29/11/14	Interviewed Timothy after the session
	13/12/14	
	17/1/15	Final observation
Leaders meetings	1/5/14	
	5/6/14	
	4/9/14	
	25/9/14	
'Spree' Residential Trip	5/7/14	Whole day spent with the group. 8am – 6pm
Prayer tea	16/11/14	

St Aidans Interview Details

Name	Role	Date of Interview	Length of Interview	Location of Interview	Notes
Dorothy	Leader	11/8/14	51	Her house	Interview went very well
Peter	Leader	13/8/14	59	His house	Good interview, though Peter seemed a little reluctant to talk at first.
Robert	Leader	21/8/14	44	His house	Good interview
Victoria	Main Leader	12/9/14	61	Her house	Good interview, no problems
Richard	Leader	21/10/14	69	My dining room	Good interview
Timothy	Young Person	29/11/14	31	Victoria's house	No problems.
Helen	Young Person	22/12/14	39	Her house	Good interview
Alison	Young Person	20/4/15	25	Her house	Good interview
Sally	Young Person	20/4/15	46	Café	Good interview

USH Observation Details

Type of Observation	Date of Observation	Notes
Group night	13/12/13	First visit
	17/1/14	

	14/2/14	
	14/3/14	
	2/5/14	Change to format of the group with new timings. I arrived slightly late due to confusion about these changes.
	27/6/14	First of four consecutive visits.
	4/7/14	
	11/7/14	
	18/7/14	
	19/9/14	First session of a new academic yr & start of run of six consecutive visits
	26/9/14	
	3/10/14	
	10/10/14	Interviewed Lucy during free time.
	17/10/14	Interviewed Steve during free time.
	24/10/14	Notes written up ten days after the evening as I was taken ill immediately after the observation and spent the night in hospital before then being away for a week as soon as I had recovered
	7/11/14	First session with a change of main leaders.
	14/11/14	Interviewed Christian during free time.
	28/11/14	
	5/12/14	Interviewed Richard during free time
	12/12/14	
	19/12/14	Winter Ball special event
	9/1/15	Interviewed Robin during free time.
	6/2/15	
	13/2/15	Talent Show Special event
	27/2/15	Interviewed Beth during free time
Leaders Meetings	16/6/14	
	5/9/14	
	2/11/14	First one with new main leaders
	23/11/14	
HCC Sunday morning services	18/1/15	
	25/1/15	
	15/1/15	

USH Interview Details

Name	Role	Date of Interview	Length of Interview (minutes)	Location of Interview	Notes
David	Leader	13/8/14	45	HCC meeting room	Good interview
Judy	Leader	18/8/14	45	Her House	No problems
Stuart	Main Leader	19/8/14	65	Office	Good interview

Andrew	Leader	2/9/14	44	Office	Good interview
Claire	Leader	3/9/14	31	Cafe	Poor quality recording due to lots of background noise in the café she wanted to meet in.
Lucy	Young Person	10/10/14	25 (approx)	During an USH night	First few minutes of interview lost due to corrupted audio file.
Steve	Young Person	17/10/14	22	During an USH night	Not very talkative
Christian	Young Person	14/11/14	25	During an USH night	Good interview
Matt	Urban Saints CEO & founder of USH	3/12/14	61	His office in Urban Saints HQ	No problems
Freddie	Young Person	5/12/14	36	During an USH night	Good interview
Robin	Young Person	9/1/15	29	During an USH night	Good interview
Beth	Young Person	27/2/15	32	During an USH night	Good interview

APPENDIX B – GATEKEEPER PERMISSION

The following are copies of final emails confirming permission to conduct research with each area of Urban Saints.

Matt Summerfield and Trustees

On 20th February 2012 Matt Summerfield wrote:

Hey Mark

Following the Trustee meeting the Trustees have agreed. Can you confirm this is ok and then we're all systems go?

Thanks

Matt

Matt Summerfield
Chief Executive Urban Saints

To the Urban Saints Archive

Hi Mark,

You are more than welcome to poke around whenever you want!! I haven't touched anything for ages so it's probably got even dirtier and dustier than it was before though.

Come whenever you want. The office is open between 9 and 5.30. Let me know when you're coming, if you want, and then if I'm not around, I'll let someone else know to expect you.

Moved house a month ago - now in Northview Road - fairly close to you!
Loving it there.

Jo

Jo Slater
Supporters Director
Urban Saints

Email: jslater@urbansaints.org
Direct Dial: 01582 589833
Urban Saints, Kestin House, 45 Crescent Road, Luton, Beds LU2 0AH.
01582 589850 email@urbansaints.org www.urbansaints.org

St Aidans Crusaders

On 15 Oct 2013, at 10:39, Victoria wrote:

Dear Mark

sorry for my slightly slow reply, life always seems to be full!!

Yes we are happy for us to be involved in your research, though we aren't quite sure what that will involve!

below are the outline of our dates for this term

 Saturday, 14 September – Crusaders restarts at Verulam 6.30-8 p.m.
Saturday 21 September – Crusaders at Verulam
Saturday 28 September – NO CRUSADERS AT VERULAM ... instead 6.30-8 p.m.
meet at: Kidsfunzone, Hatfield, AL10 0AN - £3 per person – Parents to transport
All welcome
Saturdays 5, 12 and 19 October – Crusaders at Verulam as normal
Saturdays 26 October and 2 November – NO CRUSADERS – Half-Term
Saturdays 9, 16 ,23 and 30 November and 7 December – Crusaders at Verulam as normal
Saturday 14 December – Carol singing and food.
     Meet at 129 Charmouth Road, St Aidans, AL1 4SG – 6.30-8 p.m.. Young people and parents welcome

you will see that we generally meet at Verulam School on Saturday nights in term time, and that we do not meet at eg half term
we cater for young people aged 4 to 18
though we have many very faithful young people who come most we weeks we also have a varied and floating population of teenagers, so our number fluctuate wildly varying last year from 30 to 90!!

This term so far we have been in the 30s but it is creeping up

We always have always have leadership challenges!
we also have several children with special needs whose behaviour can be challenging about half are from unchurched families, some families are very needy

we are an old style group with leaders and helpers from 4 or 5 churches in St Aidans
Crusaders in St Aidans in various forms has been running for 98 years and we are still in contact with many former Crusaders and leaders who support us in prayer and financially
We have a prayer tea for supporters twice a year and the next one is on sunday 20 October at 4pm
I have pasted below the prayer letter from 24 September, but things are constantly moving on!

We have leaders meetings on Thursday evenings and the forthcoming meetings are Thursday 24 October, Thursday 21 November and Thursday 9 January
At these we pray, and organise the forthcoming weeks for the group.

You are welcome to come to anything you like ..... but if you come on a Saturday night please do muck in as we need all the adults we can get!!

Personally as a supervisor of PhD students (I am a specialist in plant diseases) I feel that I would like a clear statement of your aims, and to know exactly what methods that you are going to use, and if you are using a questionnaire, I shall be interested to assess how the questionnaires helps

you to meet your objectives

Whilst we are very happy to be involved in your research, I feel very strongly that the normal work of the group must go on, and that the leaders have very full lives and so we do not want to be unduly distracted from our main purpose of reaching, teaching and nurturing young people .

I look forward to hearing from you

Victoria

Urban Saints Hightown

On 11th July 2013 Stuart wrote:

Mark

We've decided not to meet as Urban Saints Hightown leaders team next Monday.
There is frankly too much else going on and it is the end of term anyway.

We will be looking to meet before starting back in late September for training and planning.

Matt and I will keep you in the loop on that and hope you can join us sometime when we do get together.

Stuart

APPENDIX C – ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Evidence of Ethical Approval

I transferred from Kings College London (KCL) to Durham University in January 2015, midway through my studies. Consequently I first received Ethical Approval from KCL on 7/11/13. I had completed almost all my empirical research before transferring to Durham, however on transferring I was required to re-apply and gained ethical approval from Durham as per the email exchange below.

Kings College London Permission

7th November 2013

Mark Scanlan
Department Of Education & Professional Studies

Dear Mark,

REP (EM)/13/14-6 'An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Youth Ministry and the Church Through a Qualitative Study of Three Urban Saints Groups'

I am pleased to inform you that the above application has been reviewed by the E&M Research Ethics Panel that FULL APPROVAL is now granted with the following provisos:

- Information Sheet & Consent Form: Please make the withdrawal dates consistent.

- Consent Form for interviews: Please state that you will be audio recording, with the permission of the participant.

- Consent Form for observation: Please include a statement in relation to observation and note-taking.

For your information ethical approval is granted until 07/11/15. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research (http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/index.php?id=247).

Ethical approval is required to cover the duration of the research study, up to the conclusion of the research. The conclusion of the research is defined as the final date or event detailed in the study description section of your approved application form (usually the end of data collection when all work with human participants will have been completed), not the completion of data analysis or publication of the results. For projects that only involve the further analysis of pre-existing data, approval must cover any period during which the researcher will be accessing or evaluating individual sensitive and/or un-anonymised records. Note that after the point at which ethical approval for your study is no longer required due to the study being complete (as per the above definitions), you will still need to ensure all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed to as part of your application are adhered to and carried out accordingly.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Should you wish to make a modification to the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications: http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/modifications.aspx
The circumstances where modification requests are required include the addition/removal of participant groups, additions/removal/changes to research methods, asking for additional data from participants, extensions to the ethical approval period. Any proposed modifications should only be carried out once full approval for the modification request has been granted.

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chair of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/contact.aspx). We wish you every success with this work.

Yours Sincerely,

Annah Whyton
Research Support Assistant

Durham University Permission

Begin forwarded message:
From: "POUND M.J.P." <m.j.p.pound@durham.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: Ethical approval
Date: 18 May 2015 11:51:40 BST
To: "'Mark Scanlan'" <mark.scanlan77@gmail.com>

Mark,

The Cttee has looked at your form. I am passing it by chairs action (i.e. good to go).

Marcus

Dr Marcus Pound
Assistant Director, Centre for Catholic Studies,
Dept. Theology & Religion
Durham University

Copy of Interview Participant Information Sheets

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Youth Ministry and the Church

I would like to invite you to participate in the next stage of this original 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 investigate the relationship between youth ministry and the church. Through this work I hope to give young people a voice into more academic discussions of what kind of thing the church is.

This project is being carried out in partnership with Urban Saints and will involve me studying two Urban Saints groups through observing what they do and also interviewing a number of young people from each group.

I am now at the stage of my research where I wish to interview some young people to talk with them about the church. If you wish to take part in this aspect of the research you will be required to take part in an interview for approximately 45 minutes during an Urban Saints session this term. The audio of the interview will be recorded and transcribed (written up). In the transcribing you're name will not be used and a pseudonym will be chosen to protect the confidentiality of what you say. Once transcribed the recording of the interview will be deleted and the files containing the written, anonymised, version will be stored as a password protected file on my computer.

By taking part you and other young people who participate will have the opportunity for your voice to be heard through this research. I can also offer you a final copy of the research when it is completed.

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 from the study at any time and without giving a reason before the interview or during the interview and you can ask for any information of yours to be withdrawn from the study up to March 31st 2015.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher using the following contact details: Mark Scanlan, Tel. 07779580442, email: m.c.scanlan@durham.ac.uk

If this study has harmed you in any way, you can contact Durham University using following details for further advice and information: Prof. Peter Ward, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RS, Tel: 0191 334 3500, email: peter.ward@durham.ac.uk

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUTH LEADERS

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

<u>An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Youth Ministry and the Church</u>

I would like to invite you to participate in the next stage of this original 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 investigate the relationship between youth ministry and the church. Through this work I hope to give young people and youth leaders a voice into more academic discussions of what kind of thing the church is.

This project is being carried out in partnership with Urban Saints and will involve me studying two Urban Saints groups through observing what they do and also interviewing a number of leaders and young people from each group.

I am now at the stage of my research where I wish to interview some leaders to talk with them about the group they are involved with. If you wish to take part in this aspect of the research you will be required to take part in an interview for approximately an hour. The audio of the interview will be recorded and transcribed (written up). In the transcribing you're name will not be used and a pseudonym will be chosen to protect the confidentiality of what you say. Once transcribed the recording of the interview will be deleted and the files containing the written, anonymised, version will be stored as a password protected file on my computer.

By taking part you and other leaders who participate will have the opportunity for your voice to be heard through this research. I can also offer you a final copy of the research when it is completed.

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 from the study at any time and without giving a reason before the interview, during the interview and you can ask for any information of yours to be withdrawn from the study up to March 31st 2015.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher using the following contact details: Mark Scanlan, Tel. 07779580442, email: m.c.scanlan@durham.ac.uk

If this study has harmed you in any way, you can contact Durham University using following details for further advice and information: Prof. Peter Ward, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RS, Tel: 0191 334 3500, email: peter.ward@durham.ac.uk

Examples of Anonymised Interview Consent Forms

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.

KING'S College LONDON

Title of Study: <u>An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Youth Ministry and the Church</u>

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: _RoP(SM)/13/14-6_

Thank you for considering taking part in the interview stage of this research. The person organising 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.

Please tick or initial

- 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 March 31st 2015. ☑

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

Participant's Statement:

I _F_____

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.

Signed   Date 11/08/14

Investigator's Statement:

I ____Matt Sich____

Confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the participant.

Signed   Date 11/8/14

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.

KING'S
College
LONDON

Title of Study: <u>An Investigation Into the Relationship Between
Youth Ministry and the Church</u>

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: Ref/em/13/K-6

Thank you for considering taking part in the interview stage of this research. The
person organising 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.

Please tick
or initial

* 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 March 31st 2015.

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

Participant's Statement:

I ___C_____

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.

Signed _____   Date 2/9/14

Investigator's Statement:

I ___MARK Seanew_____

Confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks
(where applicable) of the proposed research to the participant.

Signed M. C. J.~_____ Date 2/9/14

DBS To Work With Young People in Urban Saints

MARK SCANLAN
28 GARRINGDALE
LUTON
BEDS

LU2 7TE

86922101

Enhanced Certificate

Page 1 of 2

Disclosure &
Barring Service

Certificate Number	001424473475
Date of Issue:	05 NOVEMBER 2013

Applicant Personal Details

Surname: SCANLAN

Forename(s): MARK CHRISTOPHER

Other Names: NONE DECLARED

Date of Birth: 17 DECEMBER 1977

Place of Birth: EPPING ESSEX

Gender: MALE

Employment Details

Position applied for:
YOUTH WORKER - CHILD WORKFORCE

Name of Employer:
URBAN SAINTS

Countersignatory Details

Registered Person/Body:
CCPAS

Countersignatory:
VICTORIA WILLATS

Police Records of Convictions, Cautions, Reprimands and Warnings

NONE RECORDED

Information from the list held under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002

NONE RECORDED

DBS Children's Barred List information

NONE RECORDED

DBS Adults' Barred List information

APPENDIX D – INTERVIEWS

Example Interview Questions

Leader Interview Question Outline

Warm up:

- Can I first ask how long have you been involved with [group name]?
- How did you come to be involved?

Main Body:
- *Role of a leader:*
    - o What is involved in being a leader in the group?
    - o Tell me about your church involvement?
        - ▪ How does this involvement relate to your role in {group name}
    - o [How does it work in St Aidans Crusaders to have the leaders coming from a wide range of Church backgrounds?]

- *Purpose of the group*:
    - o Describe [group name] to me?

        - ▪ For you what are the aims / intentions of [group name]?
        - ▪ What role does [group name] play in the lives of the young people?
        - ▪ How would you evaluate how [group name] does in achieving these aims?

- *Relationship of Group*
    - o How does St Aidans Crusaders relate to the wider church and / or Christian scene?
        - • What role does it play in church / Christian life in St Aidans?

    - o What difference does it make for [group name] to be affiliated to Urban Saints locally and nationally?
        - ▪ [What role do you see USH playing in the wider life of HCC?]

- *About the young people:*
    - o What words would you use to describe what {group name} does or provides for the young people?
    - o What happens to the young people once they are over 18?

- *Other possible themes:*
    - o Families
    - o Developing leaders

Cool off:

- As we finish off is there anything that you feel is important to you about [the group] that you haven't yet been able to talk about?

Young Person Interview Question Outline

Warm up

- Tell me how you got involved in your Urban Saints and how long you've been involved?

Main Body

- Describe the group to me? What role does it play, what does it mean to you?

- How would you describe your Christian faith or connection with it?

    o How have you got to where you are in terms of faith?

- Would you describe yourself as being part of a church?
    o What makes you part of it or why not?
    o What would make you part of it?

- Do you ever think of the group as being like church or is church or is a part of church or is separate from church?

- How do the two interact in your life?

- What about Urban Saints nationally?

Cool Off:

- Is there anything else you would like to add or say about Urban Saints / Crusaders that I have missed?

Example Extracts From Interview Transcripts

St Aidans Main Leader – Victoria, 12/9/14

(Paragraphs 25 – 38)

25. Me: Yeah. There's a couple of things in what we've said so far that I'm going to come back to I think. I'm going to go back to your journey, your story Victoria and it seems to be there's a number of different streams or areas that had quite a large influence on shaping your faith – Crusaders

26. Victoria: You asked me about my leadership, not my faith. That's a slightly different story.

27. Me: Ok, well maybe we'll come back to that. The influence on your leadership then: Are there different, have they all worked together in similar or have they had different kinds of influence?

28. Victoria: Several things. I wouldn't exclude bible teaching from some of the churches I have been to from that story in one sense because my biblical teaching has been very strong and I was left in no doubt from the biblical teaching I received at school and also we had bible readings on the beach missions and from the Christi union and the churches I went to in Leicester and Exeter I was left in no doubt that all of us who are Christians, a, have to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us and 2, to quote somebody erm, who I used to do the India Crusoes with, a leader, 'there's a categorical imperative in the bible – go into all the world and preach the gospel'. In other words my leadership has a strong biblical basis that also links back to the fact that I know I am a Christian.

29. Me: Ok, so that touches on…

30. Victoria: Yes, that's interwoven. Erm I think very valuably the different things I've... every organisation I have worked with at various times even dear YWAM, I think has contributed to the way I am now or again to quote John Redfearn (the categorical imperative man) 'in life's rich tapestry every thread has a point and an origin' and I'm… next weekend is going to be interesting because one of the things Urban Saints is asking us to discuss is how is Urban Saints youth ministry distinctive from other youth ministries and my feeling most latterly is that is isn't particularly distinctive and that is another issue altogether. I think it used to be and I think you know some of the things that I think are vitally important now have come from different places in my life. So teaching the bible as it were at all costs is both Scripture Union and Crusaders and to a certain extent churches and my original school and parental background so that's very strong. Getting alongside young people I think to a certain extent is Scripture Union in that I think we were expected to get alongside any young person that came up and they were very good at explaining the things that counted so on the beach we sat with the children that we possibly had in a bible study group or what have you and we as, this is very interesting, we as leaders had to be involved in the children and to take an interest in what was going on, we were not supposed to be distracted and we were certainly not to do our own thing. You know whoever the talk was for we had to be interested. You know none of this 'this is a children's talk I get out my phone' lark - in other words undivided attention. Ok, we were to a certain extent making sure the children we were with were behaving properly and not wandering off inappropriately but I mean interesting in the Crusader context I've had at various times great difficulty in getting modern leaders to realise that when you're doing the bible based bit the leaders and the children need to be the equivalent of round a table or in the circle all together and all involved and all taking the same interest and helping the children find their places in the Bible *[Victoria banged the table here for emphasis]* you are not a leader sitting at the side. Now I think I originally learnt that from Scripture Union. I also think something about follow up I learnt from Scripture Union which also was in the old style Crusader set up where if people missed three or four weeks you went to see their family. Not sure how one modifies that for a modern age but we may have lost something there, I do think there should be a full family involvement which is why we do some family events.

[21:00]

31. Me: And that touches on, earlier you said about the lad who's someone's boyfriend who's four brothers come along to – you said the parents are very committed.

32. Victoria: even though they're not Christians. Exactly.

33. Me: And it seems to me….

34. Victoria: I was amazed when they forked out for them all to go to Spree…

35. Me: Yes,

36. Victoria: 5!

37. Me: And that's not the only example I'm aware of where parents have felt a connection to the group. What do you think it is about the group that maybe wins over parents in that way?

38. Victoria: Interesting question. Number 1, we do try to take a real interest in parents. You know when they come in we do talk, we do ask how things are going, if you know there's a child with a problem or who has been ill or you know a family that's been challenged we try to make contact and that's something, interesting something else, I really have to tell leaders remember to talk to the parents, remember that they're as it were part of the group. I think also, notwithstanding the fact nobody ever wants to give us they're full addresses or fill in the consent form or give us their full email address or any of those other things that wind us up, I think they trust us. Erm, we haven't had… too many difficult incidents with parents, we are aware of some difficult parents and also in some cases we have gone out of our way to help parents. You know I think probably when they've needed it and we can be flexible to an extent though the family invariably used to dump their children an hour or more early on us for events did rather wind me up and when they persuaded us that we should take their four year old away with us and she, as we put her to bed she said if I wake up in the night whose bed shall I get into {laughter}, I thought I don't know if you quite got the right thing. And I mean we do care about parents. We do care about parents. Erm, and in that sense I love the churches that I think follow, er support us fully.

Other St Aidans Leader – Dorothy, 11/8/14

(Paragraphs 35 - 44)

35. Me: Can you unpack a little bit more maybe how you see St Aidans Crusaders relating to the 'everything else' you see going on in the town or the Christian scene if that's the right way of putting it?

36. Dorothy: I'm not totally sure that it connects as much as it maybe could at the moment, I don't know. erm, I think we possibly pick up children who, especially in the younger age groups, just wouldn't have any links with anywhere else. Some of them we pick up through the Marshalwick Baptist Messy Church, which is Julia and co. And I think that's good and I think some of them will ultimately feed in there. For the older ones I'm not so sure. Some

of them are from other churches as well. I think you could potentially push some of them towards thing like the More Café stuff that Matt Palmer does.

37. Me: Oh, ok.

38. Dorothy: I think for some of the older ones that might be appropriate. In one sense it's another strand but I think it's happening in a part of St Aidans where possibly there is not much else. Its interesting the number of kids who will find their way on foot or on bike.

39. Me: So geography is important in that sense.

40. Dorothy: Yes, erm, and I think that if you look at the address list quite of kids are from around there. Er, but I often think that youth work, children's work, youth work in churches and between churches its all bits of jigsaw. In minis we've realised through Rebekah who does the Oysterfields, Spicer Street Oysterfields Monday club, we've got kids in minis who she knows from the Monday club and their Children who other wise have no church involvement, but they're actually getting input from two points and you just never know. I see working with children and young people, as very much as often a jigsaw you are one piece in that jigsaw and you just have to trust that God takes these various bits. Often its stages in their lives or their parents' lives that you are there for and then you will find, I discovered (unfortunately they have now emigrated to South Africa but never mind!) that a family we have in Crusaders who I discovered the mother was good friends with a family in Christchurch and I was exchanging with the lady from Christchurch thoughts and concerns about that particular family. And so we were actually both praying form the various angles. So I think its an interweaving thing and the more connections that you can build the better. Does that make any sense?

41. Me: Yes, it does, it does. I guess in, in…

42. Dorothy: Its cooperative rather than competitive; in cooperation rather than in competition.

43. Me: The image of a piece in the jigsaw is almost a way in which you could describe an aim of St Aidans Crusaders. I'm interested as well, focusing in on St Aidans Crusaders, rather than the city as a whole, how would you describe the aims of St Aidans Crusaders itself as a group?

44. Dorothy: I think, various aims, to actually, I think you are reaching out to as many children and families, interestingly increasingly families as you can. Targeting those who don't really have church connections. And yes I suppose you would really like the children and their parents to come to faith but basically by the way you are with the children and what you do with them you are showing Jesus, if that makes sense.

St Aidans Young Person – Sally, 21/4/15

(Paragraphs 53 – 59)

53. Me: And so, can I ask you in the light of what you've just said I think I might know the answer but I don't want to assume, how would you describe yourself in terms of the Christian faith for yourself?

54. Sally: Erm…. what do you mean…

55. Me: On a simple level would you say of course I'm a Christian or I'm checking things out I'm not sure…

56. Sally: I would say I am a Christian but I'm not the most devoted one out there. Like I find it hard to find time to read my devotions like its this big and its hardly got any words in it but I still find it hard to find the time. But, I and I find it hard to find time to pray but as much as I can I will support the people around me and some situations I'm sitting thinking how the heck do I answer this, I know that if I need to talk someone who I can go talk to they'll help me kind of figure it out and pray about it and stuff and I know who I can go to and I know if I need to I can just go to my mum or my dad. But my faith is definitely stronger since summer I was on team for the first tome at new wine, new wine was like… we went to Kenya for 2 weeks when I was in year 4 and I was annoyed at my parents because they didn't take me to new wine…. it's the cheapest holidays there is but its great. You have 600 kids in a cowshed worshipping God for 6 hours a day its great. The talks are hilarious, some of them are crazy but its I looked forward to it so much, I was meant to go to NGM for the second year running and I thought why did I sign up, because that's what I thought they wanted me to do, so eehhh, my parents lost the deposit and I was on team at new Wine. And I saw this kid go from like erm sitting there with his knees tucked up to his face, head on knees to being a right little cheeky monkey saying come on guys lets listen to Sally, I'm just loving life. And he didn't come to some of the session because we thought we'd be ashamed of him because he'd hit a boy – don't be silly, just say sorry and move on. And the way he grew that week, I still can't believe it. Like, my faith grew as much as his did. I was in a group of 3, usually its two leaders to a group of 14 but we had anywhere between 11 and 16 kids. There was me, the youngest people on the whole team and there was someone else who, I'm tempted to say John who was actually I think on stage the year I was in that group so he's been doing it 6 or 8 years and there was a guy who had social or mental disabilities like wasn't quite with it, didn't quite understand so you really had to be like do this do that I felt really bad at first and the first day or so I thought I don't want to do this, I'm really scared what are the kids going to think of me blah blah by the third day Josh was up on stage and leading me with this fluctuating group of kids like the size of it and I was basically left to lead them and including the day which was flooded, so overnight the pipe burst that was underneath the building which meant the whole floor which was carpet flooded, it stank of cow poo because it was a cow shed and I was left to look after these kids one of whom wasn't drinking enough water and I know personally how bad that it is, erm, and this kid who closed up and then crazy erm, and God really pushed me that week – no, you are a leader, people have been telling you this for years, do it, go and I didn't really have a choice., but it was one of the best weeks and I was pushed out of that and I came back and I was like I can do this. I don't need to read my bible, although it would be wise, every single day. And… just like, although that wasn't a youth group that group made such a difference to me when I came back and I was, I haven't been to St Paul's consistently since yr 6 and that was 5 yrs ago. I only go consistently if I'm on kids work. Youth can make a massive difference because if you don't empower them who is going to become the new leaders.

57. Me: And so in terms of your own faith, you have described a massive impact that New Wine had on you there, what would you say are the main things that Crusader has added to your own faith or your understanding of it?

58. Sally: Crusaders was there when I was about to completely give up. Erm, I wasn't going to church regularly I was pretending to sleep in so my parents would leave me alone, I basically wasn't going out at all, everything was kind of hit rock bottom and then I went to Crusaders and it was my youth group, it was my church for two years. If I didn't have Crusaders I wouldn't still be at church. If it wasn't for Victoria and Anita I've no idea where I'd be, not where I am now.

59. Me: That's incredibly powerful to hear that, it's amazing.

Hightown Main Leader – Stuart, 19/8/14

(Paragraphs 22 – 30)

22. Me: So how would you describe the role that USH plays in relation to those other inputs?

23. Stuart: I think that's erm at the moment I think just recently with USH I think the role perhaps has been defined a little or refined a little perhaps I should say. Er, I think we were in danger with USH of trying to be that first point of contact, maybe, very much the outreach, but also trying to do, maybe trying to reach the other way and do some discipleship and stuff as well and its very hard to do both of those things, erm, not least because while discipleship clearly can happen with more than one person, trying to do it in a room of 40 kids or something, 40 young people, can be more of a challenge. But also discipleship can involve going a bit deeper with things and that's not, its almost two extremes. I think for a while we've been trying to do a bit of both erm but just part of the journey the church has been on, its not an agenda, but it's a way of thing that certainly Matt is encouraging and leading in the church around discipleship and that sort of thing and so, erm, with huddles and hubs and the livelife123 program. Huddles being 2s or 3s and Hubs being kind of like home groups I suppose, the terms that HCC are using. And so with a bit of a move towards more discipleship kind of focus within the church and now in particular a youth hub so, erm, being established that idea that erm… if there are young people who are wanting more of that discipleship role from the church, from HCC, from the leader, from the adults, from the people involved, then there is an avenue for that through which that can now be offered. I think that is enabling the role of USH to go back more to the introduction the outreach, so I think we're redefining the position of USH within HCC as a whole. Erm, again not because set out thinking necessarily that USH had a problem but it was clear at times it was a bit difficult to do both but because of the way the church has, the whole church has moved on, But also there's another youth work on a Sunday morning and various crèche groups and key stage 1, key stage 2 groups and so on. There's a group called apprentice, which is for the same age group as USH, there's curiously very little crossover between the young people that do the two things, nobody's 100% sure why. But again the Sunday morning arguably with apprentice would be less riotous fun and a bit more erm kind of… a bit more obviously exploring faith and that sort of thing. And er, again, so recognizing that there are other avenues through the life of HCC. Yeah, there are there things going on in HCC and the wider family of the church that now can offer some more of that kind of discipleship end of things so that helps us to enable us at USH on a Friday night when get together hopefully to be a little bit more focused on trying to be an outreach, a safe place for somebody, a phrase that has been used here, for whom Jesus is only a swear word, hopefully USH can be somewhere that they can still

come in and hopefully we encourage them not to use Jesus as a swear word when they come in but erm yes, that's a very different level from someone who has just got baptised and is looking for support and prayer and that sort of thing.

24. Me: I guess in describing USH as a safe place…

25. Stuart: I hope it is…

26. Me: You are kind of talking about almost something that USH provides for the young people that come…

27. Stuart: Yeah.

28. Me: Are there others ways in which you would describe what you hope USH provides for young people who come?

29. Stuart: Well, just to stop on that just for a moment. Maybe its not so much of an issue during the summer months but we know that on a Friday night there are, if I talk about 'the lads' instantly you'll have an image of three or four people in your mind and particularly in the winter when its cold and dark and everything else there is a sense of a physically safe place as well as perhaps being somewhere emotionally and spiritually safe as well. We know its somewhere they will come and congregate almost for the sake of having somewhere to go. You know its warmer and hey there might be some food and there's a table tennis table up stairs which is a significant improvement on the multistory care park out the back, it might not be raining in the car park but its not warm, you know, erm and there is definitely that sense and that you know in itself provides its challenges with some of the young people who come in I guess and use it as the fact that church building is open for a few hours and they use it more on that basis rather than anything else and there are challenges with that. Something you've seen and experienced with us. But yeah, you know there's also safe in terms of hopefully not… safe in terms of er… a spiritual sense as well I guess.

30. What else do we hope USH will be? Other than, well fun definitely has to be up there. Its one of Urban Saints kind of values. Its, you think youth work, if you're not thinking fun then you not going to have any youth work are you. I hope we have lots of fun and laughter and again not trying to just read off Urban Saints values here, but the other thing that springs to mind is friendship. Somewhere where friendship grows and develops. For me as a young person USH, another Crusader group, which played a huge part in the friendships and things I had during you know from 15 – 18 or whatever, those teenage years and I'm sure would have done earlier had I gone earlier, I was nearly 15 when I started going to my Crusader group. But erm, massively significant role erm and that was where my peer group kind of came from and I'd love to and again we've got different schools in Hightown so the kids aren't always all day every day in the same place but this is somewhere whether you go to the boys school, girls school or Priory school, you're not wearing a uniform when you come to us so its somewhere they come together and erm again I'm sure its not the only place but its somewhere where I hope those friendships and I'm not talking about trying to pair them all off in boyfriends and girlfriends but genuine friendships can, it's a time and a space where you meet up with those people but also where I hope those friendships are able to grow and again helped by being involved subsequently in other activities whether that's a week in Westbrook or whatever it is. So fun and friendship are definitely things I would hope USH offers and I guess… it almost

sounds like the right answer… but if we're not offering some sense of just er I keep saying an introduction to Christianity or the Christian faith or something but there's got to be just some… it may not even be a formal introduction, you know, 'today we're going to talk about…' but just that sense of some where the young people can… connect, they have got some point of connection with Christians.

Other Hightown Leader – David, 13/8/14

(Paragraphs 1 – 18)

1. Me: David, if you could just begin by telling me a little bit about you first got involved in USH and how long you've been involved?

2. David: Well, I guess I've been doing it for somewhere between four and five years now, I couldn't tell you exactly. It was almost by accident I got involved with the group. I was living in Hightown for about three or four years having moved here for work and I guess I was looking for a way to connect with the community make new friends that sort of thing. When I was younger I used to go to a Methodist youth group over in Dunstable and I remember it being fun and really interesting and I remember getting on with the leaders really well and I thought well maybe that is good place to start to connect. I mean I'd been to Sunday school a lot when I was younger and that sort of thing but since I started working and then subsequently university I kind of drifted a little bit in my faith I suppose and I was just looking through various options I looked at youth groups more generally, I looked at St John's Ambulance, I looked at cubs, scouts that sort of thing. But I just felt something about this church I suppose, modern it appealed to me. I'd actually walked past several times and seen kids, a group of kids outside and thought wow, what is that. So I sent a speculative email to the website and ended up having a chat with Gary (who's no longer a leader here but was a leader here), had a chat with him erm and then it ended up with me being invited along to check it out one evening and then it sort of gone from there.

3. Me: Ok, so you got involved in USH on a Friday night before being involved in the wider life of the church?

4. David: Yes, I didn't really come to church at all. That was almost my way in and it's been a bit of a journey. I never planned it this way, you know as my involvement with USH has grown so I found myself drawn into the church, come regularly on Sundays and have made some really great friends through the group and church in general. Its kind of all gone through USH really. In a way I have to say I felt you know I've never been someone who's mad keen on worship I'm not a great singer you know, whilst I enjoy some of the songs its never been the best for me. What USH gave me the opportunity to do was to feel involved and it was through feeling involved and through doing something I suddenly felt connected to God again in a way that I don't think I'd ever done up that point and that sort of brought me in and as a result of that involvement I think I've enjoyed church a lot more in general.

5. Me: Yeah, and can you unpack a little bit more if you can that phrase about feeling connected to God more through being a part of or being involved?

6. David: I suppose, whenever I used to go to church when I was younger it felt very one way – I was being preached to all the time I was hearing about reading the bible that sort of thing but it all seemed to be coming to me, I wasn't really doing anything with that. Erm, and maybe I didn't have the knowledge to do anything with it and that's grown as well but I never felt like I was doing God's work I guess I just felt like I was sort of attending you know.

7. Me: yeah, yes.

8. David: And whilst it didn't… without… you know I did find it quite difficult in the beginning, it can be very intimidating coming into an environment like USH with this many young people, and we used to have far more when I started before we made decisions that sort of narrowed our numbers somewhat it was very intimidating actually. But as I've grown up and I've found my role and I can sort of bring the gifts I've been given and bring them into this arena and do things for the group and even if its not directly preaching to the young people or that sort of thing I have contributed to enabling that be it though the tech side or special events, ort of drawing people to us and that sort of thing and whilst my role has not necessarily been standing up the front saying 'how does the bible relate to the sort of thing that young people are into these days my role has sort of been in the background in comparison I have nevertheless felt like I am contributing to these young peoples understanding of God and Christianity as a whole, erm, that's what being involved means to me, it means being able to communicate that and just generally have the opportunity to influence their lives I suppose.

Hightown Young Person – Robin, 9/1/15

(Paragraphs 15 – 22)

15. Me: And over the years you have been involved those kind of 5 or 6 years or so. What for you are the most important things about USH, the things that have made you, meant that's why you have been coming back? And maybe they have changed over time a few of them but they are the things that have kept you coming along?

16. Robin: Well I never really had much to do on a Friday night and it gave me a reason to go and do something I enjoyed because otherwise I would just sort of be at home doing nothing. You get bored with it after a while and it was a break from the normal and you got a chance to meet new people and have fun make new friends and like when you had troubles you couldn't talk to people at school because I didn't feel comfortable talking to teachers but you could talk to people here and trust them more because they sat down and actually took the time to get to know you and I think its just sort of friends really more than anything that kept me coming back that's one of the best things about USH – it gives you friends for life.

17. Me: Ok, tell me a bit more about that aspect of giving you friends for life – so it was friends who invited you and you're talking about making new friends?

18. Robin: Yeah, I've mad loads of friends here over the years. And I've stayed in contact with them even if they've stopped coming to USH so yeah, made hundreds of friends

since I've been here like. Because so many people have been coming and going you just meet so many people and…

19. Me: Is it an easy place to make friends then do you think?

20. Robin: Erm, it kind of is because of the situations you're put in like when you're doing activities and that you start to talk to other people and see their opinions on what things are and then it just sort of falls in naturally and you just start talking to them and it builds friendship over a couple of weeks and then a couple of weeks time you are talking to them as if you have known them for like a year. It is quite easy to make friends unless obviously you first come here on your own without other people because I know a couple of people that have come here like someone has suggested it and they wouldn't go with them so they have come in on their own and it is a bit awkward because they don't know anyone whereas if you come with your friends you know at least you've got sort of someone to talk to even if you don't make friends in the first couple of weeks. Yeah, it does make good friends. I do think it was quite easy to make friends really.

21. Me: And er, you also mentioned about saying that there were people her you could talk to about stuff if you didn't feel you could to talk people at school what is it about USH that makes it somewhere where you feel comfortable talking about stuff when you don't at school?

22. Robin: Its just with the teachers they, you can't really sit down and have a conversation with them without them having to get other teachers involved and they talk about it. I mean when I had some troubles I spoke to a teacher about it a completely different teacher who I'd never even spoke to approached me about it and saying about it and you think right, and it wasn't nothing serious and I understand with USH they say if it is something serious they might need to tell someone else and I do understand that but its just like with stuff that wasn't that serious they had gone round and talked about it but here like the leaders sort of took the time to get to know you and spend tome with you and sort of built up a friendship whereas at school its just a teacher. And so like the leaders actually made an effort so I felt comfortable talking to them more than all the teachers.

Urban Saints CEO – Matt Summerfield, 3/12/14

(Paragraphs 34 – 41)

34. Me: Yeah, I want to, you touched on some of this but I want to get even more concrete – in terms of USH on a Friday night what kind of impact negative or positive if either the church link or the Urban Saints link wasn't there? If either it was a church based run youth group, or it was an independent group run by Urban Saints?

35. Matt: Great question, great question. So I think if it was disconnected from the church that would have a big impact because I think we really are trying, we're on a journey and that journey is about…

36. Me: On a journey as a church or as the youth group…

37. Matt: Errr yes as a church but I am talking on a journey with these young people. So that journey is young people have absolutely no faith becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus but in the life of the community of faith. I don't mean that's bums on seats on a Sunday morning but it would include that potentially but ultimately they feel part this is my family. And you know thinking that church is the family of God on the mission of God this is my family. And that they are playing their part within that. So its wonderful seeing Lucy up on Sunday being part of the worship team. Or Tad or Keira his sister serving in the host team. We've got young people involved in the kids work or serving on coffee or whatever – this is my family, I'm serving my family and stuff. And so, I think that would be much harder if we just this completely independent group and because we are within church, then we can be intentionally and really strategic about that you know ok guys its part of the blessing of my pastoral role that ok guys so Robert what are you going to do are you going to serve on the video team great, will you are going to serve on the video team and we see these guys getting plugged in and making a difference. So my perception would be that would be tougher a lot tougher if we were independent. In terms of the Urban Saints thing erm much less so much less so and essentially there are two types of links you can have as you know and we have a deep Urban Saints link because we are paying for energize, we're using energize and all that kind of stuff and then we tap into stuff now on one level we could stop using energize keep recycling all of our stuff but still everything that Urban Saints avails itself to us we could still go on erm and so for me that's a philosophy do you decide to do everything yourself, run all our own residentials, run all our own missions, write our own material which I think is unwise, why do that erm and so I think for me the loss, and it would still be a loss, it's the loss of how great it was to see our young people connecting with a whole bunch of other people at Westbrook this year because they came on a Westbrook holiday and they had this building friendships and that's good for them developing other things or coming on a Rebuild or… we could never pull off a rebuild. You know to know that they are mixing with a 100, 150 other young people but also knowing that we do want to take them away by themselves and do something by themselves so I would say what we would miss with Urban Saints, or similar, could be YFC or something like that is the richness of having an experience we could never provide ourselves which is the experience of you know building a house erm but more the dynamic of being with other Christians and getting a bigger sense of kind of the kingdom stuff. If I had to choose, if someone said you can either stick with Urban Saints or the church then I would choose Church every time because the goal is not to build a loyalty ultimately to Urban Saints it is to see these young people feel part of a family of faith.

38. Me: So that ties in one of the questions I was going to follow on with – what do you hope the young people identify most with in terms of belonging?

39. Matt: That would be HCC, definitely, or a church. A church. I've got no problem if a young person comes to Urban Saints and then go on to be part of Christchurch that's fine you know but they feel these are my family I love being here we're all in this together. Definitely so.

40. Me: Do you think there is, the strength of that local church link, is there any risk of that that USH drifts towards being less outreach focused and more club for the church kids focus – is that a risk or do you not see that, is the heart ingrained enough in it?

41. Matt: There's always a risk, but I think it's a low risk because I think we see these midweek things as really trying to be outreach and even I see Sunday mornings as being very blurred

now to be honest, I don't just mean in our church but in every church. The difference on Friday nights is that generally you have a group of young people, Christian or otherwise, who want to be there, most Sunday mornings you have children or young people who their parents have brought them and they less want to be there so from that point of view both are missional, so there's a whole bunch of children and young people who will rock up on a Sunday morning to church and they are part of Christian families but they are not Christians and er there's a missional challenge there but there is a bias with the Sunday morning stuff is more disciple making oriented and we have to ask ourselves and pause now and again and say ok are we dealing with what we should be dealing with here and stuff but I think that is ingrained into the heart of what this about and I think if we ended up with just a club just for nice kids and stuff and you'll know we are in quite a moment with Urban Saints you know we used to have again we need to see a whole bunch of new people connecting, we're in that bit of this cycle.

APPENDIX E – EXAMPLE OBSERVATION NOTES

Extracts From St Aidans Observations

St Aidans Group Night Observation, 20/9/14

(Paragraphs 5 – 28)

5. The session begins with Victoria handing out bits of paper and pens and asking the young people to list the things that they couldn't live without – what are you 'obsessed' with she asks. She says that she won't say what do you worship but that is clearly the emphasis she is trying to get at.

6. As this is beginning Martin arrives after a bit of conversation and looking out of the window and the door in expectation of his arrival as Helen thinks he saw his brothers going past to their younger age group.

7. All the young people are engaged in writing their lists of things that are important too them.

8. Another short while into this exercise Timothy and Sally arrive and join in. The exercise is explained to the newcomers and Timothy seeks to clarify whether he can include people in his list –Victoria says that yes he can.

9. After a few minutes more of list writing Victoria goes round asking the young people to share some stuff from their lists. All of them are happy to talk about what they have put down and their answers range from things like chocolate to phones to family members.

10. After a bit of further discussion about the lists Victoria hands out the bibles and asks everyone to turn to Zephaniah. This is the last part of a series looking at the 'little books at the back of the Old Testament.' Victoria gives a page number to help the young people find their place. Despite this I need to help Martin find the page in the bible. He is confused between Zephaniah and Zechariah.

11. Victoria begins with an introduction to the book which explains where in history the book comes from and this sparks a discussion about King Josiah and a look back at this story in the book of Kings. Victoria is very keen that the young people know something of the context of sections of the bible. A good five minutes is spent flicking through the story of Joisah. The young people seem struck by how young Josiah was when he became King.

12. As part of this look at the context of the story of Josiah Victoria asks what is it they were doing that God didn't like? This leads to discussion on idols and worship of Baal in the Old Testament. The young people are all interested in this.

13. At this point I become aware of noise in the corridor as some of the younger groups have obviously finished their study and are now on free time. The noise seems not to disturb or distract the seniors at all. Even when a remote control car is banging into the door or a child is looking through they keep well on task. There is only a break in the focus when a remote control car actually pushes the door open and comes into the room! There is

laughter at this point and one of the leaders outside comes in and takes the car out before closing the door again.

14. Victoria takes the young people through Zephaniah a section at a time. Looking at what the Israelites were doing wrong and the call of Zephaniah for them to turn back to God. There is much interaction in this as Victoria helps the young people draw the themes out for themselves rather than just telling them what to think. This includes a reminder about 'repentance' that was looked at the previous week.

15. Timothy offers the definition that repentance means 'not just saying sorry but also turning toward God.'

16. Victoria also emphasizes that chapter 3 includes a call to justice.

17. Victoria asks them to give a summary of what the book is about. Helen does this and Sally and Timothy join in.

18. Then Victoria asks what the link is between this and the lists they had preciously written and discussed? Martin, who had been quite quiet during the bible study to this point, answers with the question: 'Who should be over our lists?' Victoria responses by asking 'is God our addiction?'

19. She then seeks to illustrate this with a model man that she has. An artist friend of hers who stayed with her a while ago made this model man and she goes into quite some detail about how it was made and the other things her friend did.

20. This is all about putting God first and that this will allow you to 'stand straight'.

21. Alison, who is often quiet, hasn't been saying much and is making an origami shape out of her paper napkin whilst Victoria is talking. I am not sure if this is a sign of boredom or not but as I watch I think that she is still paying attention and interested.

22. Victoria is still talking but drawing to a close by explaining the role of the bible, prayer and ? to encourage the young people to learn what God is thinking. The point is a challenge about how much time they spend with the things on their list and how much they devote to God.

23. There is a challenge to give some time every day; Victoria thinks it is best in the morning.

24. She asks if any of them do read the bible in their own time – only Sally answers as she is trying to regularly read a new devotion book that she read recently.

25. The session finishes with prayer in which Victoria prays that God will give us a thirst for the bible.

26. It is then time for the social stuff to begin.

27. Having not done it for a while I decide to head over to the sports hall during social time. There is the usual mixed age game of football going on and Timothy and Martin join in with this. I watch and chat to Geoff whilst also playing a little bit of basketball with the

some of the others who drift in and out, There is quite a lot of drifting in and out of the game whilst a core of people stay and play the whole 45 minutes of football.

28. I notice that there is little time taken to try and engage these drifting young people and they are left to their own devices very much.

St Aidans Group Night Observation 11/10/14

(Paragraphs 1 – 12)

Pre-Session:

1. As I arrive I find myself wondering if I will see anything new as it feels as though I am reaching saturation point where nothing new is coming to light regarding my research questions. I am however aware that as I am forming some ideas of where my research is going I may be unintentionally focusing on looking for more examples of these things rather than continuing to diligently look for new things in the group that I have yet to see.

2. I walk up to the entrance and the usual doormen (Brian and Ian) are there to check in the young people and to welcome parents. It strikes me (as amusing!) that Brian, this 60 something man who often isn't too polite about the young people, is wearing three-quarter length trousers with regular grey socks and smart black leather shoes. I note this, as it again reminds me of the slightly old-fashioned and certainly un-cool, not trendy, nature of the group and its leaders. In many ways it is the antithesis of how the church and Christian adults think that activities for kids and young people needs to be. I reflect that in an odd, unexpected way the St Aidans group is counter cultural – counter church culture and contemporary culture

The Session:

3. It appears that I am a little late today as the seniors have already begun and the two new young people have joined are there playing with some mini indoor carpet bowls. Victoria welcomes me and I comment that I have exactly the same set of bowls, as they were something I used to play at my Grandparents house when I was a boy and I asked to have them by way of a keepsake when they had to move out of their house. Initially it is only the two new girls who are playing together and then Timothy arrives. I note that I had seen him making his way along the road as I drove in but he was too close for me to feel that I should offer him a lift.

4. As Timothy joins in the game Victoria mentions that she hadn't ever come across the book that I had emailed her about in relation to her devotion at the recent leaders meeting.

5. It appears as if the three seniors are all there will be – there is talk of Hannah being on a DofE expedition and that this might mean Max doesn't come. There is no mention of whether Linda, Ruth and Esther might be coming.

6. To help make the numbers even I join in with an initial activity of building walls with jenga type blocks around a doll. Each block has a piece of paper stuck to it with a phrase that outlines some kind of what Victoria calls a 'minor sin'.

7. Once the walls are built she asks what the bowls and the wall building might have to do with each other or to do with a theme – she teases out that the bowls was about aiming for something and more often than not missing while the walls were all little things that we might think are ok but in reality are still sin. She explains that we all miss God's standards and that we are going to look at sin and forgiveness tonight.

8. The young people come and sit down around the table and Victoria hands out the bibles and opens a tin of homemade cakes (I note again that cake-making is not Victoria's gift!). Just before the bible study begins Ruth comes in and Victoria is delighted to see her. Victoria does say that she has missed the games but I add not the cakes. As Ruth sits down Victoria takes a minute or two to ask how she is doing. The well being of the young people is always central to Victoria's thoughts.

9. Once Victoria has had a brief chat with Ruth about how she is doing we turn back to the bibles. The focus is on the story of David and Bathsheba and Victoria asks the young people to find it, and then asks if anyone is willing to read. It takes a while to sort out but actually all the young people are prepared to read a section. I read a bit too. The young people themselves handling the bible is a key part of the bible focus for Victoria. This is in stark contrast to USH who never have bibles themselves.

10. The passage is read and Victoria commends the young people for reading it well. She then takes them through the story in some detail and then cross references it with Psalm 51. The young people are encouraged to draw out the various ways in which David sinned. Victoria points to both the consequence of sin but also the forgiveness that God offers through confession and repentance. There is no changing the consequence of the sin but our relation ship with God can be restored. Victoria demonstrates this through the story of David and Bathsheba's first son dying and then God blessing them with another son, Solomon, who would be the next king.

11. Victoria then gives me a few minutes in which to talk to the young people about my plans to interview some of them. They are receptive to this.

12. The two new girls and Timothy then go to free time – Timothy is eager to play football. However Sally stays in the classroom with Victoria and they begin to chat. It seems almost a pre-arranged catch up as if they knew it was going to happen but I do not know if this was the case. Either way they seem soon in quite deep conversation as I leave and head into the craft room where I am intrigued to see what Peter is doing for his craft.

St Aidans Leaders Meeting Observation, 25/9/14

(Paragraphs 1 – 14)

Pre-Meeting

3. Victoria opens the door for me and is pleased to see me. Robert had just asked her who else was coming and she was beginning to answer the question. At this stage only Robert and Victoria are there. There is some talk of who else might be around and it seems as if only Dorothy is expected.

4. Conversation flows and centres around involvement with a couple of missionary families. Robert is involved helping a Czech family settle into St Aidans. They are here on placement at Spicer Street whilst also studying theology at Cornhill College in London. Victoria and Dorothy however are involved with a man called Andrew who is a CMS missionary over here from South America somewhere. They are not happy with the schedule CMS have given him for his trip.

5. There is also conversation about 'A Rocha' being involved in a parliamentary debate and also that retired Bishop James Jones is involved. Victoria was at Exeter University at the same time as James Jones.

6. Robert also asks Dorothy if she received an email about needing to re-do her dbs check.

7. It becomes clear that no other leaders are coming and that the meeting should begin.

The Meeting

8. Victoria begins the meeting by reflecting on a cover sheet that was with the local paper. It purported to list the 100 most influential people in history and names Mohammed first and Jesus only 3rd. Victoria says her feeling on this was that this is the fault of Christians. *[It crosses my mind that this reflects something of this sense of Christians and churches not doing their role properly is part of the narrative of Crusaders; part of their sustaining rationale.]* Dorothy responds by clarifying that this was a funded Islamic 'advertisement' offering free Korans.

9. Victoria the starts with a short devotion based on Luke 24 and the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. She says that she was reading it recently and picked up on several parallels between the passage and the role of Crusaders and the leaders within Crusaders. She makes a number of these comparisons:
    a. Jesus came alongside the disciples who didn't realise anything special was going on. The leaders need to come alongside the young people.
    b. He started where they are – 'that's what we need to do'.
    c. Jesus explained everything – we need to cover the whole of the bible.
    d. The importance of different setting to recognizing Jesus. The disciples saw who he was in the house; this is similar to getting the young people to Spree or somewhere similar.
    e. The work of God is vital in opening their eyes / hearts.
    f. They then went and told others – we need to invite people. No one comes who hasn't been told about Crusaders. Dorothy adds that this is true of the parents too – sometimes parents bring other people's children with them.

10. I am struck by the similarities to this devotion and the theory in the book in *Accompanying.*

11. Victoria then prays before moving into the business part of the meeting.

12. The next section is based round the 'grid'. This is the regular part of ensuring that all of the groups and activities are covered over the next few weeks. Even though there are only 3 leaders there they still fill out the whole grid based on what they know of the other leaders availability.

13. Once the grid is filled out Victoria goes through a few bits and pieces. She is short on data-sheets that new members of Crusaders need to fill in. The ones they've got are out of date and there are not many left. It is clear that Dorothy produces these and is surprised at how out of date they are.

14. Following this Victoria talks through a sheet that she got from Urban Saints head office (although she only refers to it as 'Luton' – *This Intrigues me by the lack of use of phrases like HQ, Head Office, Urban Saints, Kestin House etc etc.*). This sheet is a list of the St Aidans registered leaders held by the head office team. This list is also out of date and needs updating but there is also conversation about the many different categories of leader and what they mean. This leads to a wide ranging conversation about what the system is now and Victoria shares that she came across a region which is still doing interviews for 'elected leaders' (an old fashioned Crusader term) and she didn't know this was still being done. There are about 5 different categories on the sheet she has. Robert suggests that they can be updated on the energize website but there is some sneering about the website with the phrase 'apparently' the site is better now.

Extracts From Hightown Observations

Urban Saints Hightown Group Night Observation, 17/1/14

(Paragraphs 1 – 7)

1. I arrived for my second observation at almost exactly 8pm on a chilly but dry Friday evening in January. I pull into the car park of Hightown Christian Centre and park the car, turning off the engine I stay in the car for a few minutes to gather my thoughts and prepare for the evening's observations to come. As I am doing this and reminding myself of the key things that I am looking for throughout the evening I notice three lads running about and playing in the car park. As they run about and between the cars one of them run past my window and looks at me with a quizzical expression on his face. The group I am observing tonight starts at about 8:15pm, with a period of free time for the young people before the structured part of the evening begins at 8:30pm.

2. At around 8:05pm I get out of the car and walk over to the front door and am let in by a leader, who then makes a point of keeping the three lads outside until it is the right time for them to come in. Inside the building the earlier (younger) group is coming down from some free time for a final summing up time altogether in the main room of the church. When all the younger ones are downstairs the tie is right for the three lads to come in for the older group. Many of the young people who make up the group I am here to observe are already inside as they are 'emerging leaders' and thus help out with the younger age group. Stuart, the main leader, is in with the younger group finishing off their evening.

3. The evening for the older group begins with free time. This means they have free run of the building, except for the main room where the younger ones are currently finishing up. Upstairs there is a games room with a pool table and table tennis available; there is also an upper room with seats to relax in. As they come in there is an opening activity that the young people are able to do – it is a sheet with various things to find out about other people. This seems to be aimed at getting the young people to mix and chat to each other

as they come in, but no one seems to be enforcing it or too bothered if they don't do it. It will not be mentioned again in the evening and as such it doesn't matter if the young people do it or not. In fact there is no incentive to carry out the task.

4. Some of the young people begin to do this but most quickly lose interest. The three lads who had been out in the car park lose interest in it quicker than most! There are leaders dotted around the building – in particular are 2 at the table near the entrance where the young people need to sign in and one who is upstairs in the games area. Others seem to float around and chat to each other leaving the young people up to their own things.

5. A few minutes after the three lads had arrived, having given up on the get to know people activity they went straight upstairs to the games room. Shortly after the (female) leader from upstairs comes down and is clearly not happy – the lads are messing about with the pool cues and table tennis stuff. According to her someone needs to shadow these lads to keep them from doing these kind of things. I am the first adult she sees and so she focuses on me and asks me to do this. As she is talking two of the lads come down and so I try to engage them I conversation asking them their names and we talk about football for a little bit. This seems to calm them down until it is time to go into the main room for the next section of the evening. This is half an hour for notices, maybe an icebreaker and some initial bible study.

6. We all go in to the main room and the chairs, as is the custom, have been cleared. The young people each take a chair and sit in a horseshoe shape around the room. There is background music playing and images on the big screen with the main notices scrolling through.

7. There are 22 young people present. One of the young people is draped at the edge of the stage and scribbling notes to himself but the leaders seem to not be bothered by this. Stuart kicks of the evening with a welcome and some notices. Key among these notices are the 3rd annual USH talent show which is in a few week's time and the beginning of youth alpha that coming Sunday evening. Youth alpha seems to be a chance for the young people to demonstrate that they are interest in taking faith more seriously and connecting them with the church given that it takes place at the same time as the adult version. The fact that Alpha starts with a free meal is emphasized a number of times.

Urban Saints Hightown Group Night Observation, 27/6/14

(Paragraphs 12 – 29)

12. As the evening starts properly two of the emerging leaders, Verity and ?, lead an opening game which appears to be purely for fun. There are 14 young people here at this point and they are all stood along the back wall while Verity welcomes them and confidently explains the game.

13. The game consists of putting a toilet paper tail tucked into your trousers and then pairing up with someone and, whilst holding their hands, trying to be the first to get the toilet paper from your partner.

Everyone, leaders included, throw themselves into this silly game enthusiastically and there are different rounds where siblings take each other on.

14. Some young people arrive in the middle of this but are encouraged in and are soon taking part too. By the end of this opening game I count 22 young people.

15. The next game is designed to begin to introduce the theme for the evening. It involves getting into groups and going round the room to find photos of famous people, naming the person. They get into groups well and seem to mix across ages nicely without encouragement and are all well engaged in the activity.

16. After 5 minutes they come back to the middle of the room and go through the answers. There is no real competitive element to this at all and the point is drawn out when David (who is leading the activity) asks what they all have in common – the answer is that they are all dead.

17. There is then a short talk – no matter how talented, or clever, or famous we will all die. Only Jesus has beaten (or cheated) death.

18. Judy gets up to build on this but struggles to be heard, as there is now a lot of background noise with the music on and general chat. She decides not to start until the young people are quiet. This only takes a minute or so and then she asks them to get into 5 groups. This is to do a jigsaw made up from a cut up A4cpicture. The twist is that there is piece missing. There is meant to be link from this to talking about the resurrection as the significant part of the Christian faith but this point is not made so when Judy starts to talk about this from a scripture passage it seems like a strange jump from the jigsaw.

19. In the middle of this little talk she refers regularly to Jesus having cheated death and also has a bit of time where she asks the young people to feedback from the bible passage (which is up on the big screen). Strangely she conspicuously avoids going to Freddie who has his hand up to speak. Eventually she does and he makes a perfectly valid point.

20. UFO video – do we believe it, does it matter? What about Jesus resurrection – do we believe it, does it matter.

21. Stuart moves into a time of reflection with the young people lying on the floor while some relaxing music plays and he leads them through thinking about the resurrection. All, including all the leaders join in with this. Young people are well engaged in this (it appears that some of them have been asking for some of this kind of time).

22. "We believe that the stuff about Jesus is important; we believe that his life is important; that his death is important; his resurrection is important."

23. Stuart then leads through the words on the session plan at this point. It is interesting to see the young people staying with this for so long.

24. Stuart finishes this reflection with a prayer that is in effect a challenge to each individual to respond to the resurrection.

25. Then it is into free time and the leaders and young spread out around upstairs and play the various games etc. Most of the young people are great at mixing and playing together; the

few younger and much smaller ones seem unperturbed by mixing with the older ones – who for their part are perfectly at home with the younger ones.

26. I find myself drawn into a game of giant jenga with a couple of the girls.

27. Interestingly, Stuart only appears sporadically during the free time and spends the majority of the time downstairs on his own or with one or two others. However at 9pm, as per the plan, free time is ended and the young people come down to be organised into small groups.

28. Stuart sends the yr11s and over back upstairs with 3 leaders and me to form 2 small groups, It takes a while for them to work out who is going to go where but then we get down to group time. I am in a group that includes Arthur. Judy is leading the group and simply asks if anyone has any questions about the session or theme from tonight.

29. Arthur speaks up first to ask a question about going back in time to save Jesus and would do it if we could. I find this a very annoying question, as the premise of it is impossible so there is no point talking about it and as such I speak more than I should, or would, normally. Trying to get the subject back onto more helpful reflections on the resurrection. However Arthur is not to be perturbed and soon the group is talking about time travel. Well I say the group but almost all of them don't say anything. Arthur states that he is not a Christian.

Urban Saints Hightown Leaders Meeting Observation, 5/9/14

(Paragraphs 1 – 12)

1. This is the main meeting for the leaders of USH before the new school year starts and as such represents a running through of the plans as well as a chance for the aims and hopes for the year to be talked through.

2. The meeting also included a time for reflection over the past year.

3. The meeting is planned to start at 7pm and from emails I know that some of the leaders will be coming straight from work so pizza has been planned so that folk can eat as they talk.

4. I arrive a few minutes before 7pm and although the car park is fairly full as I walk into the church building where the meeting is being held I see only Stuart and Judy. Stuart is on his laptop and Judy is talking to him.

5. The conversation is being initiated by Judy and is about how to do better at encouraging people from the church to step up and offer their time as leaders. Judy is suggesting that she talks about what being a leader brings to her as a way of demonstrating the benefits of volunteering. As I come in she references my interview with her and how it made her think of her role as a leader in a different way and that these benefits were things that she had not previously thought about.

6. I find it interesting that in this, what I would consider an important conversation, Stuart is quite disengaged and spends his time looking at his computer trying to do something on that.

7. Whilst this is going on Lucy a young leader arrives and sits down and then David comes down from upstairs and takes a seat.

8. Shortly after this and just after 7pm the pizza arrives.

9. Stuart then notices a car turning into the car park and recognizes it as Matt Summerfield's and says that Matt is just parking his car. Matt is the senior pastor of HCC, the Chief Exec' of Urban Saints and the founder of USH (although he hasn't been involved on any of the nights that I have been there over the past 8 months.

10. Matt greets me warmly and is pleased to see me (he didn't know I was going to be there). This is actually the first time I have seen him since the start of my research with Urban Saints.

11. As the meeting is beginning there are the following people there:

12. Stuart, Lucy (an emerging leader), Claire, Matt S, David M, Judy and Laura (I hadn't met Laura before and it turns out that she had been a leader before taking a year off and now looking to return to leadership).

Hightown Christian Centre Sunday Morning Observation, 25/1/15

(Paragraphs 1 – 11)

1. This is the second of my visits to the morning service of HCC to see how the young people from USH interact. I am particularly interested this coming Sunday as I am aware that Matt Summerfield is beginning a new teaching series on the Father heart of God which, from my interview with him, I know is connected to his heart to see church as family and to raise up spiritual parents for the young people. This is tied into his whole vision for Urban Saints and youth leadership.

2. As I arrive, and this week park in the regular HCC car park rather than on the other side of town, I notice again the team of volunteers with red 'Hi' T-shirts on to welcome folk to the service. Upon entering the building I see Kerry is wearing one of the Hi t-shirts this week and is on one of the doors from the foyer into the main auditorium.

3. I go in and take a seat towards the edge and realise that I am earlier than I was last week as there are a lot of free seats. After a few minutes a family come and sit on the same as row as me in the seats next to me and immediately say hi and introduce themselves. A few minutes later a guy who had left his bag at the end of the row returns and similarly says hi and introduces himself. This does seem to be a church where there is a culture of friendliness and welcome.

4. The service starts as usual with a few songs led from the front and I notice that the worship team seems to be entirely different from the previous week. I also look around to see which young people I can spot. I see pretty much the same ones as last week – Steve, Rachel, Anne, Dee, Michael (who is upstairs) and also this week I see one of the younger girls who's name I can't remember. As with last week they all seem to be joining in with the singing as far as I can tell. I noted that I couldn't see Christian but also that he may have been in a section of the balcony that I couldn't see. It turns out he was there, arriving just as the service started and I chatted to him afterwards.

5. Also among the congregation I notice Claire, May, Laura, David (on sound desk once again) and Deborah. Among the folk singing is Helen who I think came to one leader's meeting but this didn't follow through.

6. After a couple of songs Matt steps up to give a welcome and to share a couple of bits of information and church news. He starts though by saying that this is first time 'in church' for about four weeks. He jokes that he has been checking out others churches but also says it is good to be 'home.' Church here is described as something that happens in a particular time and place but also somewhere that is home.

7. After this there are a few items each of which are presented as items for prayer – the items are a dedication of two children, a missionary couple returning to Moldova (with an invitation to folk to join them as part of a short term trip later in the year) and Matt also shares the story of a family from the church who have had a family member tragically die in a car crash.

8. Further to this there is a plug for the USH talent show coming up and Matt wants to see the church building full for this. USH is described as a youth group that meets on a Friday night.

9. After these news / prayer / notice items there are a few more songs before Matt speaks. During these songs it is announced that it is time for the crèche and 'Apprentice' groups to go out. I see some young people go out but none of them seem to be the USH ones. After a few minutes however I see the return back to their seats. It seems that apprentice isn't happening for them this morning.

10. Matt's talk is entitled BeLoved. He starts with a reference to Finding Nemo and the story of a Father stopping at nothing to find his son. If the Bible had a strapline it could be 'The Father Fights For Family'.

11. He references his 27 years in youth ministry and says that often the question young people ask on camps etc is 'Why did God create us?' Matt answers this by saying that God wants a family. He links this to the theology of the Trinity and introduces the term perichoresis. The invitation of God is for humanity to join the dance of the Father, Son and the Spirit.

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