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## Abstract

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**Ian Neil Cockling**

### **Watching Over one another in Love: Methodist Superintendents and Oversight in the Church**

The thesis tests the claim that superintendent ministers in the Methodist Church of Great Britain exercise an effective ministry of personal oversight which is pivotal in the church's life, and which makes a distinctive contribution to the Christian understanding of *episkopé*.

The thesis describes empirical, exploratory research into the nature, operant practice and understanding of superintendency which was focused on the Newcastle upon Tyne District of the Methodist Church during 2011-2012. Data was gathered by means of triangulated interviews of superintendents, their colleagues, and the lay leaders of circuits, the circuit stewards.

Using the model of 'Theology in Four Voices' developed by Heythrop College's Action Research: Church and Society Project, the thesis captures the conversation between the espoused understandings of 'ordinary theologians', the operant theology disclosed in practice, and the normative theology of the Methodist Conference, focusing on the 2005 statement *What is a Circuit Superintendent?*

The thesis argues that the role of the superintendent minister has enduring value in the Methodist Church of Great Britain only insofar as the superintendent inculcates a connexionalism in the local circuit which includes inclusive, empowering and participatory leadership of everyone in the life of the church; which exercises personal oversight in both collegial and communal contexts; and which permits devolved *episkopé* to colleagues who are trained and trusted to lead local churches.

***Watching Over one another in Love:  
Methodist Superintendents and  
Oversight in the Church***

**A study of the understanding and practice of  
Superintendent Presbyters and Personal Episkopé,  
with a particular focus on the Circuits of the  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne District of the  
Methodist Church in Great Britain**

***Ian Neil Cockling***

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology and Ministry

Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

2015

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## List of Abbreviations

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<i>Agenda</i>	The Agenda of the annual Methodist Conference (cited with the year of the Conference).
<i>ASV</i>	American Standard Version of the Bible, 1901
<i>BEM</i>	<i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper no.111</i> , 1982
C	Circuit Stewards (when used to report responses); when used with a numeral (e.g. 1C) indicates the number of interviewees
<i>CEB</i>	Common English Bible, 2011
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
cl.	clause
<i>CPD</i>	<i>The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church</i> , 2013 (updated annually).
<i>CLP</i>	<i>Called to Love and Praise</i> , 1999
CLT	Circuit Leadership Team
DDE	District Development Enabler
<i>D-R</i>	Douay-Rheims Bible, 1582
DS	District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church
DSes	District Superintendents of the United Methodist Church
DU	Deed of Union of the Methodist Church
E	Espoused view concerning superintendency
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version of the Bible, 2001
FAOC	Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church in Great Britain
<i>GW</i>	God's Word translation of the Bible, 1995
<i>HE</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> of Eusebius Pamphilus
<i>ISV</i>	International Standard Version of the Bible, 2012
<i>KJV</i>	King James Version of the Bible, 1611
LEP	Local Ecumenical Partnership
LP	Local Preacher (pl. LPs)
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
M	Ministers or other circuit staff (when used to report responses); when used with a numeral (e.g. 2M) indicates the number of interviewees
MCGB	Methodist Church in Great Britain
<i>MWB</i>	<i>Methodist Worship Book</i> (MCGB 1999)
<i>Minutes</i>	The Annual Minutes and Directory of the Methodist Conference (cited with the year of publication.)
<i>MPG</i>	<i>The Ministry of the People of God</i> , 1988
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible, 1995
<i>NCC</i>	The Nature of the Christian Church, 1937
<i>NKJV</i>	New King James Version of the Bible, 1982
<i>NLT</i>	New Living Translation of the Bible, 2007
O	Operant practice concerning superintendency

S	Superintendents (when used to report responses); when used with a numeral (e.g. 3S) indicates the number of interviewees
SO	Standing Orders of the Methodist Church, 2013 (published annually in <i>CPD</i> )
Steward	Unless qualified with the adjective ‘church’, this office refers to that of circuit steward.
<i>TAR</i>	<i>Theological Action Research</i>
<i>TNOO</i>	<i>The Nature of Oversight</i> , 2005
UMC	United Methodist Church
URC	United Reformed Church
USA	United States of America
<i>WIACS</i>	<i>What is a Circuit Superintendent?</i>
WMC	World Methodist Council
*	This word is explained in the Glossary of Terms (Appendix 1).

## Statement of Copyright

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The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## Date of Research

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My research data was gathered in 2011-2012.

## Confidentiality

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For reasons of confidentiality in reporting direct speech the genders of superintendents have occasionally been altered.

## Acknowledgements

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I gratefully acknowledge all those who have helped me to produce this thesis.

- My supervisors, Prof Paul D Murray and The Revd Dr Peter M Phillips
- My parents, Ian and Marjorie Cockling, who introduced me to Methodism at my very beginning
- All who first taught me to think theologically as I sat at their feet in Birmingham: Canon Prof David Ford, The Revd Prof Frances Young, The Very Revd Prof Iain Torrance FRSE, The Revd Dr John B Taylor, Rex Ambler, Nicholas Peter Harvey, The Revd Dr Gordon S Wakefield and Prof Walter J Hollenweger
- My colleagues on the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church, especially The Revd Dr David Chapman, The Revd Dr Stephen Mosedale, The Revd Dr Martin Wellings, Mr Luke Curran and Prof Judith Lieu FBA, who have been enormously helpful in stimulating my research
- My superintendents who were role models over the years for me in my own preparation for superintendency: Eric Renouf, Tom Davies, Philip Chapman, Alan Warrell, Joyce Norman, Bruce Blanter and Terry Hurst
- All in the Ryton and Prudhoe Circuit who helped me over eleven years to reflect on my own work as their superintendent
- The many people I interviewed who remain anonymous, but who gave freely of their time in order that we might explore together how superintendency might be better
- My friends and my fellow students who have encouraged me in my research

## Dedication

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I dedicate this thesis  
to my wife Anne and my sons Daniel and Andrew,  
who have variously dragged me from my study  
or sent me back to it during the past eight years,  
and whose patience I could never repay;

and in memory of my mother, Marjorie,  
who taught me to read, think and question the world.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Preface

My research concerns personal *episkopé*\*<sup>1</sup>, or oversight, in the Church. My thesis tests the claim that superintendent ministers in the Methodist Church of Great Britain exercise an effective ministry of oversight which is pivotal in the church's life, and which makes a distinctive contribution to the Christian understanding of *episkopé*.

In this introductory chapter, I outline my dissertation (1.2), thesis (1.3) and findings (1.4); justify the need for my research (1.5); describe the specific contributions to the debate (1.6) and the research context (1.7); and finally note its delimitations and key assumptions (1.8).

My research aimed to answer the following questions:

- (i) How is the superintendent\* presbyter's role defined, understood and practised in the Methodist Church\* in Great Britain ['MCGB'] in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- (ii) How coherent is the superintendent's role with the traditions of the Methodists and the church in general?
- (iii) What is the continuing adequacy of *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* ['WIACS'] as a normative document?
- (iv) How do my findings affect MCGB's polity and theology of oversight? What implications are there for the future practice of superintendency?

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<sup>1</sup> Asterisks refer to the Glossary (Appendix 1).



## 1.2 Dissertation Outline

I aimed to undertake research into superintendency: what superintendents do, how their role is understood in the circuits\*, and what factors influence their praxis, discerning what is pragmatically normative as well as what is formally deemed normative. From this research I aimed to induce a framework for a theology of personal *episkopé* with special reference to Methodist superintendency which would contribute to the wider debate concerning the nature of oversight in the Christian Church.

My *empirical* focus was the average-sized<sup>2</sup> Newcastle-upon-Tyne District\* of MCGB during 2011-2012. I undertook situational analysis by interviewing all superintendents, and a colleague and lay\* leader (‘circuit steward’\*) working with each superintendent, in order to discover data concerning superintendency in practice and understanding. With an historical lens and a discovery of normative influences, I aimed to describe superintendency’s present reality.

My *theoretical* focus consisted of my examining the contributions of formal and normative theology with which to engage my empirical data in conversation. I adopted the approach of ‘Theology in Four Voices’, the model for reflection propounded by Heythrop College’s Action Research:Church and Society (ARCS) Project (Cameron *et al.* 2010). I outline my use and adaptation of this model in section 2.3.

I follow this introductory chapter (Chapter 1) by describing my hermeneutics and method, including a demographic analysis of my empirical sample (Chapter 2). I then present and analyse my empirical research findings (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I allow the espoused, operant and normative voices to enter into a conversation in which they both affirm and test one another, and I offer a formal theological contribution to this conversation. Chapter 5 contains my conclusions.

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<sup>2</sup> Mean number of circuits in a District:13; median number:12; Newcastle-upon-Tyne:12.

### 1.3 Thesis

My thesis argues that the role of the superintendent minister has enduring value in the Methodist Church of Great Britain only insofar as the superintendent inculcates a connexionalism in the local circuit which includes inclusive, empowering and participatory leadership in the life of the church; exercises personal oversight in both collegial and communal contexts; and which permits devolved *episkopé* to colleagues who are trained and trusted to lead local churches.

### 1.4 Findings

As research which is grounded in practical theology – and indeed which is explored within the context of ministry and its associated theology – this thesis makes an original contribution to the understanding of superintendency by discovering and describing the praxis and theology of superintendency in the British context. My thesis discovers gaps between the normative understanding of superintendency as presented by documents of MCGB and the espoused and operant theologies of superintendency.

The main tensions which need resolution are between:

- The desire for leadership which seeks to help the church better serve the present age which is in tension with the passivity of stable management and risk-aversion
- The normative view of shared and inclusive leadership compared with the practice of personal leadership
- How the circuit is structured and how a diversity of local churches operate in practice
- How personal *episkopé* can operate beyond or within collegial and communal *episkopé*
- Independence and accountability, and the search for mutual *episkopé*.

## 1.5 Justification for my research

Why was this research needed?

In my own experience as a reflective practitioner – as a superintendent for eleven years during two decades as a Methodist circuit minister\* – I sought to understand my role. Conversations with other superintendents uncovered varied understanding and practice. Apart from a few disparate Standing Orders, MCGB had no document describing the role until 2005.

Following the 1972 failure of the union proposals between MCGB and the Church of England (Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission 1968), George (1974) noted that the *meaning* of superintendency needed further study. As Methodism\* examined its future alone, the Committee on Further Training of the Ministry was planning to set up courses for men<sup>3</sup> about to become superintendents, and George took the opportunity to revisit superintendency's historical roots, and to ask for further research.

The Methodist Conference published *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* [*WIACS*] (Faith and Order Committee [*FAOC*] 2005b) thirty-one years after George's 1974 request, and seven years after I had first sought to understand my own role as a superintendent. However, *WIACS*'s enduring value was being questioned within five years of publication. By 2010, I was hearing remarks from some Methodist leaders (both locally and connexionally), questioning whether *WIACS* was already out-of-date.

Indeed, I would argue that even at publication *FAOC* appears to implicitly acknowledge *WIACS*'s provisionality: at the *same* Conference at which it presented *WIACS*, *FAOC* also presented *The Nature of Oversight* [*TNOO*] (*FAOC* 2005a),

---

<sup>3</sup> Women presbyters were ordained\* for the first time in British Methodism the same year as George was writing (1974); among them was Ethel (Beth) Bridges (1921-2014), immediately appointed a superintendent, having served as a deaconess since 1947 (*Minutes* 1974:33,188; 2015:25)).

requested ‘greater clarification and possible change ... in our understanding of the nature and role of Superintendents’ (§5.2) and asked,

How can individuals and groups who have [this] clearly defined role within the church’s organisational structure be better enabled to be the kind of people able to lead and manage appropriately, and to address and complete the tasks required of them? (§6.2)

No answer has yet been published. I aimed thus to better understand MCGB superintendents’ *functional* nature and role, and hence to test the normative status and descriptive adequacy of *WIACS*, as well as to explore superintendency theologically.

Academically, there have been few *theoretical and theological* contributions concerning superintendents and fewer concerning *practice*,<sup>4</sup> despite the role being seen as vitally important to the church.<sup>5</sup> Although anecdotally some British superintendents had, in self-appraisal, examined *aspects* of their own work, prior to research I discovered no completed doctoral or Masters’ theses concerning superintendents’ *full role*, and no publications on the subject.<sup>6</sup> Thus there were no previous replicable studies or formally-researched testable hypotheses. Both American and British scholars noted this dearth of data.

## 1.6 Research contributions

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix 4 lists theses on the District Superintendency of the UMC. Such superintendency differs greatly from that of MCGB.

<sup>5</sup> The role of superintendent arguably predates the beginnings of the Methodist movement, and has often been stated to be the nearest thing British Methodism has to a bishop (MCGB 2005d:579-80 – for this reason FAOC 2000a§§91,94 resisted the title for Chairs). A circuit *must* have a superintendent – on the superintendent’s death or other unexpected removal, a replacement must be found within 21 days (SO 785(3)(b)).

<sup>6</sup> Apart from my own *Handbook for New Superintendents*, published by the connexion (Cockling 2012a). At the time of writing (January 2015), I am aware of ‘contemplation’ by the connexion to expand that handbook to include a section on relationships, leadership and oversight.

In setting out the research problem – the need to understand superintendency in practice – I note contributions from World Methodism\*. Existing doctoral research into various specific roles of District Superintendents\* in the UMC (Appendix 4), focusing on *limited* aspects of this *different* superintendency, is not directly relevant to my research; there is a global dearth of research into Methodist superintendency (1.6.1); recent books on global Methodism offer a less-than-cursory glance at superintendents (1.6.2). I note a British research paper (1.6.3) and ecumenical considerations (1.6.4).

### **1.6.1 Superintendency in the United Methodist Church**

The lacuna of practical research into superintendency has also been a concern in recent years in America: two leading United Methodist Church\* [‘UMC’] professors, Richey and Frank (2004:146-47) propounded that

General Conference should sponsor a study of superintendency in the UMC, including historical and theological discussions, surveys of the practice of superintendency among bishops[\*] and general superintendents, and proposals for enhancing the effectiveness of the office for the future of the Church. Almost no data<sup>7</sup> on how superintendency is actually being carried out is readily available.

Frank notes elsewhere (2006:218-20, 248) that

the district superintendency is arguably the key office in making the connection work, ... has been little studied and its place ecclesologically is neither well worked out nor widely understood (p.248).

Frank (2006:350-51) notes the only four studies undertaken from 1954 to 1972 (Harmon 1954; Leiffer 1960, 1972)<sup>8</sup>, commenting that they ‘did not explore the ecclesiological grounding of the office’ (p.351).

---

<sup>7</sup> Richey knew of Leiffer’s (Leiffer 1960; 1972) research, citing it as contributory to a rewriting of the *Book of Discipline* (Richey 2009).

<sup>8</sup> The fourth paper, by J.C. Montgomery, remains unpublished.

Church constitutionalist Leiffer undertook his two studies before and after the American Methodist Church\* participated in the 1968 union of the UMC. Leiffer found discrepancies between stated priorities of the District Superintendents [DSes] and actual activity, i.e. (in terms of my research framework) between *espoused* and *operant* approaches.

General Conference sponsored Pederson's 2010 study (Pederson 2013). Far larger than studies by Leiffer (1960; 1972), 161 telephone interviews of between 45-90 minutes were carried out, covering 35% UMC DSes, in 51 Annual Conferences. The survey investigated DSes' roles and responsibilities, whether they had clarity about their role, how the role had changed in the previous decade, and how the role described by the DSes matched the five task areas described in the *Book of Discipline* (UMC, 2012:¶¶419-425). It is methodologically parallel to my own research, though it was only published in May 2013 as I was writing up my results, and therefore could not inform my empirical research.

Although DSes' functions are similar to British superintendents' (Pederson 2013), albeit on a larger scale (Table 1.1), the survey indicated that DSes are more akin to the District Chair in MCGB – they had responsibility for between 32 to 210 clergy, with a mean of 69 supervisees, and 75 churches; they *ex officio* hold conference responsibilities; and are also subject to a more autocratic system than in Britain: their origins as 'presiding elders' (Cracknell and White 2005:57) has always made their personal *episkopé* an extension of that of their bishop.<sup>9</sup> Therefore only the approach, but not the results, is comparable to my own research (Pederson 2013:8).

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<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie footnotes (1957:484) 'if we are looking for the really autocratic 'bishop' it seems that we should seek him among the Methodists of the United States'.

Table 1.1: Comparison of UMC and MCGB Superintendents

<b>United Methodist Church</b>	<b>Methodist Church in Great Britain</b>
Supervise clergy	Oversee circuit staff - <i>WIACS</i> §32(k)
An extension of the office of the bishop	Represent the Conference - <i>WIACS</i> §33
Support local congregations	Encourage Local Churches* – SO522
Representing clergy to the bishop	Meet in Superintendents’ Meeting with the Chair (but not representative in the Conference); <i>WIACS</i> §32(r)
Improve effectiveness and mission of the church	Help circuit create a policy for mission etc. - <i>WIACS</i> §§30, 31
Make appointments, strategist	Oversee appointments; help circuit make a strategy - <i>WIACS</i> §6
Conflict manager	Maintain order and discipline - <i>WIACS</i> §§6, 7
Deployment of pastors	Lead deployment discussions - <i>WIACS</i> §§24, 25; SO500(1)
Educator of clergy and laity	Stimulate theological reflection and doctrinal preaching - <i>WIACS</i> §§32(b)(t), 36(e); SO524
Empowering the pastors and local churches to change	Lead rational assessment and responsible risk-taking - <i>WIACS</i> §32(c)
Helping clergy and congregations to be effective in ministry	Release ministers and laypeople for ministry <i>WIACS</i> §§29, 32(i); visits churches - SO522
Revitalizer of congregations	Visitation for encouragement, challenge and support – SO522
Spiritual director, vision caster, consultant for church growth	Help means and structures for growth in holiness and inspiration for vision - <i>WIACS</i> §§5, 30
Task 1: Spiritual and pastoral leadership	‘Presiding over the people’: <i>WIACS</i> §17
Task 2: Supervision	Ensure supervision. <i>WIACS</i> §32(k)
Task 3: Personnel management	Deployment of people – SO500(1)
Task 4: Administration	Administration and support. <i>WIACS</i> §§32(l)(m), 34.
Task 5: Programmatic oversight	Doctrinal preaching – SO524

### 1.6.2 Recent books on Methodism

Books introducing global Methodism give scant attention to superintendent presbyters. Cracknell and White (2005), in their *Introduction to World Methodism*, focus instead on *general* superintendency – the ‘two streams’ (p.vii) of Methodism characterised by episcopacy and Conference. *The A-Z of Methodism* accords superintendents just three descriptive column inches (Yrigoyen 2009:291). Superintendents are not mentioned in the *Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Abraham and Kirby 2009). Frank (2010:316, 322-23) fails to mention DSEs when he writes about bishops in *T&T Clark’s Companion to Methodism*. Despite many contributions to *Making Disciples in a World Parish* (Chilcote 2011) the role of superintendents in the church’s mission is ignored – perhaps because most contributors were professors, bishops and agency directors, rather than local pastors who have been, or experienced the oversight of, superintendents (Cockling 2013:176). And in the *Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, where Richey (2013:263) finally unites thinking about both *general* and *district* superintendents in an article on *episkopé* (he speaks of superintendents’ exercising *extended episkopé* of the Conference or the bishop in a ‘suffragan-like’ way), he fails to explore how that oversight is practised locally, despite having noted, with Frank, almost a decade earlier (Richey and Frank 2004:146-47), the need for that research.

Recent books about British Methodism are no better. The *magnum opus* of Brake (1984:187-88) offers just one paragraph; the *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* just two paragraphs (Harris 2000). Superintendents (and circuits) are irrelevant to the discussions in *Methodist Present Potential* (Curran and Shier-Jones 2009) which chooses to focus on evangelistic, scriptural, sacramental, diverse, common, ecumenical and global aspects of Methodism.

It is therefore not surprising that in major ecumenical dialogues the entire ministry of superintendents is never mentioned – for example, the Seoul Report notes ‘Historically, *episkopé* in Methodism has mostly been exercised corporately, even in those parts of the world where Methodism is endowed with bishops’ (Joint



Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the WMC 2006:§112).

### 1.6.3 Maunder

There is one other related doctoral research project in Britain.<sup>10</sup> Maunder (2012) investigated one aspect of superintendency as part of his research on the wider subject of *episkopé*,<sup>11</sup> conducting a study into the views of superintendents in relation to their role of oversight. Asking 27 superintendents in the South-East District of MCGB to complete a questionnaire, he followed up the eighteen returns with six in-depth interviews.

Maunder identified three areas of focus:

- (1) the nature of superintendents' leadership, especially
  - a. the fact that they were not the managers of (and hence had great difficulties in supervising) their ordained\* colleagues, who sometimes lacked acceptance of accountability and responsibility; and
  - b. the lack of connexionalism in their circuit (i.e. a trend towards independence from the circuit of churches and ministers);
- (2) the task of administration, and the greater burden being felt by superintendents; and
- (3) the gifts and skills needed for superintendency. These included:
  - a. leadership skills
  - b. administrative competence
  - c. the need for relational skills and a gifting for "people-management".

Maunder asked questions about the training superintendents had received, and discovered that more had found the training helpful than unhelpful; however, those

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<sup>10</sup> I exclude here Grundy (2014) which, despite its title, focuses on Anglican episcopacy, not *episkopé* (pp.132-34).

<sup>11</sup> Maunder's DThMin thesis (Maunder 2014) relates more to *episkopé* in the wider church rather than at circuit level.

who were newest to superintendency had found the training unhelpful (38% viewed the training on oversight of colleagues as ‘very unhelpful’). Respondents requested training in supervision, personnel management, team-work, line management, conflict-resolution and legal or governance regulations, including those relating to lay employment. Maunder concluded that there appeared to be a focus for concern in terms of relationships with colleagues and that superintendents needed to be given appropriate training and peer support. (Cooke (2008:95) came to a similar conclusion in his research in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, quoting its General Secretary: ‘The Circuit Superintendent is immediately responsible for the ministers under his care but is seldom trained for that task’).

I build on Maunder’s research by addressing the theological aspect of the role (Chapter 4) – I note the absence of any required training in this aspect for superintendents.

#### **1.6.4 Ecumenical considerations**

The struggle to optimise the exercise of personal oversight is not unique to Methodism. The ‘Lima Document’ (World Council of Churches 1982 [*BEM*]:24-29)<sup>12</sup> acknowledges that the exercise of personal *episkopé* in a ministry of oversight is exercised on behalf of the whole church in order to maintain continuity and unity, and argued that its exercise within a threefold pattern needs to be developed for the most effective witness of the Church in this world. Equally, the transfer of ministerial authority – a function of bishops – has been seen as one of the functions to be grappled with should bishops be introduced to British Methodism, along with the problem of where the personal episcopate might be sited should MCGB adopt ‘the’ historic episcopate (MCGB 2005d; Joint Implementation Commission 2008:96).

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<sup>12</sup> I explore the contribution of *BEM* further in Chapter 4.

Other ecumenical statements follow BEM. The *Meissen Agreement* notes remarkable agreement between the churches during a period of reception (1991:§14). The *Porvoo Common Statement* (Council for Christian Unity 1993:§42) cites *BEM* throughout, stating that the differentiation and diversity of the gifts of God and of the tasks of the Church requires a ‘ministry of co-ordination’ or ‘ministry of oversight, *episkope*’.

## **1.7 The Research Context**

In this section I note normative documents concerning superintendency (1.7.1) and the changing demographic and ecclesiological contexts of MCGB (1.7.2).

### **1.7.1 Normative Documents**

Two main documents are presumed normative for superintendents: *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* (1.7.1.1) and the Standing Orders of MCGB (1.7.1.2).

#### **1.7.1.1 *What is a Circuit Superintendent?***

*WIACS* (FAOC 2005b) contains the central theory of superintendency with which I have engaged in my empirical research. The stated aim of *WIACS* was to

discern the intention which is variously embodied in Methodist history and current practice, and so describe an ideal which can function as a model of best practice to be reflected upon and re-embodied in a variety of situations in the future.(§3)

It was also intended to be used to help improve the setting up of appointments for superintendents in circuits, the ‘recruitment’ or ‘selection’ of potential superintendents, and the setting of outcomes for the training of superintendents (*WIACS*, n.4).

*A priori*, WIACS recognises that superintendents share the same role as other presbyters<sup>13</sup> in terms of ministerial functions, exercising a ministry of word,<sup>14</sup> sacrament<sup>15</sup> and pastoral responsibility;<sup>16</sup> such a ministry being described in the Conference report “What is a Presbyter?” (MCGB 2002b). It also refers to its other ‘starting points’: material concerning superintendents contained in the Deed of Union\* [‘DU’] and Standing Orders, some of which is listed in its Appendix, acknowledged as ‘not exhaustive’. I construct what I believe to be an exhaustive list of the separate aspects of superintendency in my Appendix 3.

WIACS (§10) defined oversight in its broadest sense as

in particular (but not exclusively) through theologically informed *governance*, ... *management* and ... *leadership*. Oversight is a means of ensuring that a movement or church remains true to its nature and purpose as it grows and develops and as its context changes.

The superintendent’s authority in oversight is delegated by the Conference, and shared – especially with the presbyters who exercise local *pastoral charge*\* – with colleagues and councils exercising personal, collegial and communal oversight (WIACS§§12,18; SO 700(7)).<sup>17</sup> The superintendent leads the staff in their leadership of the circuit, and the staff and stewards in their governance and decision-making (WIACS§20).

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<sup>13</sup> My research does not focus on the *presbyteral* role of superintendents (see 1.8.1 below).

<sup>14</sup> ‘this includes (formal and informal) preaching, evangelism, apologetic, theological and prophetic interpretation, teaching and the articulation of faith and human experience’ (FAOC 2002b:§6).

<sup>15</sup> ‘this includes presiding at acts of celebration and devotion, especially baptism (and, in the wider sense of sacramental acts, confirmation) and eucharist’ (FAOC 2002b:§6).

<sup>16</sup> ‘this involves collegially ‘watching over’ God’s people in love on behalf of the Conference and includes oversight, direction, discipline, order and pastoral care, and is exercised through a ministry of visitation after watching, praying, waiting on God, and sharing insights with colleagues’ (FAOC 2002b:§6).

<sup>17</sup> *Staff meetings*\* should take place weekly, or ‘as often as is practicable’ (SO523).

*WIACS* ‘builds on’ (§1) *TNOO* (§3.11), a report which was not adopted\* by the Conference.<sup>18</sup> Changes to the text of *TNOO* (§§1.11-1.13) as incorporated in *WIACS* (§32) are set out in Appendix 5. I deduce from the textual differences that *WIACS*

- *stresses* the superintendent’s leadership of both lay and ordained people in a way that
  - empowers the powerless and helps understanding of ministerial stress and ‘unrealistic or irrelevant’ expectations;
  - models the values and rules of MCGB; and
  - is more communal than personal (while noting the superintendent’s responsibility for the *management, implementation* and *review* of the governance decisions of the Circuit Meeting\*);<sup>19</sup>
- explicitly mentions the superintendent’s stimulation of theological reflection.

*WIACS* examines the interplay between three facets of the superintendent’s pastoral responsibility: *leadership, management* and *governance*. As secular models, none are specifically theological; nevertheless *WIACS* attempts to speak of them theologically: discerning the work of God in leadership, and enabling the Holy Spirit’s guidance in governance. *WIACS* also acknowledges (§21) the tensions of working with volunteers who either reject the superintendent’s management or cannot moderate over-forceful management.

Importantly, *WIACS* states (§35) that superintendents may delegate tasks to others, lay or ordained. The report concludes:

Superintendents therefore in their turn require help, support, supervision and training in undertaking their role. The ‘good practice’ which is set out here is

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<sup>18</sup> The report was received and commended for study; however, parts of *TNOO* adopted within *WIACS* are authoritative and thus normative for MCGB.

<sup>19</sup> In Marsh (2004:231), ‘Superintendent’ is defined as ‘presbyter responsible, *in the context of the Circuit Meeting*, for the co-ordination of work in a Circuit’ [emphasis added].

intended to provide tools and encouragement for this. Superintendents are not acclaimed but formed and trained. (§37)

However, as a short document, *WIACS* makes no practical suggestions as to how its policies and suggested strategies may be formulated and enacted in circuits.

Nevertheless, I would argue that *aspirations* rather than *tools* are offered in *WIACS*.

### **1.7.1.2 Standing Orders**

The Standing Orders of MCGB define superintendents' personal accountability for the work of God in their circuit, ensuring that the Conference's decisions are upheld locally by enabling 'the relevant courts, officers and ministers to fulfil their specific responsibilities under Standing Orders' (SO520(2))<sup>20</sup> and supplying to the connexion statistical returns (SO358) and details of appointments for which ministers are sought (SO542(2); 782(1))<sup>21</sup>.

Superintendents oversee worship, approving candidates for training as Local Preachers\* ['LP'], overseeing that training, deciding where and when LPs lead worship, and permitting visiting ministers (especially supernumeraries or ecumenical partners) to preside at the Lord's Supper (SO521, 564, 792(1)).<sup>22</sup>

Superintendents oversee doctrine, addressing the

urgent need that the main doctrines of the Christian faith ... be more plainly and systematically set forth in public preaching, so that the Methodist people may be established in the faith and better defended against error and uncertainty (SO524)

and assessing all candidates for ordained ministry as to their fidelity to the doctrinal standards and discipline of MCGB (SO710(3)(a)). Only superintendents

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<sup>20</sup> SO425(2) requires the District Chair 'to endeavour to establish close relationships with all the Superintendents in the District, that they may have the benefits of his or her wider experience of the District and knowledge of connexional decisions and policy'.

<sup>21</sup> The superintendent had implicit personal power to decide which ministers had charge of which churches until 2005, when SO520 was amended, as such decisions are properly the prerogative of the Circuit Meeting.

<sup>22</sup> Permission is denoted on the preaching Plan.

can consent to non-Methodist worship or Masonic meetings on Methodist premises (SO920, 928).

Superintendents oversee mission, because the circuit, not the Local Church, is normatively the primary unit of mission (FAOC 2008:1.2, 3.5.3-3.5.4).<sup>23</sup> Superintendents are charged with visiting each local church ‘to provide encouragement, challenge and support’ and with ensuring the effective fulfilment of each local church’s ministry (SO522).

As *de jure* chair of all official meetings in the circuit and its local churches (SO502) superintendents (as chair of managing trustees’ bodies) have personal oversight of the circuit’s property and finance.<sup>24</sup>

Superintendents lead and supervise circuit staff, convene the weekly staff meetings, undertake Ministerial Development Reviews, report on circuit probationers\*, are part of any advisory committee concerning resignation of a minister in their circuit, and supply ministerial obituaries (SO523, 725(4)(a), 760, 743). Superintendents must be consulted (and inform the Chair) before any minister engages in part-time chaplaincy, teaching or other work not within their circuit responsibilities, including agreements concerning fees.<sup>25</sup>

My *Handbook* (Cockling 2012a)<sup>26</sup> sets out other duties:

- oversight of Safeguarding;<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I contributed Section 3, ‘The Development of Circuits’.

<sup>24</sup> This encompasses circuit property (SO Section 95) including manses and their Energy Performance Certificates (SO965(3)), local church property (Section 94), accounts audit (SO012(4)), care of Deeds (SO903) and archives (SO015), and applications for grants from Methodist and other organisations.

<sup>25</sup> Ministers cannot receive more than one-quarter of the minimum stipend\* in fees without recompensing the circuit or ministerial colleagues (for the extra work required for cover) (SO802).

<sup>26</sup> This was possibly the first connexional publication of such a handbook (excluding two-page hand-outs on superintendents’ training courses) for fifty years, following its predecessor’s (Swift 1961) format: duties listed both thematically and calendrically.

- complaints and discipline;
- legal matters;<sup>28</sup>
- Methodist oversight of Local Ecumenical Partnerships;
- co-ordinating staff holidays and sabbaticals;
- applications to the Conference for authorisations for non-presbyters to preside at the Lord's Supper, and training those who lead services of Extended Communion (SO609);<sup>29</sup>
- communication with the District, including inviting District Officers to visit the circuit;
- ensuring the Circuit Meetings are adequately representative of age, sex and ethnicity (SO513); and
- liaising with Methodist independent schools' chaplains regarding Methodist membership candidates (SO050).

### **1.7.2 Demographic and Ecclesiological Change**

MCGB is at a crucial historical point. In 2011, 69% of members were aged over 65 (MCGB 2014b:18).<sup>30</sup> Statistical measures showed decline in the decade 2003-2013 (Table 1.2).

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<sup>27</sup> Although SO692(3) only provides that Sex Offenders' contracts be known to local presbyters, I argue that all staff should be aware of such contracts (Cockling 2012a:Section 1 (2)(a)).

<sup>28</sup> Legal matters include Listed buildings; conservation areas; Authorised Persons for marriages (and the oversight of the 'conscience clause' for ministers unwilling to remarry divorcees (SO011A (4)); Charitable registration and annual reports; tax and pension requirements; employment law and the Methodist requirement to pay the Living Wage (Living Wage Foundation 2013); office-holders' insolvency or other incapability; copyright law; and insurance (including contractors' professional liability).

<sup>29</sup> At such services, elements set aside from a previous celebration of the Lord's Supper are distributed (SO609).

<sup>30</sup> The proportion in the general British population was 21% (Office for National Statistics 2011).



Table 1.2 Demographic measures of MCGB 2003-2013

	2003	2013	Decline	MCGB 2014b: Page ref.
<b>Membership</b>	304,971	208,738	-32%	4
<b>Attendance</b>	326,400	224,500	-31%	6
<b>Children in congregations</b>	24%	15%	-38%	11
<b>Pastoral roll (including adherents)</b>	861,600	446,600	-48%	6
<b>Proportion of British population</b>	1.5%	0.7%	-53%	6
<b>Ministers</b>	2,108	1,815	-14%	17
<b>Churches</b>	6,286	4,812	-23%	12

MCGB is now more ethnically diverse, which brings sociological and cultural factors into play:

Immigrants entering Britain with a clearer sense of Methodist identity than many British-born Methodists have become a challenge to the whole British Methodist Church to clarify what it means to be Methodist. (Craske and Marsh 2009:204)

Circuit reorganisation has aimed to reduce the number of superintendents required, and also to utilise the benefits of scale: a larger staff offers flexibility in deployment and specialisation. In 2009 there were 539 superintendents; by 2014 there were 398 in 375 circuits, a 26% reduction. A five-year scheme using a connexional team of some twenty District Development Enablers\* ['DDE'] operated from 2008-2013, the major purpose of which was to facilitate the amalgamation of circuits (MCGB 2007a).<sup>31</sup> The average circuit staff team in 2014 consisted of four

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<sup>31</sup> I was one of those enablers.

presbyters<sup>32</sup> (range 1 to 25), up from three in 2012, one being superintendent: the Stationing Review Group (2008a:507) recommended a ratio of one in six. Indeed, 42% of circuits in 2008 had a staff of only one or two ministers: it was recommended that such circuits amalgamate with others. By 2014, the proportion of circuits with two or fewer presbyters had been reduced to 27%.

Larger circuits covering hundreds of square miles, of 77 churches, or of 27 ministers, cause difficulties in thinking of the circuit as a unit of mission (despite FAOC 2008). This results in Sectionalisation\* and ‘pastorates’, in which ministers concentrate preaching in their ‘own’ pulpits, aiming for ‘consistent’ teaching and contact with congregations. Colleagues offer few preaching appointments for the wider preaching Plan\*. Thus at best strategic thinking is on a Sectional rather than circuit basis. Less explicit, possibly, is the power-dynamic of the local minister excluding circuit colleagues from a personal fiefdom.<sup>33</sup> The 2013 Conference exacerbated this, removing the right of circuit ministers to a seat on every Church Council\* in the circuit (*Agenda* 2013:510). I would argue that this reduces collegial oversight.

Former FAOC Secretary, Marsh (2001:38), and former World Methodist Historical Society Chair, Wellings, also bemoan

an insidious creeping congregationalism. Small churches with energy only for maintenance and large churches safe in their self-sufficiency pay scant heed to the tradition of mutual responsibility and accountability, and do little to foster a wider vision. (Wellings 1999:156)

Shier-Jones (2009:196-97) added an update ten years later: this

creeping congregationalism ... can no longer be described as creeping. ... There is some evidence to suggest ... that churches and ministers alike are increasingly choosing to become as disconnected as possible from a

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<sup>32</sup> Only 28% of circuits have deacons.

<sup>33</sup> This is not only a modern phenomenon – Hawley (1846), in the American context, defended connexionalism against congregationalism (especially pp.162-71).

Connexion that seems less and less relevant to the concerns and work of the local church.

Alongside this, there has been an exploration of new ways of being church, which challenge inherited assumptions about how MCGB and its ministers should operate, and their very self-understanding (e.g. Horsley, Ellis, King and Woodhouse 2007). During the 1990s ‘Decade of Evangelism’, the Conference challenged every circuit to plant a new congregation. Yet this was, in those days, a filling of geographical lacunae. Twenty years later, church planting now fills demographic lacunae – new congregations aimed at particular groups defined by age, sociological background or leisure interests. New pioneer (*Venture FX*) ministers operate at the invitation of the circuit, but with an oversight and accountability which lie not with the Circuit Meeting, but with a London-based Connexional Team\*-member (MCGB 2013e). The General Secretary (Atkins 2011:§61) speaks of a ‘fluid ‘mixed economy’’.

Several theological explorations and ecclesiological developments during the 2000s in MCGB (FAOC 1999; 2002b; 2004; 2005a; 2006; MCGB 2000b; 2002b; 2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2005d) impinge on the superintendent’s role, including the ecclesiological statement “Called to Love and Praise” [*CLP*] (FAOC 1999). These relate to function and to a developing theology of ministry and oversight, within an overarching debate about the nature and purposes of the church, of leadership, and of circuit mission. By 2013, new models of superintendency were being implemented.

Some circuits have co-superintendents, where two or more (or all) presbyters share the tasks.

Another model sees the appointment of a so-called ‘titular’\* superintendent, who is not *appointed to*\* the circuit, but oversees it from afar. This may preserve governance, but can a ‘transcendent’ superintendent exercise an effective, non-incarnational, oversight?

In a small number of large circuits, a ‘Lead’ Superintendent is ‘separated’\* from local church ministry, and shares oversight with co-superintendents. This

model of shared superintendency is too new and rare to have been empirically investigated, and is not found in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District.

## 1.8 Key Assumptions

I now define the delimitations of my study of the personal *episkopé* exercised by superintendents (1.8.1) and seek to identify my presuppositions (1.8.2).

### 1.8.1 Delimitations

I have not examined the aspects of their role which superintendents share with other presbyters: this is a study of superintendency and not presbyteral ministry. Where presbyteral functions *have* been noted is where they are exercised in the context of superintendency.

I have not generally sought to contrast the personal *episkopé* of the superintendent with that of the District Chair (except the rights of a Chair to overrule the superintendent); such a study would examine a broader *episkopé* within MCGB than my focus on superintendency within the circuit context.

My study is of superintendents in the British context.<sup>34</sup> As noted above (1.6.1), DSEs have a different context of ministry. Other connexions have superintendents, but cultural variables could lead to different practices of superintendency.<sup>35</sup> Such variables would need to be considered in a more geographically diverse study.

I have undertaken a cross-sectional study of the practice of superintendency at a particular moment in time (albeit that practice is the product of historical norms). Although I gathered descriptions of a fifty-year period of superintendency practice, I did not attempt to gather data relating to particular time periods, and although such data may be inferred, the methodology is not sufficiently robust to come to any

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<sup>34</sup> Individual interviewees may themselves have experienced Methodism outside this context..

<sup>35</sup> Only two interviewees were from a non-British culture.

particular conclusions about the changing nature of superintendency over that whole period. However, I *did* seek data concerning the change perceived in superintendency over the decade immediately prior to the time of my interviews.

I did not interview all colleagues and stewards. Three people were interviewed from each circuit (including the superintendent), in a form of stratified sampling.

I focused on a particular District, but the interview cohort can be taken as a connexional sample due to itinerancy\*. Only four Districts (13%) were not represented in my interviewees' previous experience.

My analysis includes useful data from my pilot studies. This has the advantage of affording greater anonymity to interviewees, as none of the data may be securely attributed to the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District.<sup>36</sup> Equally, this means that the study cannot be taken as yielding definitive results about one particular District: such was not the purpose of the research, and the practice of itinerancy would make such a study extremely difficult to delineate.<sup>37</sup>

I have excluded considerations about the historic episcopate. The locus of any bishop in the historic succession within MCGB is, in any case, a subject of debate (MCGB 2005d). That the locus of a future episcopate probably does not lie in the office of superintendent is indicated by the fact that since Wesley's time there has been no transmission of ministerial orders made by any superintendent; ordination is an act of the Conference, not of any officer (*CLP*§4.5.12).

Finally, I make no claims as to the *effectiveness* of the practice of superintendency. This would entail determining a means of measurement which I believe to be beyond the scope of this research. As one report (MCGB 1993:240-41) notes concerning the Church,

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<sup>36</sup> For the same reason, I interviewed more than one District Chair and more than one member of the Presidency.

<sup>37</sup> Kendall (n.d.:104) bemoaned 'districtism' in the stationing practice of Primitive Methodism.

Mere statistics cannot reveal years of faithful and patient witness to the gospel which have not resulted in numerical growth; nor can they detect the truth behind a picture of growth in numbers but decrease in community witness or service, or decline in spiritual depth. ... The work of the Kingdom is of greater importance than separate denominational survival.

Equally, the 'church health' movement has worked against the definition of success which is defined only numerically (e.g. Schwartz 1996; Churches Information for Mission 2001:27-28; Warren, 2004). As Swinton and Mowat (2006:8) note, 'all human practices are inadequate, including the practices of the Church.'

Yet situational analysis of theology questions the church. If the church believes it is important to interrogate the world by its theology, then there must be a reciprocal expectation. This means that things 'of the world' are brought into the process in a critical interchange. Is this thereby syncretistic? Or does it, rather, point to God's action in the world *independent* of the body of Christ – thereby giving a greater understanding of God's perspective? Only by undertaking the research can the questions be asked, and hopefully answered. The goal of superintendency is not effectiveness *per se*, but faithful practice.

### **1.8.2 Presuppositions**

I undertook research as a critical insider: both as a former superintendent in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District (though my old circuit 'disappeared' in amalgamation) and then serving as DDE, in which part of my role was to advise superintendents in their work. I thus came to this study with an existing relationship with all the superintendents I interviewed. It was therefore necessary to strictly demarcate my role as a researcher. I highlight here the possibility of interviewee compliance because of my role as DDE. I believe this tendency is tempered by my having been a colleague of the superintendents before my role as DDE, and also by the lack of authority imbued in the District by the superintendents themselves, as I discovered in my research. No prospective interviewees declined; most accepted enthusiastically.

In interviewing participants in the study, I presumed that they may have ‘filtered’ their responses, be capable of misunderstanding, or have a limited perspective; however, I presumed that they would probably not be deliberately untruthful. In any case, my interviewing three people in each circuit offered triangulation against these possible deficiencies. I further presumed that by the offices they hold the people I interviewed are sufficiently engaged with the practice of superintendency to be able to yield authoritative data.

Furthermore, I am aware that some of my data does not arise explicitly from my research, but is part of my ‘background knowledge’. Nevertheless, my own understanding of the role of the superintendent is a valid contribution to the research: the goal of the research is not to discover simply what one cohort of interviewees understand and verbalise about their own praxis, but to be able to infer a more general understanding held by the whole of MCGB – of which I am part.

I have, however, a wider experience of the Church than Methodism, having variously worshipped as an active member of Catholic, Anglican, and Baptist congregations during my faith journey. I served as the Ecumenical Officer for the Newcastle upon Tyne District for twelve years (2000-2012), during part of which I served on the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England. I was also a member of the Faith and Order Committee of MCGB for eight years from 2007-2015. In both of these national positions I was required to engage with international ecumenical texts. During 2008-2010 I was a member of the Receptive Ecumenism research project based at the Centre for Catholic Studies in the University of Durham, and was a participant in the second international Receptive Ecumenism Conference, *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to be Church Together*, held at Durham in January 2009.

These experiences have given me a broader perspective not only on the faith and practice of non-Methodist churches, but also an understanding of the issues and vocabulary which divide churches. Yet as a Methodist Presbyterian for 26 years (including 11 years’ superintendency) I have an Arminian approach which views a goal of the church to be Christian *unity* (John 17:21-23) without church *uniformity*.

As MCGB said in its response to *BEM* (MCGB 1986:229), ‘History has provided us with many different expressions of the common faith. ... When God has made his creatures so diverse, could we wish it not to be so?’

Thus in my theological reflection, I seek not simply to gain a greater understanding of Methodism, but also to better understand Methodism’s contribution to and reception from the wider Church of Christ. Hence I presuppose that MCGB may be enriched by receiving from other traditions. I have undertaken formal theological studies in which I have been taught systematic theology by an Irish Anglican, New Testament theology by a Scottish Presbyterian, mission by a Swiss Reformed pastor and practical theology by a member of the Society of Friends and a New Zealand Anglican – all of whom have contributed to the hinterland of my thinking.

Having set the scene for my research, I now turn to matters of methodology.



## Chapter 2 Hermeneutics and Method

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### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I first explore the goal (and associated tasks) of practical theology and my choice of theological method (2.2). I describe and justify my chosen interpretative framework (2.3), my choice of empirical research method (2.4), and my research design (2.5). I explain how I collected my data (2.6), evaluate my sources demographically (2.7) and describe how I analysed the data (2.8).

### 2.2 Theological Method

#### 2.2.1 Theological Aim

As research which is grounded in practical theology – and indeed which is explored within the context of ministry and its associated theology – this thesis makes an original contribution to the understanding of superintendency by discovering and describing the praxis and theology of superintendency in the British context.

In the formal theological task I undertook for the research, I aimed to

- identify the espoused, operant and normative theologies evidenced in the data;
- examine any tensions between these theologies;<sup>38</sup>
- suggest constructive implications for practice, future research and the formal and normative theological understanding of superintendency.

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<sup>38</sup> Ballard and Pritchard (2006:85) argue that mere description of a context is insufficient: there is only an issue to be explored if there is a discontinuity, an interruption, or a tension which challenges the status quo.

The basic research question, ‘How is the role of the superintendent presbyter understood and practised in the Methodist Church in Great Britain in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how consistent is this with church tradition, and how does this affect the Methodist Church’s polity and theology of oversight?’ raises subsidiary theological questions:

- What is the espoused theology of superintendency which is understood and expressed by Methodists?
- How is Superintendency practiced, and what does that say about what it means? What is the operant theology evidenced by the practice of superintendency?
- What is the normative theology of superintendency propounded by MCGB?
- What is the formal theological response to this? And how does this affect MCGB’s polity and theology of oversight?

These questions can be investigated via the four key tasks<sup>39</sup> and four related questions of practical theology (Osmer 2008:4).

- ***The descriptive-empirical task: “What is going on?”*** There are two parts to the description of the context and ‘lived theology’ (Sweeney 2010:276) of superintendency: (1) How do people describe superintendency? What do they think that superintendency is about? What is it for? What *espoused* theology is revealed if they are asked these questions? (2) What is the *practice* of superintendency? How does it seem to actually operate? Thus I aimed to describe what *operant* theology is revealed.
- ***The interpretative task: “Why is this going on?”*** I reflect on what I believe to be the theologies undergirding the espoused understanding and operant practice of superintendency. I compare the similarities and

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<sup>39</sup> Ritchie and Lewis (2003:27) use similar categories for *secular* qualitative research tasks: contextual, explanatory, evaluative and generative. See also Swinton and Mowat (2006:51-52).

differences between the *espoused* and *operant* voices and seek to explain and interpret those differences.

- ***The normative task: “What ought to be going on?”*** Only *after* the concrete situation has been encountered and the situation has been analysed do I attempt to examine and evaluate any apparent differences between local understanding, practice and norms. This has both hermeneutic and ethical facets as the research subjects and I as researcher make judgements based on our own world-views. ‘Perceptions, beliefs and values face the challenge of being in touch with contemporary realities’ (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:86).
- ***The pragmatic task: “How might we respond?”*** The requirement to respond assumes *a priori* that progress might be made; it includes the generation of constructive pragmatic and theological responses and of positive steps in new directions. Pattison (2000a:247) argues that ‘It is not enough stoically to expose the nature of situations only to opt out when it comes to changing them’ though he warns against being normatively and dogmatically prescriptive (p.248).<sup>40</sup>

### 2.2.2 Hermeneutic considerations

In determining my method of research, I need to ask an *a priori* question: What is the nature of my main interrogation of the situation of Methodist superintendency?

This is a deeply *practical* question. My concern is with the nature of the concrete reality of superintendency in a *particular* time and place. Thus I place systematic,

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<sup>40</sup> Although Pattison (200a:231) indicates that his list of the characteristics of practical theology is ‘in no particular order of importance or significance’ I note that the *transformational* purpose of practical theology is listed first in the numbered list in Pattison and Woodward (2000:13-16 at 13) and that they emphasise a commitment to be constructive following analysis, ‘not just to seeing the world in a different way, but also to doing something to change it’ (Pattison and Woodward 2000:14; see also Pattison 2000a:237, 247).

dogmatic and philosophical theological tradition *secondary* to my *contemporary* analysis.

Swinton and Mowat (2006:25-27, my italics) highlight six tasks of practical theology. Practical theology (i) focuses on the quest for truth and *faithful transformative action* in the world; (ii) mediates Christian tradition with the *contemporary* social context; (iii) seeks to examine the theories and assumptions which underlie *current* practice and hence reshape theory; (iv) seeks to offer constructive new insights into tradition in the light of particular questions from *contemporary* situations; (v) stays close to *experience* while focusing on reflective praxis; and (vi) is fundamentally engaged in the *missio Dei* in seeking not just to understand the world, but to *transform* it.

Within a situation of interpretative polyvalence, my results offer *an* understanding of superintendency within MCGB, and my interpretation of the practice and espoused values of my interviewees offers *a* description of meaning. Swinton and Mowat (2006:51) argue that ‘the more perspectives one uses to explore that reality, the richer the data and the deeper the understanding one will be able to obtain’. I take seriously the notion that practical theology has to be multi-perspectival, in what Lartey (2000:76) calls ‘*collective seeing or comparing visions.*’ Every question is value-laden (and has culturally-specific presuppositions), and no researcher can be objective in a positivist way: we need others’ angles of vision to give a truer perspective of a multi-faceted world, to filter out what is mere background noise, and to undertake the process of complexification which, rather than obfuscating the issues, helps the complicated nature of a situation to emerge (O’Connell Killen and de Beer 1994:2; Swinton and Mowat 2006:75-76).

In sections 2.4 and 2.5 below, I explain my empirical approach. But first, I examine my theological task. What is the source of *theological* data with which I am engaging?

### 2.2.3 Models of Practical Theology

The various approaches within practical theology differ in their starting-points, their methods of dealing with theological data, and their goals.<sup>41</sup> In their presentation of the four basic models of practical theology, Ballard and Pritchard (2006:59-60) note that the models should not be seen ‘as disparate or mutually exclusive. Rather they should be regarded as strands which are often woven together and affect each other’ (p.59). These strands are (i) practical theology as applied theory; (ii) critical-correlative methods; (iii) praxis; and (iv) habitus. It will be seen that *I do not use one model exclusively*: I thus heed Tillich’s warning that ‘Methodological imperialism is as dangerous as political imperialism; like the latter, it breaks down when the independent elements of reality revolt against it’ (Tillich 1953:67).

#### 2.2.3.1 Applied Theory

I do not use Schleiermacherian applied theory because such a deductive approach is probably inadequate. Ballard and Pritchard (2006:13) criticise the tendency towards ‘an excessive dependence on historical precedent and a theological prescriptiveness which can be insensitive to the importance of the social and psychological realities’. Van der Ven (1993:92-93) contends that ‘Theology is in need of inductive research into the current pluriform, heterogeneous and chaotic societal, ecclesiastical and pastoral fields’. I concur: applied theology has on the one hand too narrow a *telos* for the full purposes of practical theology, and on the other hand too universal an approach for the particular concrete contexts of superintendency I wanted to investigate. Any historical or philosophical context is important not as a prior framework, but as part of the rich description of the *present* context, and is very much secondary. I footnote some historical precedents to highlight echoes of the past rather than prescriptions for the present.

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<sup>41</sup> Foley (2013:11) has collected twenty-seven definitions of practical theology. Miller McLemore (2012) as an entire work sets out the breadth of practical theology in ‘its complex and extended responsibilities’ (p.5).

As Pattison (2000b:137) comments,

[T]heology should be seen primarily as *contemporary enquiry* ... What unites all theology is its quest for adequate and true responses to the realities of human and religious experience. Good theology is dynamic, searching and open-ended, ... characterized by a willingness to really try and listen to and understand present realities rather than to regurgitate the answers of the past.

### 2.2.3.2 Critical Correlation

Tillich (1953:70) described the method of correlation thus: ‘it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions’. To use this method in my research, I would seek to correlate my empirical findings with theological norms, and generate answers to any dissonance I found. But Tillich’s model is unidirectional: the norms are used to interrogate the data. The refinements of Tracy (1975) and Browning (1991) offer a *mutual* critical correlation in which the data is allowed to interrogate the norms, though Browning (1991:55-56) asks ‘How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation?’ thereby exemplifying the prioritisation of the normative. But ‘tradition’ also arises from practice as much as from philosophical and systematic theology:

Take any of the great pivotal figures of Christianity – Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Wesley, Barth – and their theology arises from and reflects back on to the challenges they had to face. (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:62)

The technical approach of van der Ven (1990) begins with a problem, and moves through theological induction and deduction *before* obtaining any data (p.225).

Pattison (2000a:232) critiques Browning’s linear ‘action-guiding’ approach as too logical a link between theory and practice – whereas ‘people are not wholly rational and reality is complicated’. I note that Browning himself struggled with his own earlier term ‘strategic practical theology’ (Browning 1991:8) as suggesting ‘complicated models of anticipation, calculation and retaliation’. Healy (2000:38-39) argues that the method of critical correlation fails because the cultural context of the church is not separate from the church as a distinct entity with which the church’s

alignment can be correlated within a single normative account (p.175-76) and because the church involves a mystery.

In addition, Healy (2000:49) and Swinton (2012:86-87) criticise Browning (1991:ix, 44) and van der Ven (1996:39-40, 94-95) in their according equal status to social sciences and theology, and being ‘excessively dependent upon modernistic and explanatory theological categories, with little or no critical contribution from theology’ (Healy 2000:49). Healy himself has been criticised for similar reasons: Watkins (2015:28) notes arguments against Healy’s interdisciplinarity resisting his suggested socio-scientific and ethnographic approaches because they ‘have failed to be as theologically rigorous, substantial and faithful to the ecclesiological tradition as they need to be, if they are to serve, truly, the practical and faithful living of church.’ Swinton (2012:88) notes ‘If theological reflection occurs *after* the event has been observed, recorded, interpreted and explained, then theology becomes a second-order activity that is dependent on a particular account of the world that is generated via ethnographic methods that are far from neutral’.

Watkins (2010:167) comments on the list of polarities presented by Pattison and Woodward (2000:16), on Browning’s ‘revised correlational method’ (Browning 1991, especially 44-47) and Campbell’s argument for ‘relating’ practical theology to ‘other theological disciplines’ (Campbell 2000, especially 84-85), noting that in all there is the assumption of a ‘gap’ which needs to be imaginatively bridged.

Furthermore, Healy (2000:36) argues that by using models and the bipartite concept of the church<sup>42</sup>, such ‘blueprints’ aim for ‘perfection’ (Healy 2000:36). In relation to my own research, *WIACS* and Standing Orders are such normative blueprints, whereas my collecting of interview data is seeking to provide an empirical description about superintendency in practice. Attempts to use blueprint norms fail to account for the church’s messiness (Healy 2000:148).

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<sup>42</sup> That the church consists of two parts: the pilgrim (and not-yet-perfect ) church militant, and the perfected church triumphant.

Nevertheless, my quasi-quantitative approach towards some of my data (Appendix 3) offers a type of correlation between the norm and the practice. My presentation of statistical significance<sup>43</sup> for my findings, and my counting of the number of similar comments, measures whether patterns exist, i.e. repeated occurrences of particular practices or understandings of superintendency. I contend that my use of this quantitative approach as part of my ‘toolbox’ (Swinton and Mowat 2006:51) does no injustice to the qualitative approach, but contributes to my rich description of my findings: it is *not* a means of claiming any quasi-scientific objective validation of my data. But it does highlight where further research is necessary to discover a better evidential base.

Although Pattison (2000a:243) notes the dialectical approach of many practical theologies which hold polarities in tension, Healy (2000) has contended that the dialectical approach is not a necessary characteristic of practical theology; indeed he argues (2012:183) that to adopt a correlational approach, using polarities, is flawed, because ethnography reveals the church as a diverse and complex community, which is ‘in principle, not clearly bounded in terms of ‘church and world’, nor closely interiorly regulated and homogeneous’. Watkins (2015:36) agrees, arguing that

a plurality of perspectives is the thing that most adequately describes reality as it is lived and experienced. This places theology not in a position of correlation, or ‘dialogue with’ (and so separation from) the ‘world’; but rather, in the midst of ongoing conversations with numerous others, in a connectivity of ‘others’; of which it is, itself, one.

### **2.2.3.3 Praxis models**

Although praxis models *begin* with concrete experience, no practice is value-free: ‘Theory and practice are dialectically locked together, for theory or understanding arises out of action, and action relates to reflection on interpreted action’ (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:54). Swinton and Mowat (2006:20) argue that practices are

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<sup>43</sup> The measurement of statistical significance in random data sampling permits the researcher, in a *scientific* survey, to define the probability that what has been discovered is idiosyncratic or is part of a wider pattern.



‘performative of particular beliefs’ and ‘bearers of tradition’ within communities. This anticipates the normative task, as *expressed* beliefs can change practice. Browning (1991:9-10) notes the Aristotelian *phronesis*, the practical wisdom, arising from a practical rationality.

Ricoeur thus spoke of a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ about practices. In my empirical research I *begin* with action, asking people to verbalise their understanding of that action, by describing it and explaining it, so that the movement is firstly from action to words. This is not to say that action is performed without undergirding theory – action is performative of theory, but that theory is not always expressed, or is ‘assumed’. Perhaps what is assumed is not what undergirds the practice. Swinton and Mowat (2006:vi, 10) ask ‘Is what *appears* to be going on within this situation what is *actually* going on?’ (p.v) and they note that ‘we often discover that what we *think* we are doing is quite different from what we are *actually* doing’ (p.vi). It is descriptive research using empirical and literary methods to test practice against an ‘interpretative framework’ (Swinton and Mowat 2006:34).

The hermeneutic of suspicion seeks to *complexify* situations (Swinton and Mowat 2006:13-16) in order to explore them polyvalently and *interpret* them in the light, for example, of their history, culture, social expectations and language, and evoke that ‘unnatural self-reflection’ which highlights previously unnoticed assumptions.

The concrete situation I am analysing comprises the research context already described in section 1.7, but also the data I gained from my interviews, which is presented in the next chapter. Placing my research in its context follows the contextual approach of Bevans (2002:3), who argued that all human experience is contextual, and *particular* factors such as culture and social location are themselves a source of theology. It also recognises that the present context is dependent on the past and differs depending on perspectives, what Farley (2000:121) calls the multidimensional ‘demand of the situation’. This is corrective to the approach of Hiltner (2000:30) who in 1958 mapped out the ‘logic-centered fields’ of Christian faith with the ‘operation-centered areas’ of Christian life, with no reference to any localised contexts.

However, van der Ven (1993:121) has noted that ‘perception does not arise simply from the accumulation of facts free from the influence of any theoretical preconception’. I note the impossibility of drawing up interview questions without a prior framework of theoretical preconception. Gadamer (1989:266ff) refers to *prejudices* as forestructures<sup>44</sup> or conditions of knowledge that determine our ability to find intelligibility in a situation.

Similarly, although Swinton and Mowat (2006:178) note how important it is that data categories emerge from the data, rather than being imposed on it, data-gathering, analysis and interpretation is not value-neutral. The only way we can make sense of a situation is to interpret it, and the act of interpretation requires the importation of meaning:

Central to the act of interpretation is what we already know. Our own embeddedness and historical situatedness not only deeply influences the way we interpret our world; it is the basic way we strive to make sense of anything in the world. (Swinton 2012:82)

Campbell (2000:85) argues that the relationship between practical theology and other disciplines<sup>45</sup> is *lateral*; they are side by side because

Practical theology juxtaposes concrete situations of witness, celebration and service with the findings and formulations of the biblical, historical and philosophical subjects in the theological corpus. It does this not in order to correct according to some canon of relevance, nor in order to be corrected according to some canon of orthodoxy. It is more an exercise in creative imagination, the interplay of idea and action, with all the ambiguity and inconclusiveness which this implies.

Swinton (2012:75) argues “[W]e are enabled to look carefully at the empirical church, reflect on it in the light of Scripture and tradition, and allow that looking to challenge and inspire our ecclesial practices”. But, he argues, *looking*, i.e. empirical investigation, privileges that which is verifiable as opposed to that which is

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<sup>44</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:24) speak of ‘foreshadowing’.

<sup>45</sup> Healy (2000:158-169) argues that the social sciences need to be used theologically.

subjective: ‘that which drives, motivates, controls, and acts on people’s ecclesial lives cannot be seen: it can only be grasped by faith’ (2012:76). Therefore, he concludes, ‘the methods one chooses to use in one’s attempt to look at something will determine what one can see and what one cannot see’ (2012:76).

Moreover, there is an aspect of espoused theology which is untestable, unprovable and beyond empirical measurement. Pattison (2000a:223) argues that to place meaning, value and belief on *practice* is to have an implicit, working theology, even if it is unarticulated. The task of my investigations was to glimpse the meaning inherent in practice, and also to encourage an articulation of the espoused theology of ordinary Methodists in relation to superintendency.

Furthermore, God is also revealing Godself in the research I am undertaking. Fiddes (2012:25-26) speaks of ‘engagement’ with God, rather than ‘observation’ (of something which can be objectively examined). ‘We need to get beyond subject-object thinking to a kind of thinking characterized by engagement and participation’ (2012:26).

#### **2.2.3.4 Habitus**

The espoused and operant theologies of my interviewees, I contend, rely on habitus – which includes their way of being Methodists. Following Farley (1983) ‘habitus’ seeks to undertake practical theology in a way of life, responding to a situation with spiritual love: the task of practical theology is to train mind and heart, will and emotions, in response to the Holy Spirit. This approach may well be criticised because of its emphasis on oppressive conformity in a process of socialisation (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:75), but such conformity is part of the normative scriptural and traditional approach to discipleship and ‘growing into God’. Problematically, it is difficult to objectively define standards by which to judge behaviour, relying instead on subjective community consensus. Within the context of my own research, the community may be seen in a wide sense as the whole of MCGB, or in a narrow sense as the local communities which have been experienced by the interviewees. I explore a tiny part of the community of the Newcastle District

– the church *in via* – with a view to locating the theology present in its faithful living out of its practice and experience of superintendency, not necessarily in order to generate theological answers to any problems. Healy (2000:74) warns that ‘we cannot claim to map out the answers to all major ecclesiological questions in a form that is universally applicable.’<sup>46</sup>

If theology is ‘faithful understanding’ then practical theology serves the quest for ‘faithful living’. Healy (2000:21-22, 38) argues for *witness* and *discipleship* as having priority over theology: ‘The church’s response to its ever-shifting contexts should not first-and-foremost be to formulate theological constructions, be they doctrinal or moral systems, but should be to reconstruct its concrete identity so as to embody its witness in truthful discipleship’. Badcock (2009:7) affirms Healy’s pragmatism: ‘an ecclesiology that cannot show its relevance to the actual life of the church is of questionable value’.<sup>47</sup>

### **2.2.3.5 *In Via* Theology**

Yet there is what might possibly be called a fifth approach which seeks to take practice in its entirety as the prime source of theological understanding, as developed by Heythrop College’s Action Research: Church and Society project team (Cameron *et al.* 2010).

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<sup>46</sup> The theological horizon or metanarrative described by Healy (2000:52-76), rather than relying on dialectical polarities of church/world or church militant/church triumphant draws on aspects of Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama* [TD] (Balthasar 1988-1998). Balthasar contends that the relations between God, world and church are best conceived like a play which has the goal of humanity’s communion with the Trinity (TD III, 452). All humanity is part of the play, as actors not puppets (Healy 2000:68), but Christians *choose* to participate in the dramatic struggle of discipleship (TD I,22; III, 534). There is always a ‘tragic’ division between our individual identity and the part we are called to play (TD III,208), a role we need to discover as it is mediated to us through the Church. The church *in via* lives a tragic tensive existence, caught, for example, between the now and not yet, or between and the ideal and the fallen reality (TD IV:453-54) as it dramatically chooses how to constitute its concrete existence (TD II, 86; III, 431).

<sup>47</sup> Conversely, Schleiermacher noted that empiricism was insufficient to discover the essence of Christianity (Schleiermacher 1976:105, Healy 2012:184).

Watkins (2010:168), a member of the team, argues that models of theological reflection which seek to integrate scripture, tradition and experience have a ‘striking ... prior assumption of separation of experience from tradition or doctrine’ in which both are ‘objectified’ as conversation partners. Where practice is brought *alongside* tradition, the implication is that practices

are not already part of and bearers of that tradition. ... Thus violence is done both to Christian practices as theology (instances of faith seeking understanding) and to the texts of the Christian tradition, as themselves fruits of faith practised.

Watkins (2010:168-69) presents an *alternative* model of integration, beginning with an ‘ecclesiological understanding of the pastoral theological task as discernment and articulation of God’s presence to us – his self-revelation in time and space’. I note here an emphasis on *particularity*. Such an ecclesiology ‘begins with an assumption of connection’ which ‘does not do away with controversy, tensions, fractures and conflicts of understanding, but relocates them to the living context of theological tradition as embodied in the life, practice, current conflicts, and intellectual and worshipping memory of the Church’ (2010:169). There is no need for a systematic attempt to make connections (p.173): the connections are already there. The task is then attentiveness to God’s revelation in today’s world as part of the task of *traditio*: receiving what has been handed on, discerning the *single* voice of God (p.171) and handing on the *traditio* ourselves. Yet Watkins presents that single voice as being discerned through a ‘cacophony’<sup>48</sup> of particular voices, rather than a controlled conversation. The Word comes to us in more than a rational theological analysis of ‘words, texts, practices, traditions, experiences’ but as personal encounter in which the Spirit speaks afresh (p.171-72). Sweeney (2010:276-77) comments on the integration of the voices: ‘Lived theology [*espoused* and *operant*] is not autonomously constructed but is determined and patterned, to a

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<sup>48</sup> Pattison (2000a:243) also warns of a ‘cacophony’ of voices, but notes that this prevents individual voices from being attended to and clearly heard, as opposed to discerning the *single* voice which is apparently the most important.

greater or lesser degree, by ... *formal* theology ... and ... the *normative* theology of the Christian churches’.

This *in via* method is related to the habitus approach, but is subtly different in the way that data is gathered. Habitus could emphasise the lived Christian experience above all else, and thus ‘lose data’ from scripture, Christian tradition, and a rational approach to the data (Cameron *et al.* 2010:25.28; Walton 2003).<sup>49</sup> I would argue that this is especially apposite for Methodists, who are accustomed to adding ‘experience’ to their inheritance of the Anglican ‘threefold cord’ of scripture, tradition and reason.<sup>50</sup> *CLP* (§§1.2.8-10, 2.3.18, 2.4.4, 2.4.13) argues for scripture interpretation in ‘dialogue’ with tradition and the experience of Christian faith in contemporary context and culture.

Cameron *et al.* (2010:26) ask what ‘authority’ is ‘normative’, noting that different Christian traditions give different weight to ‘doctrine’ and ‘experience’, and therefore normatively ‘restrain’ theological reflection. By contrast, as Steen (2010:108) highlights, Cameron *et al.*’s emphasis on making operant theology ‘explicit and heard ... allows it to challenge other theologies’. Roach (2011:126) particularly notes that in Cameron *et al.*’s work, the four voices free the conversation from denominational and dogmatic approaches; I add that it can potentially do this *within* a denomination as much as between denominations: in particular *contra* formally stated ecclesiology or perceived normative collusion.

So the method of Theological Action Research [‘*TAR*’] seeks to integrate all four ‘voices’ of theology, which I will now discuss.

## 2.3 Interpretative Framework

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<sup>49</sup> Nichols (2011) argued (albeit polemically) in his address to the *Anglicanorum Coetibus* Conference in Canada that Anglicanism has now lost ‘reason’ from this trio, as reason has ‘mutated’ into ‘contemporary experience’.

<sup>50</sup> Avis (2002) maps the development within Anglicanism of the threefold cord, from Jewel and Hooker, through the Tew Circle, and the Chicago-Lambeth conversations, to 2001.

### 2.3.1 The Four Voices of Theology

Although Cameron *et al.* (2010:53-56) see this *model* of theological reflection as intertwined and linked with *TAR's method*, I suggest that the model has value even without the action element,<sup>51</sup> and can therefore be utilised independently. I thus concur with Ballard (2010:158) who argued that the two should be 'more clearly distinguished'. The conversation between these four voices has, indeed, occurred throughout Christian history.

The key contribution of *TAR's* 'Theology in Four Voices' is its recognition that to seek to understand a situation is understand the 'interactive performance' and co-inherence between 'speech acts' and 'performed practice' (Cameron *et al.* 2010:13-14). The goal of discerning the four voices is to elicit a *better* understanding (as a *complete* understanding is unachievable.) But, I would argue, by engaging in the conversation, I enable different participant's voices to be expressed and heard.

The 'Four Voices of theology' are distinct but overlapping (Cameron *et al.* 2010:53-58):

- (1) Operant theology – that embedded within a group's actual practices.
- (2) Espoused theology – that embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs.
- (3) Normative theology – which includes scriptures, the creeds, official church teaching and liturgies, and the particular faith communities' orthopraxy.
- (4) Formal theology – theologians' theology and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Cameron *et al.* (2010:146-48) have found this tool to be a 'fairly straightforward way of disclosing important tensions' (p.146) which have taken the conversation into a fresh place, particularly where the operant theology of practitioners has been awkwardly dissonant with normative or formal theology. They uphold *TAR* as being 'formative of practice' and practice as being 'transformative of theology' (pp.149-

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<sup>51</sup> That part of 'action research' where transformative action is implemented and further analysis takes place.

51). They rightly warn of the difficulties of *speaking* of practice, which is a step removed from the *reality* of practice, and also speaking about practice as *the* place of encounter with God because practice is itself ‘partial’ and ‘by its very nature, resists any exhaustive account of itself’ (pp.22-24).

Watkins (2015:24) presents the four voices framework of TAR as ‘a constructive and integrative ‘whole-theology’ response to the particular narratives of practical theology and ecclesiology in recent times’. The four voices approach ‘is able to offer such a response because of the way it locates itself within a theology of ‘tradition’, of faith handed on in *via*’ (2015:24) and therefore views ecclesiology as process (‘a verbal reality’) (2015:25), not a product. The process avoids the ‘danger ... that practical or ethnographic ‘ecclesiologies’ really do little more than produce descriptions of the living of church, and remain at a loss as to what to make of the described realities theologically’ (Watkins 2015:28).

Watkins (2015:34-38) notes three points about TAR.

(1) TAR is fundamentally non-correlationist: it does not seek to correlate theology with practice. Practices are not simply data-sources or objects of theological interpretation. They are ‘of themselves, embodiments of faith seeking understanding: they form a theological voice, or authority, which needs to be listened to as such’ (Watkins 2015:35). This operant voice itself discloses an operant and an espoused theology. It is, nevertheless, rooted in the established tradition of ‘*traditio*’ (p.37)

(2) TAR requires a ‘conversational, communal approach, within a context characterised by non-negotiable particularities’ (Watkins 2015:35): The conversation is required to be ‘attentive to otherness and surprise’ as truth is progressively revealed to us (p.36).

(3) TAR requires that the operant and espoused voices are brought into conversation with the normative voice of Christian tradition and the formal voice of the academy: all four voices are interdependent. (Watkins 2015:37).



Within this conversation, she contends, theology is found at ‘epiphanies’, the ‘moments of disclosure’. Watkins (2015:37) argues ‘If it is the case that postmodern theology is required, by its contexts, to engage in interruptive conversation with the pluralism of particularity, then the methods called for by ‘the four voices of theology’ would seem well-suited to our contemporary context’.

Social science methods and ethnographies may, in a postmodern setting, merely offer ‘an ever increasing set of detailed descriptions, whose very particularity make them difficult to place within the doctrinal tradition concerning church’ (Watkins 2015:38). There are two possible solutions to this, which Watkins (2015:38) discounts: (1) abandon the doctrinal abstractions; or (2) ‘simplify and so inevitably manipulate our reading of practices so as to make them coherent’. TAR offers a third way of epiphanies and interruptions entered into by ‘real, particular people’ in conversation. ‘Ecclesiology thus becomes, in its primary function, that practice of interruptive conversation across theological and personal voices, which seeks to serve the life of God’s mission in the particular places, peoples and events of the world’ (Watkins 2015:38).

The ARCS team propounds that Christian practices ‘describe the reality of the church’s mystery, as embodied in particular contexts and groups; they both disclose proper questions for the theology of church and ... present an essential locus for the discovery of fresh responses to those questions’ (Watkins 2012:169). ‘Christian practitioners are constantly working with and responding to thoroughly theological questions in their living of church in the world. This voice of practice must be heard, for it is spoken from the heart of the church itself’ (p.176).

Much systematic theology, argues Watkins (2012:176), assumes that ‘the places of practice are the loci of problems and that the theological tradition is a treasure trove of answers.’ In each case of their presentation of practical theology and qualitative research, Swinton and Mowat (2006:126-131; 178-190; 216-18; 243-44) reflect theologically *after* they have complexified the situation. This is common in the use of the pastoral cycle methodology.

Watkins and Cameron (2012:72) describe how the ARCS project involved using social science methods and action research for ‘a certain reflective reading of raw data witnessing to practices of faith as they are understood by the practitioners themselves’. The theology expressed through this practice, and ‘those theologies expressed primarily through words and concepts, discloses both various connections and disconnections – or fractures – between the embodied and the systematically articulated ... theologies. Such recognition of fractures leads us to reflect on their possible bases’.

I would note here that there appears to be a difference between ‘fractures’ which are worthy of closer investigative conversation, and ‘gaps’, which correlationists need to systematise.

Watkins and Cameron speak of the importance of what Andrew Todd called the ‘Kairos moment’ in theological reflection (Thompson 2008:56, 97), ‘moments of disclosure’ (Watkins and Cameron 2012:81) or ‘small epiphanies when something is seen differently’, ‘a moment when the tradition and reflection on practice trigger an insight that in turn will prompt fresh thinking or action’ (Watkins and Cameron 2012:74-75). They give examples of these moments in practical projects and the reflections undertaken following data collection (pp.75-81).<sup>52</sup>

Gadamer (1982:356) has commented on the nature of surprise, arguing that experiences have to be *new*, otherwise they are simply repetitions, rather than negations, of previous experience: ‘Every experience worthy of the name thwarts expectation’. Swinton and Mowat (2006:112) comment that ‘the process of knowing and the development of knowledge relates to a constant process of experience – surprise – re-encounter with renewed experience’. In this respect, Methodist tradition is altered in each successive generation, building on previous experiences. When the horizons of my interviewees caused me surprise, my own horizon was expanded.

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<sup>52</sup> I note that these terms resonate with the description by Reichertz (2007:220), within general grounded theory discussions, of the abductive ‘cognitive logic of discovery’.

Ballard and Pritchard (2006:17) express the nature of surprise eschatologically: ‘The Kingdom has not yet come; so we ask how do we move into God’s future and keep ourselves open to the possibility of newness and surprise’. They note that ‘we can stumble over the Kingdom’ in places where faith is not specifically found (p.54). Fiddes (2012:25, 33) speaks of unexpected insights into how God’s promises are fulfilled in the life of the Church. Campbell (2000:86) argues that theologians need to ‘have the temerity to suggest that they can discern where God is at work’.

Religious belief is exhibited in practices, but such practices cannot be the sole transmitters of meaning. To limit analysis to practices is to reduce the contribution of espoused and normative theologies to that which is filtered by those practices. I contend that we must avoid the naturalistic reductionism which limits our understanding of the church to that which is concrete and empirically observable. Furthermore, discerning the conscious espoused theologies of those engaging in practice is helpful to ascertain why they carry out those practices, notwithstanding that some practices occur for preconscious or unconscious reasons (in which ‘transitional, largely pre-linguistic part of the human the symbol, the ritual and the metaphor hold sway and the logical, rational proposition has little purchase’ (Pattison 2000a:220)). Even if a practice is the result of unthinking and habitual traditions, the very act of questioning the practice brings theoretical reasoning into the conversation. One cannot *think* about a practice without *applying* some sort of framework of analysis. It is this *theoretical reasoning in conversation with practical reasoning* which is transformational.

### **2.3.2 My use of the ARCS method**

Although the full ARCS method<sup>53</sup> requires a number of steps, including feedback to participants, reflection by participants alone and with the ARCS team, and the

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<sup>53</sup> Worked examples of the use of the ARCS method may be found in Cameron et al (2010:109-37), Sweeney et al (2010:274-75), Watkins (2012:171-74), Watkins and Cameron (2012:74-89); Watkins (2014:240-47); Watkins and Shepherd (2014).

agreement of practical responses (the action phase) the limitations of my research meant that I was not able to carry out such an exercise (Sweeney *et al.* 2010:279). I acknowledge thus that my research does not stand securely ‘in the performance’ as advocated by ARCS, but is situated as it were in the auditorium (2010:280), raising a tension between ‘subjective participation and outsider perspective’. This, as acknowledged by Sweeney *et al.* (2010:280), raises the problem of objectivity. Nevertheless, I contend that the etic viewpoint, though not without its presuppositions, has greater objectivity. I cannot be purely objective, nor indeed deemed wholly etic, however, as I am myself part of the Methodist culture or habitus which I was observing.

Notwithstanding my part-emic position, I aimed for objectivity by use of full transcripts, giving me greater accuracy than if I had personally-generated a summary of each interviewee’s comments; within my analysis, I aimed to be systematic; and within my interpretation, I aimed to be open to further insights. By using a method based on grounded theory, in which theoretical categories are allowed to inductively emerge from gathered data rather than being imposed on it, both the etic and emic approaches are combined. ‘This is an emic technique in that it develops internally to the data, but also etic in that it imposes strict systems of coding and classifications’ and therefore ‘is a corrective for subjective bias’ (Sweeney *et al.* 2010:281). It also permits a form of ‘virtual’ dialogue between the participants and the researcher.

The ARCS process ‘requires an open (though not uncritical) attentiveness to practice in which emphasis is laid on discerning the work of the Spirit in practices, rather than any sense of need to correct practices against some previously well-articulated authority’ (Watkins and Shepherd 2014:109).

The central conviction of the ‘four voices of theology’ approach is that ‘the practices of Christian living are not only suitable objects for theological exploration, but are themselves theological (Watkins 2012:169, 177) Practices are – both intentionally and unintentionally – bearers of theology. Practical theology is concerned with how these embodied theologies of Christians’ lives find their proper authority within the doctrinal and pastoral articulations of our age’ (Watkins

2014:236). Foley (2013:11, n.1) notes that the chronological place of praxis is contested; but for the ARCS team it has priority, using grounded theory methods of induction. The approach of grounded theory is helpful so that *others'* perspectives may be heard and I may not suffer too severely from that 'selective deafness' which is the corollary of subjectivity.

I discerned the operant practices from my interview data, but only after the induction of grounded theory does the 'operant' voice of actual practice enter into conversation with the espoused, normative and formal voices in a 'complex inter-dependency of the voices which exists from the outset' as 'each "voice" is already, in some way, present in and formative of the others ... [in an] essential unity of the voices as *together* revelatory of that truth of God's Spirit at work in world and church' (Watkins 2014:239).

Cameron *et al.* (2010:54-55) define normative theology as 'what the practising group names as its theological authority'; they recognise that such a theology is produced due to influences from history, doctrine, scripture, and 'the traditions and practices recognized by the community over generations as being authentic to its gospel living.' Methodist doctrine as defined in *DU* is based on five normative sources: Scripture, the Apostolic Faith, the historic creeds, the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation, and 'Methodist usage' – i.e. Methodist tradition. I would argue that *a source of theology only becomes normative when it is accepted (explicitly or implicitly) and inculcated into the group.*

I aimed to discover what practitioners believe constitutes this normative theology. To what extent is *church teaching* within Methodism actually normative? To what extent does this teaching concerning superintendency owe its origin to practice? Methodist tradition allows *experience* to transform norms of praxis.<sup>54</sup>

But

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<sup>54</sup> This is in direct contradiction to Browning's approach, which seeks to defend the norms of praxis against concrete situations (Browning 1991:55-56). See Ballard and Pritchard (2006:62).

Sometimes the very question of what is normative theology for a particular practitioner group becomes *the* question for attention: it is a question that highlights issues of authenticity, legitimation and identity for the practices carried out. (Cameron *et al.* 2010:55).

Wigg-Stevenson (2011) examined formal theology's value for 'ordinary' church members. Using the Four Voices and the work of Tanner (1997), and rooting her research in a local church theology class, Wigg-Stevenson investigated the conversation between what Tanner calls 'everyday theology' (context-specific forms of theology in the local church) and 'academic theology' (specialised, historically consistent and systematic), and discovered that

Everyone ... agreed that academic theology had an important role to play for the church. But no one thought that their everyday theologies should be treated as a source that academic theologians should systematize or even from which they should abstract in order to reflect on it. And, interestingly, no one answered that academic theology could provide them with the "right answers" to questions they might have about belief and truth. (pp.111-12)

Cameron herself (2012:7) has explored the challenges of helping 'ordinary theologians' to engage with practical theology's task.

To what extent are elements of formal theology – the theology of theologians and dialogue with other disciplines – dependent on other voices? Formal theology deliberately attempts to listen to other voices. Shier-Jones (2005:46) highlighted within Methodist theological method the 'conversation with tradition'; Conference reports seek to 'demonstrate that different, important, voices from the past and the present have been listened to and engaged with' as God 'guides us through Christian fellowship' (MCGB 2000a:12). Such emphasis on tradition is criticised for lacking future perspective (e.g. Clark 2010:241-42).

The field of practical theology seeks to understand and test the coherence of the church's *operant* practices and reflect on them theologically. This thesis tests superintendency practice against the *espoused* understanding of representative Methodists and the Church's *normative* statements. My formal theological task is to elucidate their meaning and formulate a response.

In presenting my thesis I myself make a formal theological contribution towards the synthesis of formal theological and pragmatic statements out of which MCGB's normative understanding of superintendency arises.

### **2.3.3 The conversation between practical and dogmatic theology**

I now consider the *limits* of the conversation between the espoused, operant and normative voices. Where are the 'red lines' which the voice of experience and practice may not cross? This very question asks about the priority of the normative.

McGrath (2012:115) argues that the pastoral cycle of Green (1990:93) and its adaptation by Pattison (2000a:135-45) allow theological reflection to be brought to bear on a situation; but

it is important to appreciate that an implicit, intuitive process of theological reflection is already taking place in the processes of observation and reflection, in which the theological *schema* or "mental map" of the Christian observer subtly influences what is actually observed, and the action subsequently taken within that situation.

This is because in their reflection upon practice, practical theologians require a 'background' of systematic theology and a habitus approach in order to describe the epiphanic moments of what practice says (in the ARCS examples, about 'sacrament' or 'hospitality' - Cameron *et al.* 2010:148-50) or of the moments when 'the kingdom breaks in' (Sweeney 2010:282). Making sense of practice draws into the conversation the formal and normative voices. Sweeney (2010:282) warns rightly of 'the need to be on guard against culture simply overpowering theology': the formal and normative are important components in that defence.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, normative theology must not overpower culture by requiring that conformity and orthodoxy which stifles 'the possibility of developing new insights and directions' (Pattison 2000a:238) and allowing practice to be transformative of theology.

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<sup>55</sup> Pattison (2000a:242) similarly warns against that 'experiential fundamentalism' which deems our own experience as uniquely normative for others.

Practical theology is communal and experiential, giving high status to ordinary experiences (Pattison 2000a:246); it prioritises the communal over the individual and theory-laden praxis as an essential dialogue-partner (Foley 2013). Swinton and Mowat (2006:5) argue that to take human experience seriously ‘does not imply that experience is a source of revelation’. I *disagree* to some extent, because the Holy Spirit’s work is not restricted to dogmatic and systematic theology. For example, many Christians would question the assertion of Swinton and Mowat that the resurrection cannot be understood by experience and human reason, for such Christians express that they have experienced the presence of the risen Christ who is with them ‘always, to the completion of the age’ (Matthew 28:20). Although such an assertion is not objectively testable, it is nevertheless a subjective espoused view and the prevalence of that view can be discovered empirically. However, I also *agree* to some extent with Swinton and Mowat: although experience can indeed be a source of revelation, in order for it to be *recognised* as revelation such revelation needs to be critically tested by or alongside normative sources. Swinton and Mowat speak of the *script* of the performance being provided by ‘scripture, doctrine and tradition’ (2006:7). Swinton and Mowat emphasise faith as a *performance* (2006:4). But such *operant* practice, they argue, can only *interpret* the script, and ask questions of it which arise from particular contexts (p.7): scripture and tradition cannot be rewritten. Thus in investigating contemporary experience – the operant and the espoused – the normative and the formal theologies are required as a hermeneutical framework beyond social science methods such as grounded theory research.

Ballard and Pritchard (2006:13) note the ‘inner limitation to theology’s freedom and independence’ arguing that ‘theology acts on behalf of and for the purposes of the People of God’. Such a limitation arises from scripture and tradition and other normative teachings of the church. This means that any transformation following my research is *limited* by Methodist and ecumenical tradition: I contend that there must remain something of the Methodist Church of Great Britain which allows it still to be



recognisable as *Methodist* by other members of the World Methodist Council, and as *church* by other parts of Christ's Body,<sup>56</sup> otherwise this would imply that MCGB had 'lost' something that was deemed necessary within *tradition, scripture* and *reason*. Contemporary *experience* is thus tempered by these three: in short, *practice* needs to be considered alongside a common systematic and dogmatic framework, a 'tradition held in common' (Cameron *et al.* 2010: 60). I relate this not only to Pattison's argument for the articulation of *identity* (2000a:223) but also to the nature of the church. A theological framework marks that nature and places limitations on that change. Such a framework, argues Pattison (2000a:223) has 'real significance'. Swinton and Mowat (2006:5) locate 'continuing innovative performance' in critical tension with 'scripture, doctrine and tradition'. In Methodist terms, experience, reason and tradition have always been subservient to scripture, even if there has been disagreement as to how scripture is to be understood in the contemporary situation; and local experience has always needed to recognise the wider connexion.

Although, therefore, a 'grounded theory' approach to theological data treats such data as an authentic theology, the acceptability of that theology is *tested* by its coherence to systematic and dogmatic tradition. There is here a subtle difference between the applicationist approach which *begins* with (or *later* applies) historical and philosophical theology in order to stifle nonconformity to tradition<sup>57</sup>, and my approach which acknowledges that practice is *assessed in the light of tradition*. Gagey (2010:82) notes Grellier's argument that to apply systematic theology from the Bible and Christian tradition to practical tasks in the church is to make practical theology a secondary discipline, requiring it to *apply* doctrines in the development and interpretations of which it itself played no part. As Gisel (1977:11) noted: 'practical theology' cannot just be content with being the pure application of a

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<sup>56</sup> Fiddes (2012:19) has criticised a purely inductive approach due to 'the dangers of relativism and a floating free from the Christian tradition'.

<sup>57</sup> Pattison (2000a:219) speaks of 'the kinds of totalitarian Stalinist world views that crush individuals in the world and the church'.

theory developed elsewhere'. Gisel (1977:26) argued that theology 'is not for the mere faithful ratification of antecedence. It develops a specific reading of the givens of history and experience'.

Thus I also listen to Methodist traditions, to the normative and the formal theologies, and whether they are new insights and directions which are of enduring<sup>58</sup> value in the debate. The operant and espoused voices of practice (and the self-description thereof) are part of the current *provisional* (Pattison 2000a:238) culture of the circuits I have investigated, but again, I argue that such culture must not overpower and fragment (p.240) that which is recognisably 'Methodist' or recognisably 'church'. Such culture, though, is *itself* part of the Methodist Church. Here there is a tension between the Conference dictating conformity in connexionalism and limiting subsidiarity, and the pluralist reality of the localism I found in my research.

Fortunately, the flow is not unidirectional.

[O]ur Standing Orders are not theologically sterile. Rather, they represent the doctrines of the Methodist Church in practical and structural ways. Nevertheless, usage is much more open to development and change than doctrine as the annual amendments to CPD demonstrate. (FAOC 1984a:§19)

Shier-Jones (2005:12) notes that 'Methodist theology will continue to change as the Methodist people change and as the Church strives to fulfil its calling'. I would note the reversibility of causality – the way the Church fulfils its calling, and the way that people change in order to do that, is influenced by the Church's theology.

The Church's authority for interpretation, argues Avis (2002:366), is contingent on the 'assumptions, needs and demands of time and circumstance' with 'an appeal to reason and learning as competent to modify the interpretation of Scripture and tradition' (p.112)..

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<sup>58</sup> I use the word 'enduring' not to argue for a generalisation of operant theology (which may be particular to its place and time) but to denote the enduring *contribution* to the tradition of the church which the contemporary and contextual hands on to its successors.

Thus the pragmatic task – the response to the theological enquiry – belongs to the nature of the church: the church only exists to fulfil its calling. I contend that without the church’s considering *change*, not only can there be no progress towards God’s *telos* for the Church, but the Church would become anachronistic, ceasing to exhibit in each age the presence which is prefigured by the Incarnation: an anachronistic Body of Christ would fail to be fully present. Within Methodist tradition, *TNOO* (§§2.2, 4.1.3) speaks of the creative and re-creative love of God seeking to *perfect* all things, both in the internal  $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omega\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$  of the church and the participation in external relationships in the world which God loves.

Swinton and Mowat (2006:87) argue that theology should be given priority, because ‘Within the process of practical-theological research, qualitative research data *does* acquire its significance from theology’. However, they argue (p.91) that that does not make theological tradition immune from criticism, because such tradition is part of ongoing contextual communal history. I would add, also, that scripture also should not be immune: this is not to criticise scripture, but to criticise the way it is used to interpret the contemporary situation.

By adopting *WIACS*, the Conference endorsed its conclusions (SO131(17)(d)) and thus *WIACS* formally became a normative document for the practice of superintendency in MCGB, intending ‘to stimulate, encourage and assist both Superintendents and the circuits’ (*WIACS*§3). As the existence of a normative *document* does not lead to normative *practice*, my research aims to capture the conversation between theory and practice, seeking to test the mutual relevance of this theoretical definition for the actual practice of superintendency.<sup>59</sup>

It is important, in Swinton and Mowat’s term, not to lose the plot and ‘require the creation of another play’ (2006:4-5): they emphasise ‘the importance of normativity’ (p.11). I understand this to be the case because the true starting-point for practical

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<sup>59</sup> The use of the word ‘theoretical’ does not imply that the theory was built up *a priori* – the document was a result of its writers thinking about the practice of superintendency as they had experienced it, as well as exploring what was normative for the role in Methodist history (*WIACS*§3).

theology is not *experience*, but *God*, in God's self-revelation, as the source of ultimate truth.<sup>60</sup> Practical theology seeks a faithful response to that revelation in its interpretation of the practices of the church (p.11) in order that those practices may be more faithful. Ballard and Pritchard call tradition the 'givenness' which is a faith passed on by the saints: 'We do in fact live out of a continuity and we are truly given the treasures of wisdom from the past' (2006:92), Yet this tradition 'has to be living' (p.93), and is not necessarily a chain – it is possible to return to foundations which have been forgotten, 'making theology connect with life and ministry so that Gospel truth comes alive.' It is also possible to be reminded of forgotten treasures by ecumenical partners. Pattison (2000a:239) argues that pastoral theology privileges the present over the past. Yet God is not solely the God of the *present*: God has acted throughout history. Therefore the historical voice also needs to be heard. The voice of the future may not be empirically testable, yet fresh insights may be the seeds of that which is seen as normative in the future. Until then, we need to hear from all four voices.

## 2.4 Choice of Empirical Research Method

The nature of the data I sought dictated my research method.

Yin (2009:8) helpfully tabulates the three variables guiding method: (a) the type of research question; (b) whether the researcher may control behavioural events; and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary, rather than historical, events.

Of the five major research methods presented by Yin, I ruled three out.

*Experiment* was not possible due to the inability to control behavioural events. Nor would *archival analysis* yield much data – my literature review found little published evidence concerning the praxis of superintendency, and practice is simply not

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<sup>60</sup> Of course, sources of normative theology, including scripture and tradition, are seen (depending on one's hermeneutical viewpoint) in a range of ways, for example either as *the* revelation of God, or as a *conduit* of the revelation of God.

recorded. I did consider a questionnaire *survey* of superintendents and key informants, but this would have required my formulating questions which (a) would possibly have closed down the conversation; (b) may not have been answered or understood; and (c) were difficult to systematise as a lack of prior research gave few parameters to test. Open questions do not suit surveys, as people may write little, be unsure how to answer, and are not present to clarify answers during questionnaire processing.

I therefore adopted a *case study type* approach to investigate variables of interest. By *case study type* I mean triangulated interviews, which, unlike a survey, could ask supplementary questions to probe and clarify in a situation of open enquiry, reducing the negative effect of semantic polyvalence.

Other possible case study approaches were not pursued. It would have been impracticable to undertake an embedded researcher, participant observation or focus group approach in each of thirteen circuits; furthermore, a one-off Circuit Meeting, staff meeting and CLT in each (entailing 39 meetings<sup>61</sup>), might be locally unrepresentative. Interviews supply greater chronological and situational information. Equally, analysis of secondary written sources such as meeting minutes merely investigates redacted secondary sources concerning decisions, not a detailed description of the superintendent's performance or actions.

The research method adopted can be seen as a single case study using multiple sources of evidence, rather than a multiple-case study of the detailed practice of different superintendents. This follows the model of Kaufman (1981), who undertook a multiple-case study of six federal bureau chiefs but presented his findings as a single-case study. Multiple sources of evidence aid the discovery of trends, commonalities and convergences of data, and minimise the effect of gaps in individuals' data.

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<sup>61</sup> My work as DDE gave me multiple experiences of these.

This multi-perspectival view also addresses two dangers of interviewing only the principal actors (i.e. superintendents): (1) power dynamics, especially of a group who may habitually act as knowledge gatekeepers; and (2) an approach which is ultimately individualistic as opposed to (using a Methodist term) connexional.<sup>62</sup>

I used three main triangulation methods – data triangulation, consisting of at least three interviewees per circuit; theory triangulation, consisting of my multi-perspectival interpretation of the data; and methodological triangulation, consisting of an analysis of both interview transcripts and written normative documents. I did not use investigator triangulation, as I myself undertook all the interviews; this did have the advantages of providing a more consistent interviewer approach, and an opportunity to observe the interviewee’s non-verbal messages, but the disadvantage of the possibility of interviewer bias. I mitigated this in my data analysis of full transcripts, and by using Cameron *et al*’s four voices as an interpretative framework.

#### **2.4.1 Research Method Limitations**

Case-study research has limitations (Wisker 2001:90). Particular contexts are not necessarily generalisable. Sufficient case studies need to be undertaken before general patterns can be identified with any degree of certainty. If

case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon in its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson 1993:52),

then here the multiple sources of evidence arise from just 3% of circuits. Would this number suffice?

Kvale (2007:44) notes that interviews ‘in common interview studies’ tend to be number around 15±10.<sup>63</sup> I sought advice from Roger Walton, experienced in case study research (Walton 2002); he suggested that I might find sufficiently clear

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<sup>62</sup> I note Miller-McLemore’s (1993) web-based ‘connexional’ approach.

<sup>63</sup> Five interviews seems a small number.

repeating patterns of results before completion of all interviews. Nevertheless, I completed all my planned interviews. Furthermore, since no invited interviewees in the District declined to participate, a 'single-case study' was also in effect completed.

### **2.4.2 Participants in the Conversation**

I do not investigate Methodist superintendency as a disinterested outsider. Coghlan and Casey (2001:674) argue that insiders 'need to combine their action research role with their regular organizational roles and this role duality can create the potential for role ambiguity and conflict'.

Yet permanent insiders have an advantage concerning their organisation's everyday life:

They know the everyday jargon. They know the legitimate and taboo phenomena of what can be talked about and what cannot. They know what occupies colleagues' minds. They know how the informal organization works and to whom to turn for information and gossip. They know the critical events and what they mean within the organization. They are able to see beyond objectives that are merely window dressing. When they are inquiring they can use the internal jargon and draw on their own experience in asking questions and interviewing, and are able to follow up on replies and so obtain richer data. (Coghlan and Casey 2001:676).

However, insiders may assume too much and thus not probe as thoroughly as outsiders or those ignorant of the situation; think that they know the answer and not expose their current thinking to reframing; and find it difficult to obtain relevant data, because as a member they have to cross departmental, functional or hierarchical boundaries or because as an insider they may be denied deeper access, which might not be denied an outsider (Coghlan and Casey 2001:676).

Cameron *et al.* (2010:143) speak of the verbalisation of espoused theology being restricted where it differs from perceived normative theology. I would elucidate that this begs two questions: How much is not said? And what is said that is only said because it is expected to be said? There are implications for power relationships

here. I particularly needed awareness of this when asking stewards or colleagues questions which might invite criticisms of their current superintendent.

My contribution as a former superintendent has validity, but I also needed the perspective of each superintendent, colleague or steward. Despite each individual perspective's restricted contribution, by placing them all into the conversation I elicited and utilised the practical knowledge of 'local stakeholders' (Greenwood and Levin 2007:53) as much as any formal, theoretical, or normative knowledge which I as researcher, or the wider church, may bring to the conversation.

The theology of ordinary participants also needs to be heard: for, if we define 'theologians' as 'all those who seek to make sense of life by speaking about God', they comprise the majority. They receive theology through a personal and idiosyncratic process, argues Astley (2002:36), which

is much more important for most people. Our embracing of faith compels us to speak here of the truth of theology as an 'encountered truth'; it is the sort of truth that we do not just know, but are 'in'.

In his charting Astley's 'ordinary theology' as an epistemological model for his own doctoral research, Armstrong (2011:12) asks 'Why should we take the views of ordinary Christians seriously as *theology*?' Armstrong notes Astley's (2002:56) argument that the God-talk of 'ordinary people' is only theology when it is engaged in critically and seriously, and Cobb's (1993:136) argument that ordinary Christians need to become 'reflective believers'; he also notes Christie (2005:209): research which found that some ordinary believers are 'highly resistant to any kind of critical reflection and evaluation of their faith'. Armstrong (2011:20-21) might have engaged more with ARCS' voices of theology if Cameron *et al.* (2010) had been published a little earlier.



I suggest that belief, faith, or spirituality become *theology* only when they are communicated, i.e. theology *only exists in conversation*.<sup>64</sup> Conversation requires thought formulation: the requirement to *express* belief clarifies one's espoused theology. This develops Astley's argument for the need for rational reflection.

## 2.5 Research Design

I now set out my practical design for gathering data: identifying appropriate data (2.5.1) and questions (2.5.2).

### 2.5.1 Study propositions and appropriate data

In framing my questions, I needed awareness of the ethnomethodological and phenomenological problem occurring when interviewees and I understand underlying meanings differently. In any interview it is necessary to negotiate shared reality. The process of interpretation (of questions and answers) may be obfuscated by misunderstandings and language difficulties. Yet within the MCGB context there is a shared sub-culture (termed 'Methodism') which would help in overcoming some of the interpretative problems. Such a subculture has built up over two hundred years of working practices based on a highly centralised decision-making process – indeed, until 1996 all local churches and circuits shared identical meeting agendas determined under Standing Orders promulgated by the Conference (MCGB 1995). By restricting my lay interviewees to stewards, usually appointed due to their knowledge of Methodism's structures and practices, I hoped that we would share a common descriptive framework and understanding, and I would receive appropriate data.

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<sup>64</sup> Of course, that conversation may be between writer and reader. The reader could even be the writer, reading a journal and engaging in conversation with her younger self. 'Conversation' includes non-verbal theology (as in creative arts), albeit with the communication problem of subjective interpretative frameworks: conversation requires a shared interpretative understanding.

I recognised paradigmatic orthodoxy – the testing of practice against the Church’s statements on Superintendency – as a possible data contaminator: interviewees may well tell me what they think I ought to hear. Triangulation tempers this.

One steward (in interview) commented on the limited number of key informants:

I think a lot of people around the circuit certainly don’t know the superintendent, and, other than those who go to Circuit Meeting, probably, never actually see the superintendent acting as a superintendent. He was one of the circuit staff who came to preach. I don’t think most people would have any idea of what the superintendent was there for, and have very little idea of what the superintendent actually did.

Perhaps only superintendents know what they do – others see the ‘tip of the iceberg’. As one steward noted, ‘to be honest I don’t know what he does in a working week’. However, interviewing other people triangulates the superintendents’ comments about themselves. Furthermore, those who are or have been superintendents have a framework of experience which they use to comment on others’ superintendency.

### **2.5.2 The Interview Schedule**

I sought comments on superintendents’ *operant* practice both on *specific* tasks identified by theory, and in *general*; on the *espoused* understanding of superintendency past, present and future; and on *normative* factors impinging on superintendency.

In designing the interview schedule (Appendix 9) I initially defined a specific question for each aspect of superintendency I was to investigate: a possible interview schedule of over sixty questions. Meeting with Guest, I drew on his considerable experience of using interviews in ethnographic research (e.g. Guest, Tusting and Woodhead 2004; Guest 2007). Guest suggested a maximum of eight broad questions using an interview-guide approach: a more free-ranging conversation might actually lead to richer material than a tightly-structured (and intensive) interview. I hoped such questions might also allow freedom for authentic answers. I did identify

possible follow-up questions when I sought ethical approval (Appendices 6-9). Appendix 2 shows which voice(s) each main or follow-up question was designed to probe: ‘O’ for the operant voice about the *practice* of superintendency; ‘E’ for the espoused voice about the *understanding* of superintendency; ‘N’ to discover sources deemed to be normative.

Guest also suggested a pre-interview questionnaire: I declined, in order to discern interviewees’ espoused views untainted by the paradigmatic orthodoxy risked by my providing any prior formal framework, including ‘in-house’ jargon.

Early on, after eight interviews, I found it helpful to ask interviewees to compare the superintendent’s role with a secular organisation. This probed issues of power and hierarchy, particularly concerning leadership styles and shared oversight. Focusing on the fifteen current superintendents with triangulated interviews, I was able to test their leadership against the statements in *WIACS*.

I inferred from *WIACS* a list of superintendency tasks. I asked interviewees about the list’s composition, inclusions and omissions. I asked them to rank the tasks, based on what they *thought* was the most important, and on what *in practice* either they as superintendents spent the most time doing<sup>65</sup> or what they thought their superintendents emphasised.

I asked superintendents what had empowered or drained them in their ministry, to understand helps and hindrances, but also to uncover any normative influences.

I asked about *others’* expectations as an attempt to discover normative influences: superintendents might respond to expectations in order to reduce stress when these differ from their own viewpoint (*WIACS*§37). Furthermore, interviewees possibly covertly presented their own expectations by speaking in the third person.

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<sup>65</sup> One superintendent said ‘That’s not what I spend most of my time doing, but that’s the most important thing I do.’

Finally, I asked an open question as to whether interviewees had anything further to say: 19 (41%) of interviewees (8S 7M 4C) had nothing to add. Additions are dependent on the preceding conversation, and are not truly “open”. Nevertheless, space was offered beyond my own framework of analysis for interviewees to express themselves.

## 2.6 Data Collection

I arranged interviews by telephone, explaining that I would be asking for opinions on superintendency. Three people in the pilot studies declined to be interviewed: two by not replying and one superintendent by insisting that I only interview her stewards in her presence. I responded to this experience in my study proper by ensuring my telephone conversation explained that my study was about superintendency rather than about a particular superintendent. One steward admitted ‘I was worried about talking about a particular person as opposed to the function in general’ [C]. No one in the study proper declined to participate or be recorded or withdrew during interview; I thus had a 100% participation rate.

I explained that it would take ‘an hour or so’ – interviews averaged 82 minutes (range 45-125). For interview privacy and comfort, I interviewed most in their homes. One interview was curtailed due to a funeral, and one superintendent prioritised answering the telephone and having four lengthy conversations, rather than speaking to me. Most seemed to genuinely enjoy the conversation - one superintendent expressed thanks for the opportunity to talk about his work; he noted that superintendents did not feel the same freedom to speak in superintendents’ meetings.

Of the 46 interviewees, only two had undertaken any preparation: one superintendent had read *WIACS*, and one steward had looked at *CPD*: thus, for most interviewees, there was no recent explicit attempt to ensure paradigmatic orthodoxy.

In total, I recorded 66 hours of conversation and transcribed around 250,000 words. There is debate as to the value of *verbatim* transcription (for a discussion see

Halcomb and Davidson 2006); however, the qualitative focus of my research and analysis of the ‘conversation’ was greatly aided by it, as I sought to discover ‘values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and feelings’ (Halcomb and Davidson 2006:39). Furthermore, as I transcribed the interviews during the year-long process of undertaking them, I was able to improve on the clarity of my questioning in subsequent interviews.

Such was the interviews’ nature and their subject matter (particularly when considering disciplinary cases) that I assured confidentiality and promised that I alone would listen to the recordings, and no individual interview would be published in full transcript. Such was the specific nature of some of the comments, that I have also avoided publishing individual triangulation (apart from Table 2.6) of any superintendent’s comments or practices; such triangulation undergirds my work, but is not referred to in this text. The triangulation thus occurs in general terms insofar as two non-superintendents in each circuit have commented on the work of superintendents they have known (including their current superintendent), and each superintendent has spoken of other superintendents they have known.

## **2.7 Interview Cohort Demographics**

My 46 interviewees included three key people from each of thirteen<sup>66</sup> circuits who would have knowledge of superintendency: the superintendent, a colleague and a steward. In addition, five interviews were undertaken as pilot studies, but also yielded data worth including in my results. These interviewees included people in a neighbouring District.

Where I had a choice of interviewees (which colleague or steward) I ensured a representative sample overall of different interviewee types (Table 2.1 – some appear

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<sup>66</sup> Two amalgamated during my study.

in more than one category.) I excluded some colleagues: the five full-time chaplains lacked regular contact with the superintendent.

I convened two focus groups: (i) a DDE group working with circuits' strategic vision; (ii) a discussion between all of the District's superintendents, enabling dynamic sharing to supplement their individual interviews. This allowed me to probe some common themes which were emerging in order to test their veracity.

Table 2.1 gives an analysis of the breadth of interviewees. Except where stated, percentages refer to the proportion of interviewees.

*Table 2.1 Types of Interviewee*

<b>Interviewee Type</b> (some appear in more than one category)	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total interviews</b>	<b>46 (100%)</b>
Superintendents (current and former)	18 (39%)
Colleagues	16 (35%)
Stewards	14 (30%)
Newcastle-upon-Tyne District	44 (96%)
Other District	3 (7%)
Pilot study	6 (13%)
Study proper	40 (87%)
Members of Presidency*	2 (4%)
Chairs	2 (4%)
Active superintendents	16 (35%)
Presbyters [57 in District; 44 who were not superintendents]	27 (59%)
Deacons* [5 in District]	1 (2%)
Current probationers [5 in District]	1 (2%)
Full-time lay workers	2 (4%)
Superintendents appointed from within the circuit (% of supts)	7 (37%)
Team superintendents (% of supts)	5 (26%)
Those who have experienced Team superintendents	7 (15%)
Experience of single-minister circuit	1 (2%)
Former superintendents (% of non-supt, presbyters)	5 (63%)

Ministers who had previously been full-time lay workers	9 (20%)
Ministers from other denominations (% of ministers) [14 in District]	3 (10%)
Methodist ministers with experience of LEPs (% of ministers)	10 (36%)
Stewards with first-hand experience of LEPs (% of stewards)	3 (21%)
English as a second language	2 (4%)
Ex-probationers supervised by their current supt (% of ordained)	2 (22%)
Superintendents who had supervised probationers (% of supts)	14 (78%)
Currently working in more than one circuit (% of supts/colleagues)	2 (7%)
Local Preachers or Worship Leaders (% of lay people/deacons)	8 (47%)
Experience of “titular” superintendent	2 (4%)
Current circuit had merged	21 (46%)
Experience of non-circuit appointments (% of ministers)	6 (21%)
Supernumeraries (% of ministers) [55 in District]	2 (7%)

All but one interviewee were white, reflecting the relative lack of ethnic diversity in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District.<sup>67</sup> No data exists as to the ethnic diversity of Methodist ministers and stewards.

### 2.7.1 Gender Profile

There is no attempt in the connexional stationing committee to achieve gender balance: *circuits* seeking ministers are expressly forbidden from specifying gender. Gender is not accounted for when stationing superintendents, and there appears to be an imbalance. Most surprisingly, when pressed about women in superintendency, no interviewee saw gender as a relevant factor. Across the whole of MCGB in 2012 (*Minutes* 2012), of 1,711 presbyters and stationed probationer presbyters, 620 (36%) were female, yet of 402 superintendents, just 86 (21%) were female while 317 (79%) were male. Of 406 circuits, 323 (80%) had male superintendents and 87 (21%)

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<sup>67</sup> Population for the District’s geographical area in 2011 was 95% white; for Great Britain it was 87% (Office for National Statistics 2011; National Records of Scotland 2011).

Table 2.2 Analysis by Gender

	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	% of Intvwees
<b>Role</b>						
Superintendents	17	1	18	94	6	39
Colleagues	10	6	16	63	37	35
Circuit Stewards	5	9	14	36	64	30
Chairs	2	0	2	100	0	4
<b>Age</b>						
20-29	0	1	1	0	100	2
30-39	2	2	4	50	50	9
40-49	7	1	8	88	12	17
50-59	10	3	13	77	23	28
60-69	8	7	15	53	47	33
70-79	3	2	5	60	40	11
<b>Years of service</b>						
‘Ministers’ in this section includes employed lay workers						
Ministers 1-10	4	4	8	50	50	25
Ministers 11-20	13	2	15	87	13	47
Ministers 21-30	2	1	3	67	33	9
Ministers 31-40	4	0	4	100	0	13
Ministers 41+	2	0	2	100	0	6
Lay people 1-6	3	3	6	50	50	43
Lay people 7-12	1	5	6	17	83	43
Lay people 13+	1	1	2	50	50	14
<b>Have experienced female superintendents</b>						
Ministers: yes	7	5	12	28	71	38
Ministers: no	18	2	20	72	29	62
Lay people: yes	1	4	5	20	44	36
Lay people: no	4	5	9	80	56	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>



female.<sup>68</sup> (The Bristol District, which had 71 staff in 10 circuits, had no female superintendents in 2012.<sup>69</sup>) Thus Newcastle-upon-Tyne had a below-average number (1 rather than 3) of female superintendents. Of the circuits, 5 out of 12 had never had female superintendents before or after amalgamation. However, in all but two there were staff members who had experienced female superintendents. Only one circuit in the District had no female staff. Of 44 non-superintendent circuit ministers, 24 (55%) were female.

## 2.7.2 Age Profile

Table 2.3 Age Profile

Role	20s		30s		40s		50s		60s		70s		Mean age	Estd. Popn. Mean (95% C.I.)
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%		
Supts			1	7	3	20	8	53	3	20			53	53.2 ± 4.4
Colleagues	1	6	3	19	5	31	3	19	4	25			48	48.25 ± 6.7
Stewards							2	14	7	50	5	36	67	66.6 ± 4.0
Chairs							1	50	1	50			60	

As ages were asked for in decade-intervals, the estimated population mean (at a 95% confidence interval) indicates no significant age difference between superintendents and their colleagues. As for stewards, I note that I tended to interview the longest-serving steward. There is a generational difference between the stewards and some

<sup>68</sup> Joint superintendencies account for a greater sum than 100%.

<sup>69</sup> The four tiny Districts – Cymru, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Shetland, totalling five circuits – similarly had no female superintendents.

of the circuit staff: when discussing circuit strategy it is possible that this difference in age could cause difficulties in mutual understanding.

### 2.7.3 Professional Background

*Table 2.4 Analysis by Occupational Background*

Role	Manual		Clerical		Professional	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Superintendents	2	13	5	33	8	53
Colleagues	1	6	12	75	3	19
Circuit Stewards	1	7	3	21	10	71
Total	4	9	20	44	21	47

For ministers, this refers to their work before entering the ministry. ‘Lay Worker’, because it does not require a qualification, is categorised as ‘clerical’ rather than ‘professional’. ‘Student’ is also categorised as ‘clerical’.

Of the (only three) colleagues who had professional backgrounds, all were female. From this interview population, it appears that superintendents are nearly three times more likely to have been professionals before offering for the ministry than those who are their colleagues. I suggest that the skills needed for superintendency, coupled with these figures, indicates that the stationing committee is identifying people who are more likely to be able to cope with that part of superintendents’ work which goes beyond simple administration.

The high number of stewards with a professional background also gives some confidence in their ability to critique superintendents’ work, even though they do not see much of that work in practice. Some skills used in their own workplaces would thus be transferable.

### 2.7.4 Service History

Superintendents’ mean current length of service was six years; the stewards’, eight years (one had served for seventeen). As, on average, the stewards interviewed had been in post longer than the superintendents (in only three circuits was this not the

case), this could have implications for the sharing of authority in a circuit. As one steward said,

I'm very unsure of the relationship between circuit stewards and the ministerial staff. I can remember in days gone by, the circuit stewards made the decisions and they were there as a constant whereas the ministers moved on.

On average, superintendents had served with four superintendents, their colleagues with five (one had 39 years' service – none as superintendent), and stewards with two. This reflects itinerancy – the moving between circuits increases ministers' contact with superintendents, but superintendents in post will only experience their own superintendency. Two had been superintendents of three circuits, seven of two, and ten were in their first superintendency. The average number of circuits in which superintendents had served was 3.5, that of their colleagues 2.6, and that of stewards 1.6. This last figure is artificially high due to circuit mergers – 8 of the 14 stewards had thus served in an 'old' and a 'new' circuit whilst remaining in post.

Interviewees had collectively experienced the superintendency of 123 people. Not all were commented on explicitly, though in asking to comment on previous superintendents, the practices which remained in the memory were highlighted, or were part of the general hinterland of interviewees' understanding of superintendency. I thus had a primary source of superintendency from 19 current or former superintendents, and secondary sources for the individual practice of a further 103 superintendents. The DDE focus group represented an overview of some 60 further superintendents' work (*Minutes* 2012).

## **2.8 Data Analysis**

I analysed the data with NVivo. Financial and time constraints precluded my undertaking detailed scrutiny and piloting all possible software analysis techniques: I chose NVivo due to training being offered (I attended three two-hour training sessions) and on personal recommendation by doctoral colleagues.

I analysed the data in two different ways: inductively and deductively. The inductive approach was used to answer part of my first research question: ‘How is the superintendent presbyter’s role ... understood and practised in MCGB in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?’ The deductive approach related to my third research question: ‘What is the continuing adequacy of *WIACS* as a normative document?’

Firstly, my *inductive* analysis of the data, following the *TAR* approach, used grounded theory techniques (Sweeney *et al.* 2010:275; Birks and Mills 2011). In an initial *totally open* approach to the data, I used NVivo to ‘automatically’ find all occurrences of every word used by interviewees. Although this gave a basic outline of the data, a multiplicity of synonyms and descriptors about identical concepts diminished its usefulness.

My resultant manual inductive approach was not totally free of an analytical framework. Birks and Mills (2011:89) argue that when using grounded theory, ‘In order to maintain focus and develop analytical depth and integration, the substantive area of enquiry should be kept in mind at all times’. So my interview questions (Appendix 9) shaped part of my analysis.

Responses for each question were coded for descriptors in the following broad areas: superintendents and their power (Question 1); eight task areas described in *WIACS* (Q.2); espoused views, and the practice, of governance (Q.3) and management (Q.4); superintendents’ leadership practice (Q.5); normative and formal influences on the practice and understanding of superintendency (Q.6); characteristics of particular situations (Q.7); possible future superintendency practice (Q.8); and a final open question inviting any further comments not already made in response to my questions (Q.9).

However, answers to questions were not focused exclusively on those questions. I thus also undertook a more open inductive approach to coding which sought to find themes which arose throughout the conversations. This axial coding method grouped data into that which concerned the operant voice, the espoused voice or, more rarely, referred to normative or formal sources. This allowed patterns to emerge from the

data, which I could then investigate theologically. Those data-driven patterns give the headings to Chapter 3, in which I present my data.

My second, *deductive*, approach to coding was based on the fifteen superintendents about whom I had obtained triangulated interviewees, and consisted of *my imposing a theoretical framework on the data*. I analysed the full transcripts of each interview for particular comments about each superintendent's practice, and coded these comments based upon 136 theoretical statements which I inferred from WIACS (Appendix 3). This entailed my manually testing each transcript against each statement in order to ensure that I did not miss nuances in statements. The result is a test of whether I found *significant* evidence for each statement. As the exploration of my research is qualitative, I do not analyse the results in my discussion, but I offer the results to show where further research is needed in the quest for further evidence concerning the practice of superintendency.

NVivo can be used in a literal way to codify words and syntax; it can also be used reflexively to analyse a researcher's own approach to making sense of data. I concentrated rather on the interpretative use of NVivo. My interpretative method was to gather comments which gave evidence for each aspect of superintendency represented by the theoretical statement, then to 'weigh' the comments data on a seven-point scale for each superintendent, ranging from +3 to -3, using the following criteria:

Table 2.5 Method of weighing data

Evidence basis for each superintendent	Evidential weighting
There are <i>multiple data</i> (more than one comment and more than one interviewee) which <i>explicitly evidence</i> this theoretical statement to be <i>true</i> about this superintendent.	3
There are <i>some data</i> which <i>explicitly evidence</i> this theoretical statement to be <i>true</i> about this superintendent.	2
There are <i>some data</i> which <i>imply</i> that this theoretical statement is <i>true</i> about this superintendent.	1
There are no data in this interview which evidence the truth or falsity of this theoretical statement in relation to this superintendent.	0
There are <i>some data</i> which <i>imply</i> that this theoretical statement is <i>untrue</i> about this superintendent.	-1
There are <i>some data</i> which <i>explicitly evidence</i> this theoretical statement to be <i>untrue</i> about this superintendent.	-2
There are <i>multiple data</i> (more than one comment and more than one interviewee) which <i>explicitly evidence</i> this theoretical statement to be <i>untrue</i> about this superintendent.	-3

In Table 2.6, I offer an example, chosen because it demonstrates the full range of weighting. I show the evidence and decision for six of the superintendents.

Table 2.6 Weighting example

Statement being tested: “In leadership, superintendent inspires implementation of ideas”.	
Evidential statements [and who said them] References denote comments from a superintendent [S], a minister or other colleague [M], or a circuit steward [C].	Weighting of this superintendent
“We’ve tried lots of things that haven’t worked.” [S] “It was very significant when the Circuit Meeting approved the finances for that appointment.” [S] “One thing that I see my role as: basically releasing, affirming and celebrating. I tend to want to say “Yes” unless I can think of a strong reason to say “No” rather than the other way around.” [S] “If he sees people that have innovative, creative ideas, he’s more than happy to run with them until such a point as they drop off, or they become obviously they’re not going to work. But there’s not	3

<p>been one idea yet I can recollect where we've not run with to see whether or not it's got legs, and that's one of his strengths.” [M]  “He won't restrict people's creativity or imagination, but he will encourage people to be honest and open about what it is they want to happen, whether he agrees with it or not.” [M]  There's something about the permission-giving nature that [he] has which enables an awful lot of things to happen.”[M]  “‘There was some discussion about [an initiative] which has been taken forward, and [he] was instrumental in making that change. It was done in consultation and for a trial period. He's seen some changes through.’ [C]</p>	
<p>“We've supported [<i>Messy Church</i>] in the circuit financially and otherwise, and I've encouraged that – supporting what others do. The support within my Circuit Meeting where we decide where money is going is there.” [S]  “‘When the Circuit Review was first proposed, [he] was instrumental in coming up with the prod to say we ought to be looking at things. Once we'd started that thinking off, and were getting feedback from various areas and churches, then [he] was exercising a leadership role in how that feedback information was handled. [C]  “[He] does think very thoroughly about circuit policies. That's what he emphasises.” [C]</p>	2
<p>“I take the leading role, but I don't believe I have that style of saying “Right, we will do this: you'll do that, you'll do that”. It's much more by consensus. I would say that my emphasis is always on “we”: “How are <i>we</i> going to do that?” Even if one person ends up doing it.” [S]  “[He] does adopt an inspirational approach. [He's] a lovely guy, and there is something stimulating and inspiring about him.” [M]  <b>Q. Have you seen [him] talk about changing the way you do things? A. “At circuit level that is fine” [C]</b></p>	1
<p>[No example offered by virtue of this category requiring that no evidence exist].</p>	0
<p>“Developing circuit policies is my weakest area, probably.” [S]  “I don't think forward-planning is very much [his] thing. I think he's good at reacting to crises, but I don't think forward-planning is his genius.” [M]  “I think that involves organisation – and I have to say, I wouldn't say that's [his] strongpoint” [M]</p>	-1
<p>Circuit policies to me is ways of moving forward, of developing new ideas, new ways of working. [He] does this very reluctantly. We've looked at the way forward, but it was status quo, really. It's almost a fear if anything even slightly different was suggested.  [M]  I can't think of anything which [he] may have changed rather than</p>	-2

continued. It's just a continuation of the circuit routine. [He's] reactive rather than proactive". [C]	
"They don't always wish to toe the line when you ask them to do things ... The bigger the circuit, the harder it is." [S] "People were coming to give their ideas and then go away and leave them with the people that were co-ordinating the meeting. So then [how] you deal then with all those ideas, I don't know." [M] "I wouldn't say [he] was great at communication and clarity. So when it comes to publicising things, or getting people on board for things, I think [he] gets disappointed that people don't come forward and volunteer for things. People have the view that [he] maybe isn't the most organised." [M] "I think [he] is trying, but it doesn't seem to materialise." [C]	-3

The result was a measure of statistically significant data. For most – 88 of the 136 statements (65%) – the evidence was inconclusive. Where significant evidence exists, the strength of that evidence is shown in the third column of the table in Appendix 3.

I add the caveat that this is ‘soft’ data – the evidence was ranked by me as researcher, and thus perhaps has less validity than if each interviewee had been asked to make a judgement on each theoretical statement for their particular superintendent.

Conversely, there are advantages to the researcher weighing the evidence for each theoretical statement. Firstly, it avoids the interviewees feeling pressured to ‘score’ or ‘mark’ the superintendent. Rather, their statements about the superintendent’s practice are used to provide evidential data. Secondly, when a subject completes a simple Likert scale, there is no requirement for that judgement to be evidenced. By manually coding the data myself, I generated an evidence-base for my categorising on the Likert scale each superintendent’s practice. The evidential weighting could be manipulated quantitatively.

Furthermore, statistical significance is only part of the analysis – a statistical ‘mean’ answer would result from both positive and negative evidence for a particular practice, yet much can be learned from both evidence types, even with an



inconclusive mean. Furthermore, qualitative data incorporates minority or even unique comments.

Having described my data collection and analysis, I now present my data.

## Chapter 3 Empirical Research Findings and Analysis

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### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I set out, and begin to analyse, my data. The way the data is approached out reflects both my interpretative framework (as described in section 2.3) and my research questions.

My first research question, “How is the superintendent presbyter’s role defined, understood and practised in MCGB in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” requires that the data be seen as located in a particular place and time. My data is so located (as noted in section 1.8.1).

How the role is *defined* and *understood* relates both to the normative definition and understanding of MCGB and also to the understanding of those at the level of the circuit who are, or who work with, superintendents. I have already set out my answer to the normative definition and understanding of MCGB in section 1.7.1.<sup>70</sup> By engaging with my data in this chapter, I first set out my answer to the understanding of practitioners (3.2). I then set out my answer to the question of how the role is *practised* (3.3).<sup>71</sup>

I note two caveats. Firstly, my presentation is not an ‘objective’ description. I have not relied on neutral evidence but on the descriptions of others (Cameron *et al.* 2010:23). However, my use of many perspectives increases the veracity of my data, when such data is commonly described (Swinton 2012:76). Furthermore, my

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<sup>70</sup> In terms of the ARCS framework of ‘four voices’ this *relates* to the normative voice. I explore the normative theology in Chapter 4.

<sup>71</sup> Thus section 3.2 relates to the *espoused* voice, and section 3.3 to the *operant* voice of the ARCS framework of ‘four voices’. I explore the espoused and operant theological voices in Chapter 4.

interviewees are all – whether superintendents or not - engaged participants in the habitus of superintendency (Fiddes 2012:25-26).

Secondly, although I have sought to work from a grounded theory type of approach, I cannot totally avoid an interpretative framework which is limited by my own theoretical sensitivity as to what is of interest: others may choose to present other patterns in the data (Gadamer 1989:266ff; van der Ven 1993:121; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:24; Swinton 2012:82). This interpretative framework includes the need to answer my research question (Cameron *et al.* 2010:99).

### **3.2 The Understanding in Circuits of Superintendency**

This section presents data which answers part of my first research question: ‘How is the role of the superintendent presbyter currently understood in MCGB?’ By ‘understood’ I mean that which is espoused by individuals and articulated by my interviewees as members of MCGB rather than that which is propounded by official Methodist teaching as normative.<sup>72</sup> My presupposition (as set out in section 1.8.1) is that as all interviewees are members of MCGB, and that my interview cohort includes those experienced in many different parts of the Connexion, then their espoused views as a sub-group is representative of the espoused views of MCGB as a whole. Their answers are thus valid data to construct an answer which indicates how the role of the superintendent is understood in MCGB.

What do people think that superintendency is about? What is it for?

In presenting my empirical data I present not only the espoused views explicitly stated by my interviewees, but also my interpretation of the views I believe have been *implicitly* revealed in the statements they have made about the practice of superintendency: in speaking about that practice they have filtered their description,

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<sup>72</sup> I have answered the normative aspect of my first research question – how the superintendent’s role is *defined*, in section 1.7.1.

based on their own understanding of the actions of superintendents. That practice also reveals something of their espoused theology which has not been expressed in words by my interviewees.

To answer this part of my research question is to begin to undertake Osmer's first task of practical theology (section 2.2.1 above) by answering the question "What is going on?" I also begin to undertake Osmer's second task of theology – the interpretative task.

### **3.2.1 The Role in General**

I began each interview with an open question asking interviewees to describe the role of a superintendent (Appendix 9, Question 1). It should be noted that these first descriptions were not given at great length, but were short summaries, rather than attempting to be exhaustive and definitive statements. Therefore they indicate what interviewees saw as the most important aspects of superintendency. Table 3.1 tabulates the responses. I have further categorised these responses as to whether they refer to the tasks of leadership (L), governance (G) or management (M).<sup>73</sup>

It can be seen that the majority of interviewees described the superintendent as a collaborative team-leader who oversees and manages a Methodist Circuit.

All three types of interviewee – superintendents, colleagues and stewards – noted governance and management about equally, but made comparatively more statements about ways in which superintendents lead (the average number of statements for each category is shown as 'Total per person' in Table 3.1). I consider leadership in greater depth below (section 3.2.1.1).

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<sup>73</sup> These three categories are noted in 1.7.1 above as being mentioned in *WIACS*, and I will explore them further in my discussion in chapter 4.

Table 3.1: General descriptions of superintendents

<b>Descriptors (Key: L = leadership, G = governance, M = management)</b>	<b>Supts.</b>	<b>Colleagues</b>	<b>Stewards</b>	<b>Total</b>
Collaborates / Works in team (L)	63% (12)	77% (10)	43% (6)	61% (28)
Manages (M)	47% (9)	62% (8)	50% (7)	52% (24)
Oversees staff (G/L/M) †	47% (9)	62% (8)	43% (6)	50% (23)
Oversees circuit's work (G/L/M) †	53% (10)	23% (3)	43% (6)	41% (19)
Leads (L)	42% (8)	38% (5)	14% (2)	33% (15)
Oversees churches (G) †	37% (7)	31% (4)	21% (3)	30% (14)
Pastors staff (L)	32% (6)	31% (4)	29% (4)	30% (14)
Represents connexion (G)	26% (5)	15% (2)	50% (7)	30% (14)
Holds ultimate responsibility (G)	16% (3)	46% (6)	29% (4)	28% (13)
Enables / encourages (L)	32% (6)	23% (3)	21% (3)	26% (12)
Co-ordinates work (M)	16% (3)	31% (4)	36% (5)	26% (12)
Administrates (M/G)	16% (3)	23% (3)	43% (6)	26% (12)
Acts as circuit minister + supt (L)	26% (5)	15% (2)	29% (4)	24% (11)
Leads circuit's vision (L)	26% (5)	15% (2)	14% (2)	20% (9)
Leads circuit's strategy (L)	21% (4)	23% (3)	14% (2)	20% (9)
Directs mission (L)	21% (4)	23% (3)	7% (1)	17% (8)
Acts as spiritual leader (L)	16% (3)	23% (3)	14% (2)	17% (8)
Exercises boss's authority (G/L/M)	5% (1)	31% (4)	7% (1)	13% (6)
Exercises prophetic function (L)	11% (2)	8% (1)		7% (3)
Makes circuit Plan* (M)		8% (1)		2% (1)
<b>Total</b>	100% (19)	100% (13)	100% (14)	100% (46)
<b>Total Leadership statements per person</b>	3.95	3.92	2.79	2.98
<b>Total Governance statements per person</b>	2.00	2.31	2.36	2.20
<b>Total Management statements per person</b>	1.84	2.38	2.21	2.11
†These categories have been separated out; every interviewee mentioned one form of oversight.				

*Colleagues* were almost twice as likely as *stewards* (77% compared with 43%) to mention superintendents' *collaboration* with others. Perhaps this reflects where that collaboration occurs, with superintendents being more collaborative in the staff meeting than in the Circuit Leadership Team\* ['CLT'] (I discuss collaboration in greater detail in sections 3.2.1.2 and 3.3.1.1).

One in four interviewees spoke about one aspect of collaboration – the enabling/encouraging of others – but superintendents were more likely to describe themselves in this way than were their colleagues and stewards.

*Every* interviewee mentioned the superintendent's role as overseer. However, this role was more often cited as overseeing *staff* than *churches*: twice as many colleagues and stewards mentioned the former rather than the latter. Does this arise from the fact that superintendents oversaw local churches by speaking to the minister in pastoral charge rather than attending local meetings? And does this practice of oversight at a distance lie behind the fact that colleagues cite the superintendent's oversight of the *circuit's work* at half the rate of stewards and superintendents – because they see *themselves* as in practice undertaking that oversight of local churches on behalf of the circuit? Just one quarter of interviewees mentioned superintendents as co-ordinators of the *circuit's work*.

Furthermore, comparatively more colleagues highlighted themselves being overseen by the superintendent than the numbers of superintendents or stewards mentioning that oversight. Does this indicate that they more likely to view conversations with the superintendent as checking on the way they personally are doing their work, rather than a general inquiry as to how the work is going? Perhaps this possible view is not helped by only one in three colleagues (indeed of all interviewees) seeing the superintendent's role of pastoral care for them as important enough to mention it in response to this question (I discuss this in section 3.2.2.5).

Half the stewards – though only one-quarter of superintendents and fewer colleagues – noted the superintendent's representing the wider connexion (see section 3.3.2.3). It could be that these latter two are figures lower because the ministers view the representational role as belonging to *all* presbyters. (One in four

interviewees highlighted that the superintendent was first and foremost a circuit minister, and therefore fulfilled the same purpose as his or her colleagues as far as some of the local churches in the circuit were concerned.) And was the collegial figure lower still because colleagues are more aware than stewards of how much superintendents do not pass on from the connexion, and in any case, see that as their own role?

Only one in four highlighted the superintendent's role in co-ordinating the work of the circuit. Perhaps this is because co-ordination was seen to be undertaken collegially in meetings *chaired* by the superintendent, rather than as an individual action of the superintendent. Colleagues and stewards highlighted the co-ordinating role twice as often as did the superintendents themselves: does this reflect that superintendents believe themselves to be more *laissez faire* than they are?

Around half the interviewees saw the superintendent managing the circuit (see section 3.3.4) though this needs to be distinguished from administrative duties. Stewards and colleagues attributed more duties of both management and administration to superintendency than did superintendents themselves – is the size of these tasks more imagined than real? However, more than three-quarters of all interviewees did not mention the administrative tasks of superintendency, possibly because most of my 'sample' superintendents had administrators to help them. A Chair spoke about the value of circuit administrators freeing superintendents for 'some of the broad brush thinking':

My recollection of one Super is that he did seem to spend his whole time chasing up membership returns or doing insurance policies, and found it a huge burden – and it was almost entirely for him an administrative task. [Chair]

However, the Chair acknowledged that

You have to have a certain skill to be able to use an administrator. [Chair]

After inviting an answer to this first, open, question, I then showed interviewees a list of eight tasks inferred from *WIACS* (Appendix 9, Question 2). A minority (11%) of interviewees commented that there was no explicitly spiritual framework in the list, such as 'encouraging discipleship' (a new emphasis of the Connexion since

WIACS); ‘growing the Kingdom’ in non-church-based work and Fresh Expressions; the task of praying for the circuit; and ‘no mention of Jesus Christ, or God’.

But when asked about *other* people’s expectations, the three most common answers were that the superintendent should ‘solve all problems’/‘give comfort’ (28% of interviewees); ‘be available in churches’/‘pastoral’/‘nice’ (26%); ‘be business-like’/‘organised’ (20%). None of these could be describing prophetic leadership or even specifically spiritual tasks. Most people seemed to think that there were no general expectations of superintendents:

The majority probably don’t think about it, and haven’t a clue what the role involves. It’s slightly unsettling, because you don’t know what role you’re supposed to play, and do people care less anyway? [S]

I think most folk haven’t any expectations. I just don’t think they know what a superintendent is. Just like they don’t know what a circuit is or a District is or the Connexion is. I think we’ve got so many people in our churches now that don’t come from Methodist stock. I think we can get hung up on an awful lot of stuff, trying to get information to people that really just don’t bloody care. [M]

I note here the findings of Maunder (2014:97) who surveyed 106 people in 4 churches (from different circuits), 60% of whom said the superintendent was, for them, ‘very influential’, and 23% of whom said he or she was ‘influential’. Unfortunately, Maunder did not ask them how that influence was felt, but it would certainly indicate – in a more controlled survey than the qualitative answers I gained, and albeit from a small sample – that people do, on the whole, notice what their superintendent is doing. I would therefore suggest that the answers I obtained were second-hand opinions about opinions, and therefore should not be taken as too authoritative. Having hoped that they might elicit deeper responses given in the third person, I do not intend to comment further on them.

### **3.2.1.1 Leadership**

It can be seen in the ‘Total statements per person’ section of Table 3.1 that superintendents and colleagues made statements relating to leadership comparatively more than did stewards. Yet the simple description of the superintendent as a ‘leader’



(shown in the table as ‘Leads’) was noted by just one-third of interviewees, but three times more by superintendents and colleagues than by stewards. Is this figure low because collegial and conciliar collaboration diminishes an individual’s apparent contribution, leading people to be less likely to notice and comment on it?

In all comments about leadership, interviewees most often highlighted the superintendent’s personal leadership role *as part of general leadership in the church*: [9S]<sup>74</sup> (47% of them), [7M] (54%) and [5C] (36%) mentioned it.

It’s a very significant leadership/management role within the connexional church. [S]

It may well be that leadership is seen with a particular person or a particular group of people depending on what’s being done – but I suppose overall that has to be the superintendent. [S]

People understood leadership to include: leading by example; modelling good practice; exercising ‘people skills’ (such as caring for circuit officers); encouraging vision (‘to be the person who asks the right questions of the circuit’[S]); managing conflict; and enabling others’ gifts.

Superintendents described their responsibility for leadership as a task additional to the role of minister of a local church:

I have this consciousness that I have responsibility to be leading the circuit. [S]

Finding direction for the churches of the circuit, the unity of the circuit and the vision. [S]

Some see the extra responsibility as removing them from the ‘normal’ presbyteral role (note that both comments imply that the circuit overview is not a task of other presbyters):

[I constantly have] to carry the thoughts of the circuit, not just the four churches that I’m minister of. [S]

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<sup>74</sup> ‘S’ refers to superintendents; ‘M’ to ministers and others on the staff of the circuit; ‘C’ to Circuit Stewards (see List of Abbreviations).

[I need to] take the circuit overview, when other people are at the coal-face of their pastoral charges.

To offer leadership required enabling a developing vision:

A good superintendent [is] an inspirational figure. [S]

Being able to set a tone and to contribute to a conversation and to that process of discernment. [M]

To draw out of the staff what's happening in their churches. [S]

[To] build the bigger picture which then enables the Leadership Team to be informed and guided. [S]

During my interviews, 10 (22%) interviewees mentioned leadership in *mission* as one of the primary goals of superintendency. Superintendents approached 'mission' more generally: the task was

to offer leadership across the circuit in terms of mission and on-going purpose. [S]

Table 3.2 shows the espoused views when asked to compare superintendency with a secular role.

*Table 3.2: Comparison of superintendent with a secular organisation*

	<b>Supts.</b>	<b>Colleagues</b>	<b>Stewards</b>	<b>Total</b>
CEO	20% (3)		29% (4)	18% (7)
Higher manager		33% (3)	21% (3)	16% (6)
Area/middle/line manager	53% (8)	67% (6)	50% (7)	55% (21)
Non-hierarchical	26% (4)			11% (4)
<b>Total</b>	100% (15)	100% (9)	100% (14)	100% (38)

Most saw the superintendent as middle-manager. I hypothesised that those who saw the superintendent as a CEO were less likely to think connexionally, seeing the circuit as a closed entity; however one of the Chairs used this term, thus would certainly think connexionally. One steward noted that even CEOs are accountable to a board. One superintendent preferred ‘Area Manager’, but thought that others saw him as a CEO.

Interviewees spoke from their own experience of other organisations, but most stressed the ‘hands-on’ task – such as a ward-sister still nursing, the head-teacher still teaching. The low number of interviewees (24%) mentioning superintendents also being circuit ministers may reflect the focus of thought being on what was *different* about superintendents for the purposes of the interviews, or ‘taking it as read’.

### **3.2.1.2 Power and authority**

From Table 3.1 we see that the superintendent’s oversight role is overwhelmingly acknowledged. One third of colleagues (though only one superintendent) described the superintendent as their boss. But Table 3.1 also shows that only one-quarter of colleagues cited superintendents practising oversight of the *circuit’s* work; this may indicate that colleagues see circuit oversight as collegial rather than personal (as noted above in section 3.2.1).

Most interviewees saw the leadership of the circuit as collaborative, with the superintendent

Garnering and putting forward ideas within the Leadership Team then finding the most appropriate ways to disseminate that within the Circuit Meeting. [S]

The making of the policies has to be collaborative. I don’t like the idea of people coming with it cut and dried. [C]

They could vote against it, and that’s their democratic right to do so. Firm leadership is about persuasion [S].

This could cause problems for those who define leadership as ‘getting things done’:

My frustration with superintendents I've known in the past is that they haven't given a lot of leadership in terms of they've been willing to sit back and let groups or committees or churches decide, which sometimes takes a long time.[S]

Four superintendents declined to think in terms of hierarchy: 'it's a co-operative'[S]. The small remuneration of 7½% stipend\* for being superintendent was seen as illogical – 'either everybody should be paid equally, or the allowance should be greater'[S].

Three times the proportion of colleagues (46%) than superintendents (16%) saw the superintendent holding ultimate responsibility; twice as many colleagues as described the superintendent as overseeing the circuit's work (Table 3.1). This could mean that they themselves want to work in their own way in their own churches, as long as the superintendent takes ultimate responsibility. Half the total number of interviewees spoke during interviews about the superintendent's accountability to the wider church: 'the buck stops'<sup>75</sup> with them.

I note here that some leadership attributes may be seen both positively and negatively, depending on an individual's viewpoint – 'authoritative' or 'decisive' leadership is not universally welcomed.<sup>76</sup> Taking proactive initiative was rare: people complained when it did *not* happen, but when it *did* happen it was not always appreciated or welcomed. There were warnings from all three participant-perspectives:

People claim that they are open to leaders being allowed to lead, and yet at the same time are quite antagonistic if where they deem that they are being led is not where they want to be led to. So it's not as straightforward as it is in a hierarchical employer-employee situation, because we're dealing with volunteers [with a] different genre of leadership needed. [S]

Power is a matter of persuasion, because most people in churches will do what they're going to do regardless of what you say. So, that's why the power of the

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<sup>75</sup> Maunder (2012) also found this phrase in common use.

<sup>76</sup> See Table 3.11 for examples of both positive and negative citations of leadership styles.

superintendent is limited. In the end, the superintendent's power is correlative to their ability to win an argument, and to carry people with them. [M]

Do superintendents really have any power to change anything? [M]

Why should superintendents always feel the need to change things when local churches do not want to change? [C]

Generally the word 'power' was disliked by superintendents and colleagues – preferring 'authority' or 'influence' because

['Power'] usually gets misinterpreted to being overriding other people's wishes. [S]

I could use the fallacy that I have power to my advantage should I want to. [S]

One superintendent had been given permission to be 'radical', but his appointment had been curtailed for his overzealousness:

People want strong leadership until they get it. [M]

Conversely, some superintendents see their task as maintaining the *status quo*:

I don't think he has any power. Power is being able to *change* things. They don't change things – they make sure that, certainly along Methodist lines, everything runs the way it should; which is different to *innovating* things, which would then become power. [*Interjection: So you don't think the superintendent has any role in innovation?*] Well, none of them that I've seen have. No. [*She laughs*] [C]

Thus pragmatically the superintendent's authority was limited:

There's a gap between a perception of authority and the power to enact some bits of work. [S]

One new superintendent noted that his predecessor had exercised strong control:

They seem to have gone through a period where they were not allowed to say anything at Circuit Meetings!

But others dealt with conflict by specifically allowing people to express 'dissenting' opinions in meetings.

Furthermore, there was no significant evidence that superintendents' authority to intervene in the local church was recognised by their colleagues: 'Without sanction,

there is no authority' [S].<sup>77</sup> Yet colleagues noted the possibility of an attitudinal use of power: superintendents have the power to avoid consultation as much as to enter into it. Thus both superintendents and colleagues could potentially avoid consultation with one another.

So much of what we do does rest on consensus and goodwill. [S]

A member of the Presidency said,

I think a superintendent has probably more power in the Methodist Church than any other minister – including the Chair – insofar as he can, if he wishes, chair any meeting of any sort within the circuit and the churches.

Yet the superintendent must guard against 'treading on the toes of the minister on the ground'[C].

My role is to encourage the ministers in *their* role, and support them from the background. [S]

I'm not the sort who wants to stand over my colleagues in some kind of overbearing supervisory sort of way. Nor will I want to meddle in the internal doings of churches where they have their own minister. [S]

You do not want to undermine their authority. [S]

It's not my job to tell people how to do their ministry or run their churches – it's just my job to run the circuit. [S]

You look after your own patch – which is as it should be. [S]

It appears, furthermore, that *stewards* did not necessarily recognise the authority of the superintendent: 40% of the stewards I interviewed viewed superintendents as the executive officer of the stewards, some stewards believing that they themselves supervised the superintendent. Power struggles were evident.

The circuit stewards have a fair amount of authority, influence, vis-à-vis the superintendent minister. [C]

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<sup>77</sup> Maunder (2012) also found superintendents experiencing powerlessness over uncooperative ordained colleagues.

When I asked one steward ‘would you expect [the superintendent] or the Senior Circuit Steward to take the lead in the discussion about policy?’ after a pause of twenty seconds he replied, ‘Sorry – you’ve got a big gap [in your recording] now.’ When pushed further, he noted that ‘I wouldn’t expect him to be leading the thinking of the circuit stewards.’ He noted that there needs to be research into the working relationship between the superintendent and the Senior Circuit Steward.

Nineteen interviewees (41%) spoke of the role of superintendents ‘not to necessarily be the main practitioner’ [S] but

To liaise closely with and work alongside all of the staff within the circuit. [S]

[Working] alongside lay leaders in providing that leadership. [S]

Colleagues looked for a ‘team player’ who had the insight to build, blend, motivate and facilitate teams ‘to share gifts and graces together.’

You become the focus person, but you’re not the only person. [S]

### **3.2.1.3 Summary of the Role in General**

The superintendent is expected to be a collaborative team-leader and to oversee and manage the circuit. Superintendents are expected to be overseers of the work of the circuit rather than of its individual churches; colleagues, however, are more likely to describe that oversight as being exercised over *them* rather than over the *circuit*, perhaps indicating a greater expectation of *collegial* oversight over the circuit in general. (3.2.1)

Stewards see the superintendent as representing the wider connexion, though this is not a view generally held by ministers, possibly as a result of this also being the task of *every* presbyter. (3.2.1)

Superintendents are expected, in addition to their role as local-church minister, to personally lead the circuit as part of the general leadership structures of the church, including leading by example; modelling good practice; exercising ‘people skills’ (such as caring for circuit officers); encouraging vision; managing conflict; and enabling others’ gifts. They are described most often as ‘middle managers’,

connecting the ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ parts of the organisation, whilst still being ‘hands on’ practitioners. (3.2.1.1)

Yet the recognition of the superintendent’s personal *responsibility* is not accompanied by a similar recognition of their personal *authority* to make decisions. Collaborative leadership can diffuse power and lead to criticism of a lack of leadership. (3.2.1.1)

The notion of ‘influence’ is preferred to that of ‘power’, with the leadership authority being seen as collaborative and supportive; but superintendents *as superintendents* are not expected in ordinary circumstances to exercise any authority in the local church; indeed any notional authority has no day-to-day impact on colleagues (except in extreme cases of disciplinary problems). There is a lack of clarity over who has ‘ultimate’ authority over the circuit, with some evidence of a difference of understanding between stewards and superintendents. (3.2.1.2)

### **3.2.2 Specific Tasks**

Interviewees noted that two-thirds of my ‘sample’ superintendents had ‘delegated’ some part of their function, such as making the Plan or chairing Local Preachers’ Meetings. I found one example of the Admission of a Local Preacher being ‘delegated’ to a colleague. Such delegation was noted in Table 3.11. This implies that it was expected that superintendents are the primary performers of these roles.

I now examine the specific tasks interviewees expected of superintendents.

#### **3.2.2.1 Worship, Training and Theological Thinking**

Superintendents were expected to make the Plan and organise the ministers and LPs to ensure that local churches’ worship needs were met. Only two interviewees (both non-superintendents) mentioned, unprompted, the making of the preaching Plan (Table 3.1) – most only mentioned the Plan when I specifically asked about ‘providing for worship’ (see section 3.2.2.2). Perhaps the drawing up of a rota was not deemed sufficiently important to mention. (Yet one colleague even claimed ‘I have been superintendent in the sense that I have made the Plan.’)



When used well, the Plan was seen as a strategic tool for ‘sharing preachers fairly and wisely’, both those preachers who were appreciated by congregations, and those whom the superintendent avoided planning in some churches:

You keep a lot in your head that borders on the pastoral and the confidential.  
[S]

The superintendent also planned himself or herself:

It’s quite good for the superintendent to go round and share Communion with people [S],

Superintendents were expected to preside over the training of preachers and probationers. A colleague noted that after ordination she missed the regular supervision sessions with the superintendent.

One superintendent noted

the great responsibility of giving [probationers] the foundations for their ministry in the future – slip up there and you could spoil somebody’s work.

I note that such a statement assumes almost sole responsibility, as if all studies and support for post-college training and formation in ministry from elsewhere do not exist.

But concerning training for other roles, just five [3S, 2C](11%) minority responses argued that the equipping of the ministry of the whole people of God – training for discipleship, or ‘learning and development’[S] – was important. (This matches the low figure in Table 3.1 for the enabling/encouraging role of superintendents). Most interviewees, when presented with the list of tasks inferred from *WIACS*, expressed surprise that superintendents would be expected to train others. Such surprise is perhaps indicative of how little training happened in circuits. One superintendent noted that it ‘sits unhappily’ with superintendency.

What does that mean? Training others to do what? [S]

There were individual exceptions to such thinking: one superintendent saw himself as ‘the fount of all knowledge’ of training opportunities; a steward noted that superintendents needed to equip ecumenical partners in Methodist practice; another

argued that the staff meeting – of which he was not a member – was seen as the way the superintendent trained others [C].

One superintendent saw it as important

to release people into District, connexional, ecumenical or completely “outside” activities that actually enrich them.

Several interviewees were surprised to see theological thinking a suggested task of superintendents:

I wouldn't have thought a superintendent was any more responsible for making (*sic*) people think theologically than any minister [M, also 2C]

Some superintendents relished the prophetic role, speaking of preaching ‘challengingly’ around the circuit as ‘an extension of what we’re trying to do in the CLT’: ‘participating in God’s mission, and about recognising God in our context’.

But spiritual matters were explicitly mentioned by just eight (17%) interviewees. This suggests that spiritual matters are to the fore in the pulpit rather than the meeting-room. Of the eight comments, I note three, each of which speak of the discernment of the activity of God:

A superintendent spoke of

Trying to bring some of the gospel and Kingdom priorities into that mix and the principles by which we are going to be travelling.

Colleagues spoke of the need

To listen for where God was working and seeking to develop that work in that particular part of God’s Kingdom, seeing where they could enable all to flourish and grow and develop and offer intelligent and caring ministry in a particular location [M]

If God’s in this, then it’ll pay off, and if [God] isn’t, then it won’t. [The superintendent] won’t restrict people’s creativity or imagination, but he will encourage people to be honest and open about what it is they want to happen, whether he agrees with it or not [M]

### 3.2.2.2 Pastoral Care of the Staff

Staff pastoral care was seen as intrinsic to superintendents' presbyteral role.

Superintendents' ability to *care* is more important than financial or leadership abilities. [C]

If colleagues feel that they are valued and cared for then you're going to have a happy circuit. [S]

Good pastoral care is 'systematic and consistent' [M]; 'the ability to listen, then to ask relevant questions of the staff', even removing them from difficult situations where necessary [M] and being 'somebody to walk with me' [M].

The superintendent's role in pastoral care of colleagues was

To make sure that everybody's happy, hopefully. [C]

To be a source of help for colleagues and lay workers and members of congregations. [C]

Because you're talking about human beings, their strengths and their weaknesses will have a play upon how they work and where their focus is going to be. [C]

A sounding-board and a guide. [S]

To support the staff in their role within their churches [S]

Another superintendent was content when staff pastoral care was found elsewhere:

I don't think it's something to be precious about.

Concerning colleague's work, care was also seen as necessary in relation to professional disappointment:

Being in touch enough to see where things are not working as well as they could. [M]

The superintendent needs to care for staff whose ideas are rejected by a CLT. [C]

### 3.2.2.3 Maintaining Connexion

One colleague argued that it was the superintendent's task to communicate about Methodism. The superintendent was 'another cog in the wheel'[C] who had to "toe the party line"[S], even when this was not acceptable locally:

Listening to the District or the wider Connexion as to what the Church is saying and where it seems to be going, and looking to put vision into action. [S]

Conference statements drive you mad in the end, the ones you've got to work through. [S]

He does pass that information on. But usually we all [groan] – especially as it usually seems to involve us in doing more work. We feel we're a long way from London here, and so when edicts come, there's a general [murmur against them]. [M]

However, one superintendent said he never filtered connexional information, and passed it on to his circuit

because I think they *should* be interested in it.

The connexional website contained too much information:

No one has pruned it. [S]

I ignore all the bits that fill me with boredom. [S]

In an ideal world, it would be brilliant to read through all this stuff! [S]

Another took 'fairly seriously stuff that comes down from Connexion', believing that gives us the framework in which we then interpret how we apply those things in our own situation. [S]

One superintendent commented that 'some Conference statements make me feel guilty: "Oh, I'm not *doing* that."'

Twelve months on, the 2011 General Secretary's Report was still being discussed and being used to shape connexional work as "a discipleship movement shaped for mission":

We're going to use it for a six-week preaching series, because we want the person in the pew to get it. [S]

Only two colleagues highlighted the superintendent's role of representing the connexion, perhaps indicating that colleagues see this as the role of *all* ministers in Full Connexion\* (as noted above in 3.2.1)

Connexionalism also meant the superintendent supporting the implementation of circuit policies at local church level [3S, 3M, 3C]. Most people [57% (26)] commented on the superintendent's personal *episkopé* as one who 'holds together the circuit' [S] and cares for the ministers [C] with

the intelligence and compassion to perhaps come in and offer advice, or if necessary actually do the job as well. [M]

Superintendents spoke of an *executive* leadership based on Circuit Meeting decisions and 'negotiation with others'. The superintendent may personally disagree with those decisions, but must 'ensure that the jobs are done' [M]:

having discerned, to ensure that that discernment is acted upon. It's a facilitation, an encouragement, an urging – rather than actually doing it yourself. [M]

Quite a lot of the goal of superintendency is explanatory – what and why we've decided. [S]

Encouraging others to fulfil their roles as well, but on the whole I suspect that we work best with a kind of consensus. [S]

[The role is] encouraging fellowship between the churches, encouraging churches to work together, encouraging the circuit to play to its strengths in partnership between the churches[S].

To help develop good practice within the circuit. [S]

One superintendent noted that he was

quite keen to keep a close eye on certain churches to make sure that whilst they're being very creative, they're also not contravening what we set out to be and do as a church. [S]

### 3.2.2.4 Representative Ministry

When asked to describe what a superintendent *is*, most interviewees (27 or 59%) only described what a superintendent *does* (Table 3.1). However, descriptions concerning what the superintendent *is* have different underlying nuances from *functional* descriptions (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Describing what the superintendent is

	Supts.	Colleagues	Stewards	Total
Minister	21% (4)	8% (1)	14% (2)	15% (7)
Embodiment of the Connexion	16% (3)		7% (1)	9% (4)
ἐπίσκοπος / ‘bishop’	11% (2)	15% (2)		9% (4)
Figurehead / focus	5% (1)	8% (1)	14% (2)	9% (4)
First among equals	5% (1)	15% (2)		7% (3)
Father-figure <sup>78</sup>	5% (1)		7% (1)	4% (2)

What a superintendent *is* relates to the nature of the superintendent’s *office*, rather than that of any actions. In this sense, I emphasise the representative public and official ministry of *being* rather than *doing*, which subsists in the entirety of a superintendent’s being stationed as such.<sup>79</sup> This is represented in Table 3.3 by the number of people who used non-functional descriptions concerning what a superintendent *is* rather than what she *does*. It is further evidenced by occasional problems of continuing deference to a former superintendent who remained in a circuit after relinquishing the superintendency (thus no longer functioning as such).

Answers emphasise that a superintendent is first and foremost a presbyter – who is first among equals. Few interviewees seemed comfortable with ascribing too

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<sup>78</sup> The proportion of female superintendents (20% - *Minutes 2011*) is perhaps too small to counteract this image.

<sup>79</sup> Murray (2010:51-52), in the Catholic theological tradition, makes a similar case on which to base Catholic priests’ representative ontology.

hierarchical a position to superintendents – ‘focus’ and ‘Father-figure’ may be seen as ‘soft’ expressions of hierarchy. A minority (all ordained) equated superintendents with bishops – this did not seem to be an image which resonated with laypeople.

Superintendents were commonly seen as the representative or ‘face’ of the circuit (though team superintendency diminished this role) both to local churches and to ecumenical partners.

When I go somewhere as superintendent, I am “the circuit”, and I am saying, “The circuit is interested in what’s going on in your church”. [S]

### 3.2.2.5 Management and Policies

Most interviewees (34 or 74%) explicitly mentioned their views concerning the superintendent’s management role (Table 3.4). The ‘other answers’, each given by only one superintendent, were: processing complaints, giving information for decision, doing paperwork, organising conversations, sowing seeds, and appointing leaders. Such leaders were not specified.

You do have things that need to get done, and so you try to manage the processes. [S]

To ensure that the Methodist Church within that circuit runs smoothly and in the way that it should [S, similarly C].

There are certain things that they’re *required* to do – and that is to chair the Circuit Meeting – most of their other responsibilities could in theory be delegated. [S]<sup>80</sup>

It’s primarily the superintendent’s role to make sure things are done. [M]

The superintendent was generally seen as ultimately responsible as ‘the guy at the top’ [2C] for managing the circuit (including themselves), requiring good financial understanding [4C]. Even delegated tasks needed to be managed by the superintendent [S, 3C], by regular reports [2C].

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<sup>80</sup> SO 502(1)(b)(i) permits the chair also to be delegated.

*Table 3.4 Views concerning the superintendent's management role*

	Supts	Colleagues	Stewards	Total
Overseeing others	3	5	5	13 (38%)
No or poor management	1 <sup>^</sup>	5	3	9 (26%)
Finance/property		2		2 (6%)
Making Plan	1		1	2 (6%)
No delegation		1 <sup>†</sup>	1 <sup>†</sup>	2 (6%)
Other answers	6			6 (3% each)
Total (excludes nil responses)				<b>34 (100%)</b>
<sup>†</sup> These responses related to the same superintendent. <sup>^</sup> A superintendent agreed with his colleague and steward that he was a poor manager.				

The staff needed to be managed, but with care [C]; it was better to speak of being Team Leader, argued one superintendent. Strong management was seen as being exercised more in facilitating consultative conversations than in issuing directives. However, in two circuits, there was a lack of clarity as to where collaborative decisions should be taken.

One colleague noted that superintendents should be trained in management and leadership as well as theology. [M] One steward felt that the sharing of management with lay people should be explicitly stated and expected.

Colleagues spoke of superintendents' responsibility for running the circuit effectively, with

All the administrative work of the circuit to attend to. [C]

They probably do a lot more admin that I don't have to look at [C].<sup>81</sup>

However another colleague – in a circuit with a paid administrator - specifically said

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<sup>81</sup> As noted in section 3.3.4.1, stewards do not necessarily see administration taking place.



I don't see it as an admin role. [C]

[The superintendent] has oversight for the ministerial staff and the working of the circuit – and that working should be about mission. [C]

Superintendents spoke of managing resources collaboratively. There was a need to avoid being 'maintenance-driven':

It's primarily a co-ordinating role, trying to give a focus for all the churches to be working together, and use our resources in an intelligent way, rather than just all operating separately. [S]

The superintendent should take the lead in *discussing* the use of resources. You *facilitate* discussion about it because there's people in the circuit know more about it than you do. [S]

I don't think it's the superintendent's job or role to say how we're going to look to staffing in the near future. I think it's got to come from within the churches, and from the Leadership Team, and not just from the treasurer. [C]

Nevertheless, one interviewee recognised the influence of superintendents and therefore the covert use of power:

The strong should support the weak – providing there's potential. So that if they were a struggling church, had no money, no personnel, and there was no potential, I wouldn't encourage money to be thrown at that church. [S]

The superintendent had 'some responsibility' [M] for resources deployment involving having 'a really good understanding of what needs to be done'[C], but three stewards argued that *stewards* had ultimate *financial* responsibility 'and the superintendent should be more involved with the spiritual side.'

In overseeing governance, the superintendent was 'helping to keep the Methodist Church connected'[S] and 'a person who brought together all the sections of the church'[C], 'and point them in the same direction so they are not pulling each other apart – and pulling me apart!'[S]. This latter superintendent clearly saw an important role for himself in maintaining unity in the circuit. The superintendent needed to support all ministers in *their* role as connexional representatives by ensuring they know the Conference's decisions [M].

Interviewees were clear that superintendency was exercised in the context of a connexional church with responsibility and accountability: ‘the superintendent has the overall responsibility to make sure that [local] policy fits Methodist policy and guidance’[S; similarly C, M], ‘to see the relevance of those [connexional] policies within our own particular unique situation’[S], and to ‘interpret’ connexional policy [2S] (though sometimes ‘the District and Connexion are a different universe, as far as [the local people] are concerned’[S]).<sup>82</sup>

Governance included upholding Standing Orders and guidelines [M, C, S]. John Wesley was ‘big on discipline and good order, a good model for Methodists’[C].

One superintendent had moved from being ‘quite anxious to toe the line, and to do everything as required’ to believing he was

as entitled to influence things as anyone else, including innovation. I’m not called to just do everything the way it’s always been done, but to do the job as I see fit.

Part of my role has been interpreting the spirit of *CPD* (and then I suppose having to face the consequences if I misinterpreted things and things go wrong) but to give permission for people to do what they believe is sensible unless there are rules which say otherwise. I tend to hang a little bit loose from the strictures of *CPD*, although I think I probably know enough of it to know my way around and I regard some of the stuff that we are required to do as a little bit ridiculous in some places, because we just haven’t got the personnel to do everything that’s required of us. That’s part of the confidence that I think superintendents acquire as they go on – as to what can be ignored, or at least distanced from a little. I think there is an element of [feeling secure in my role] – at best what are they going to do [to me]?

Two people [1M, 1C] saw the superintendent’s *personal* governance responsibility purely in terms of connexional policies. Superintendents were expected to represent the wider connexion to ensure that the circuit’s policies were not askew from connexional thinking. Governance of *circuit* policy was shared with the CLT and Circuit Meeting: ‘it has to be delivered as a corporate whole, rather than

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<sup>82</sup> Maunder (2014:98) has shown a diminishing influence of connexional officers and meetings as they exist further from the local church.

just being one person trying to push it' [M]. The development of policy was expected to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Collaborative policy-making was expected to be empowered by the superintendent's inspiring the circuit to discern God's will and to seek a common vision.

One superintendent commented that

Developing circuit policies could be based on a 'maintenance-driven model' of the church: rules, regulations and schedules. Or it could mean, "How are we as a circuit going to organise ourselves in order that we work in the most effective way?"

Effective organisation need not mean constant change:

[I'm] keen on continuity. If we do have a good thing going it's a blooming pain when that's disrupted by changes. [S]

We don't know whether we're doing things right at all. We're just carrying on with the system that's been laid down for us, but we don't want to do that unthinkingly. [S]

Yet the task was to guide the Circuit Meeting and CLT to formulate strategies to

Deploy resources in the most effective and fruitful way. [S]

To help the circuit to move as a coherent whole and not just as several individual ships that do their own thing. [M]

Whether it's visionary or not depends on the person and their gifts. [M]

### **3.2.2.6 Summary of Specific Tasks**

Superintendents were expected to perform specific tasks (such as making the Plan and chairing circuit meetings), though they were recognised as able to delegate aspects of their work. (3.2.2)

Superintendents were expected to make the Plan in order to provide preachers in an equitable way to lead worship. They were expected to preside over the training of preachers, to assist in the training of probationers, and perhaps to train staff within the staff meeting. Interviewees generally did not expect superintendents to engage in training people for other ministries, nor, *as superintendents rather than circuit*

*ministers*, to stimulate theological thinking. Spiritual input was expected in worship, not meetings. (3.2.2.1)

Superintendents were expected to offer good pastoral care to staff. (3.2.2.2)

Though half the stewards expressed the expectation that superintendents, as superintendents, represent the connexion, only a minority of superintendents stated that they expected this of themselves. Their colleagues, on the whole, did not express this expectation, perhaps indicating that they see it as their own role too.

Superintendents were expected to aid the implementation of circuit-level decisions in the local churches, and encourage the local churches to work together. (3.2.2.3)

Superintendents were expected to personally represent the circuit when they visit local churches, but hierarchical terms were eschewed, interviewees preferring to emphasise their primary role as presbyters. (3.2.2.4)

Superintendents were expected to manage the circuit, ensuring the wise use of resources and overseeing others to ensure that agreed tasks are performed and that good governance arrangements existed. Some interviewees argued that circuit policies should be aligned to connexional policies, but not all superintendents themselves saw the need to adhere to connexional policies, arguing that local differences were possible.

One quarter of my interviewed superintendents were judged by interviewees to be poor managers, perhaps due to the lack of training in management practices. The task is seen mainly as one of co-ordination, encouraging churches and staff to work together, but not generally one of administration. (3.2.2.5)

### **3.2.3 Broader Thinking**

I asked for responses to broader questions about superintendency – hindrances and helps for superintendents, vocation to superintendency, and possible patterns of superintendency.

### 3.2.3.1 Hindrances and Helps

No particular problem hindering their work was cited by a majority of superintendents, though ‘workload’ and ‘administration’ were cited by large minorities (Table 3.5). Perhaps this was linked to poor delegation.

*Table 3.5: Hindrances to superintendency*

Workload and Stress	8	42%
Administration	7	37%
Staff disagreements	4	21%
Negativity and whingeing	3	16%
Resistance to change	2	11%
Unrealistic expectations	2	11%
Previous supt still present	2	11%
District supts’ meetings	2	11%
LEPs	1	5%
Employment Issues	1	5%
Problem churches	1	5%
Managing decline	1	5%
Chair’s attitude towards me	1	5%

Smaller numbers of superintendents found the *people* they had to work with difficult – though ‘staff disagreements’, ‘negativity and whinging’ and ‘resistance to change’ may be interrelated, and all may be a product of an authoritative non-collaborative approach to superintendency: it is, however, difficult to find a definitive causal link. I would comment, though, that the expected collaborative working is difficult in an atmosphere of staff disagreements and negativity.

The District superintendents' meeting was seen by two attendees as unhelpful (compared with five who found it helpful) due to covert competitiveness, the sense that they were not performing as well as their colleagues, and for one, the sense that the Chair was judging him.

One superintendent spoke about the need to oversee oneself, necessary because only a superintendent understands the experience:

Planning one's own learning, recognising one's own limitations, reflecting on pressures. [S]

Only two superintendents felt that people's expectations of them were unrealistic. If the expectations were as reported (section 3.2.1) then they would not generally be too onerous.

Conversely, Table 3.6 shows sources of help/empowerment identified by superintendents.

*Table 3.6: Sources of Empowerment for superintendents*

<b>Source of Empowerment</b>	<b>Total (19)</b>
Superintendents' Course	42% (8)
Superintendents' Meetings in the District	26% (5)
Conversations with church members	16% (3)
Books	11% (2)
Personal spirituality	5% (1)
Hearing about research	5% (1)

A superintendent expressed the hope that Chairs might mentor superintendents, but acknowledged that this was a problem when the Chair had never themselves been a superintendent.<sup>83</sup>

It seems that what seemed to be helpful is the sense of collegiality *between* superintendents in the peer support that they receive. A sense of isolation and a feeling that they alone must do their job increases stress.

When one of the constituent superintendents in an amalgamation (or an existing circuit minister was appointed as superintendent) they reported the benefit of being able to ‘hit the ground running’.

### **3.2.3.2 Vocation**

Some interviewees noted that the process of selection for superintendency had ‘no clarity’[C], and no training is required (except if superintendents wish to supervise probationers). The practice of merely ticking a box on a stationing form indicating the willingness to be stationed as a superintendent is an inadequate discernment of vocation, even if accompanied by a conversation with the Chair.

Six people [1S, 3M, 2C] mentioned the personal gifting of superintendents.

I don’t think every minister should be a superintendent. I don’t think we should clamour to get anybody and everybody just because there’s a vacancy [S].

There needs to be more opportunity for development of vocation. [S]

One superintendent noted

I don’t feel *called* to be a superintendent, and yet I recognise that superintendency is a really good way in which I can make the most of my gifts – so if that *is* a call, then it’s a call. [S]

However, another argued that *practice* and *pragmatism* sometimes fail to respect this:

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<sup>83</sup> This is rare but not unknown.

I think a lot of ‘calling’ is trying to assess, with others, your gifts and talents and potential, and to see how you can best serve. I think the tragedy is that Methodism’s sometimes knee-jerked when there’s been a gap, a need of a superintendent, and bunged somebody in, without them necessarily having the right gifts and attributes. [S]

Four presbyters chose never to accept further superintendency posts. One cited time-loss from his ‘normal’ presbyteral role: ‘Superintendency for me will be a one-off affair. It is very unlikely I will do it again.’

### 3.2.3.3 Ordination and *episkopé*

Is the lack of an episcopal order in British Methodism problematic? Table 3.7 summarises responses to its possible introduction into circuit superintendency.

*Table 3.7: Attitudes towards ordination as superintendents*

	Supts	Colleagues	Stewards	Total
Would support	1 (6%)	1 (8%)	5 (42%)	7 (17%)
Would not support	9 (53%)	10 (83%)	5 (42%)	24 (59%)
Don’t Know	7 (41%)	1 (8%)	2 (17%)	10 (24%)
Total	17 (42%)	12 (29%)	12 (29%)	41 (100%) †
† Excludes nil responses				

Interviewees overwhelmingly rejected any reintroduction of an ordination service for superintendents.<sup>84</sup> This does not necessarily reject a third, episcopal, order, but would not site it in superintendents. The strongest objection was from colleagues, which confirms the tenor of responses in Table 3.3 of superintendents as being presbyters who are first among equals. Stewards were equally divided.

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<sup>84</sup> In 1846 the three ordination services (for superintendents, elders and deacons) that Wesley had adapted from the Anglican ordinal were replaced by a single service for Ministers which combined elements from the services for elders and superintendents (WIACS§10).



Grounds for support were mostly that ordination recognises a person as called, gifted and trained for superintendency [5S, 2M, 7C]. ‘It could work. I wouldn’t want all the pomp of a bishop’[C]. Conversely, interviewees eschewed any unnecessary distinction between ministers – superintendents would no longer be ‘first among equals’ – or any denial of lay ministry. [3S, 4M, 3C]

As soon as you have a hierarchy of presbyteral ministries, you assume there is a difference in kind. [M]

Superintendency is merely a time-limited functional role, and is not ontological [6S, 3M, 1C]. One steward sat back in astonishment at the whole notion! Several interviewees mentioned their appreciation of the extra question in the Welcome Service (*MWB:359*) which is asked of superintendents and ‘could be strengthened.’

Two interviewees spoke of the still-prevailing ‘historic expectations of awe’ concerning the status of the superintendent:

I can’t imagine some of them [using the superintendent’s first name] – always this great reverence, one step down from God. [C]

Some people still look to the superintendent with some regard (“Do you know, we didn’t get many here, and it was the Super preaching!”) That’s helpful and unhelpful in the same breath, really .[S]

But superintendents themselves saw a change in attitudes

I think the number of people who look up to the superintendent in a respectful – almost unhealthily respectful – way is lessening. I think it’s probably a generational thing. [S]

What if there were *no* requirement for a superintendent to be ordained? Could a layperson be appointed to a merely functional office? Table 3.8 summarises responses.

Table 3.8: Attitudes towards lay superintendents

	Supts	Colleagues	Stewards	Total
Yes	3 (17%)	7 (58%)	6 (50%)	16 (38%)
No	11 (61%)	3 (25%)	5 (42%)	19 (45%)
Don't Know	4 (22%)	2 (17%)	1 (8%)	7 (17%)
Total	18 (43%)	12 (29%)	12 (29%)	42 (100%) †
† Excludes nil responses				

Of those expressing a preference, the majority opposed the appointment of lay superintendents. However, this majority relies heavily on superintendents' objections; colleagues and stewards were less likely to object to lay superintendents. Perhaps colleagues viewed this from the perspective of superintendency offering oversight of the *circuit*, rather than the *local churches*, so any lack of ordained status of the superintendent would not affect the fact that they, the local presbyter, offered ordained leadership where it was needed.

Arguments *for* were theological:

- Lay people could also be called by God.[2S, 1M, 4C]
- Ministry is a partnership. [4S, 1M, 2C] (A ministerial vice-superintendent, separating management from pastoral care, was suggested).
- Lay-people can be trained theologically and bring broader experience.[2S, 2M, 1C]

and pragmatic:

- Could use a different title, such as bursar.[1C]
- Having a lay chair for a Circuit Meeting was working well in one circuit.[1C]
- Would have more time if they did not preach.[1M]

Arguments against were also theological:

- The pastoral, theological and sacramental would be missing.[9S, 6M, 7C]  
'Having a presbyter in the role of chair can sometimes mean that you "chaplain" as well as chair a committee.'[S].
- There is an "ontological" dimension to superintendency as it is part of a life-long calling to the pastoral office.[4S, 1M, 1C]
- Presbyters are called to collegially reflect theologically and this would exclude lay superintendents.[4S, 1C]
- Oversight should be shared, not handed over.[1S]
- Laypeople would not be appointed by the Conference.[1M]

and pragmatic:

- Laypeople do not understand the pressures of ministry.[5S, 3M, 4C]
- Laypeople would not have the time to do it on a voluntary basis, and would be more expensive than presbyters.[1S, 5C]
- Laypeople would not accept the oversight.[1M, 4C]
- Presbyters would not accept the oversight.[1S, 1M]
- Too great a cultural change.[3S, 1M]
- The loss of the different viewpoint and the limited timescale which itinerancy brings.[3S]
- There is a dearth of laypeople wanting to exercise leadership.[1M]

#### **3.2.3.4 Shared *episkopé* (Team)**

Interviewees gave their opinions of Team Superintendency (Table 3.9). Team roles needed clarity, or teams failed. People generally preferred one figurehead in leadership.

The circuits which were planning for mission partnership were looking forward to working together, but recognised the challenge for Team Superintendency and the need to define roles (which is a functional approach), which did not work well if

there were communication or personality problems. The same comments applied to two-minister circuits.

*Table 3.9: Attitudes towards and experiences of Team Superintendency*

	Supts. (19)	Colleagues (11)	Stewards (12)	Total (42)
Yes, in theory	21% (4)	27% (3)	17% (2)	21% (9)
Yes, it works	5% (1)		8% (1)	5% (2)
No, in theory	58% (11)	64% (7)	67% (8)	62% (16)
No, it did not work	16% (3)	8% (1)	8% (1)	12% (5)

### 3.2.3.5 'Separation' for *episkopé*?

Larger circuits in other Districts were 'separating' superintendents from local pastoral charge in order to 'free them up' for superintendency. Table 3.10 shows responses to this possibility.

*Table 3.10: Attitudes of welcome towards 'separated' superintendency*

	Supt (16)	Colleague (13)	Steward (14)	Total (43)
No	31% (5)	46% (6)	50% (7)	42% (18)
Yes	44% (7)	46% (6)	29% (4)	40% (17)
Maybe	19% (3)		21% (3)	14% (6)
Don't Know	6% (1)			2% (1)
Irrelevant		8% (1)		2% (1)

There was a fairly even divide between those who expressed an opinion on separated superintendency (though on balance it was rejected). Superintendents were more in favour than others. Some were concerned about the cost, but I asked them to address the principle. The overwhelming reasons against were superintendents 'losing touch' with the churches by not having their own church ('It wouldn't be separated, it would be detached'[S]), and the loss of the pastoral role of the presbyter. (It was acknowledged that superintendents could focus pastoral care on

other staff). One steward said the decision was entirely context-specific for each circuit.

Arguments in favour centred on the superintendent being freed to think about the circuit as a whole, losing the secondary role of local minister. One superintendent highlighted the tension between these two roles, noting that his colleagues would ‘fight ‘their’ churches’ corner’ against the circuit in a Circuit Meeting, but as meeting chair he could not do the same for his ‘own’ churches.

Separation would permit ‘visitation’ and, indeed, the smaller churches would see more of the superintendent, and be more connected. There would be the opportunity for a missional, coaching and teaching role. A non-separated Chair commented that there could be problems of oversight – would the local minister leave gaps for the superintendent to preach, or would the superintendent plan themselves first?

Others argued for another benefit: it would make the District redundant.

### **3.2.3.6 Summary of Broader Thinking**

A large minority (42%) of superintendents argued that workload and stress, and the amount of administration they had to do, were hindrances to their superintendency. Others who cited people’s negativity, disagreements and resistance to change, may have been expressing results based on their own leadership style. District Superintendent Meetings could be both helpful and unhelpful, depending on their perception of either peer support or competition. I note that only two superintendents cited books as helpful, and only one related his personal spirituality with his superintendency. A majority had found the connexional Superintendents’ Course helpful. (3.2.3.1)

Despite some interviewees arguing for a discernment of personal vocation to superintendency, many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the selection process and system for stationing ministers as superintendents (which is covert). Four presbyters had experienced superintendency and discerned that they would never exercise it again. (3.2.3.2)

Interviewees rejected ordination of superintendents to the ministry of oversight. The strongest objection was from colleagues. Negative perceptions of bishops prevailed. The possibility of lay superintendents was more acceptable to colleagues and stewards; superintendents themselves were against the idea. (3.2.3.3)

Interviewees generally argued against team superintendency in theory. Those who had experienced it in practice were more than twice as likely to say that it did not work. It was felt that clarity of role was needed, and that people generally prefer one figurehead. (3.2.3.4)

Interviewees were almost equally divided over the possibility of separated superintendency, but the balance was against it: superintendents needed to be rooted in the pastoral role. (3.2.3.5)

### **3.3 The Practice of Superintendents**

This section sets out the concrete reality of superintendency in the contemporary, multi-faceted and individual experience of my interviewees. It presents data which answers another part of my first research question: ‘How is the role of the superintendent presbyter currently practised in MCGB?’

I describe practice in order to ‘hear’ the operant voice in the conversation. I am seeking in my thesis to advance knowledge of superintendency and to elicit learning about aspects of practice which have not been known before (Cameron *et al.* 2010:103). Thus, aside from my *own* learning, there is in my data as a whole an academic learning about the practice of superintendency, as this is the first time research of this nature has been undertaken into British superintendency (section 1.5). I note that the description of practice is my description based on the description of my interviewees, but the use of many interviews contributes to the reliability of the data.

How does superintendency operate? What concrete challenges are superintendents facing?

### 3.3.1 The Role in General

There are two aspects of how I present the data relating to the general role: leadership (3.3.1.1) and policy-making (3.3.1.2).

#### 3.3.1.1 Leadership

I asked in what ways interviewees had seen superintendents they had known exercising leadership. Thus the objective population being considered in order to answer this question was at least 123 superintendents (including, for superintendents, themselves) (Table 3.11). These include ‘known’ past superintendents, as distinct from the ‘sample’ current (or recently active) superintendents whom I interviewed. Figures, though broadly indicative, cannot be used to securely define any proportions, as interviewees did not necessarily describe the practice of every superintendent they had known; nevertheless they are indicative of the lived practice deemed worthy of mention by interviewees. It is worth noting that extremely good or extremely poor superintendents are more likely to be remembered and commented upon.

Note that Table 3.1 addresses the general role of superintendent, thus answers are more abstract than those of Table 3.11: in Table 3.11 specific ‘known’ superintendents are called to mind by interviewees.

*Table 3.11 Ways in which Superintendents exercise leadership*

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Superintendents positively cited</b>	<b>Superintendents negatively cited</b>
Collaborative leadership	14	5 (No collaboration) 1 (Collusion with some staff)
‘Delegates’ part of functions	12	1 (No delegation)
Facilitator, coach, supporter, enabler	11	1 (Poor mentoring)
Inspirational / enthusiastic leadership	10	2 (No leadership)
Focused with clear agenda	10	2 (No clear agenda)
Leadership to seek vision	9	8 (No search for vision)
Spiritual / theological leadership	8	1 (Theological reflection not welcomed)
<i>Laissez-Faire</i> / relaxed	7	2 (Too laissez-faire)

Collegial leadership	7	3 (Irregular staff meetings) 2 (Power-struggle with colleagues)
Listener	6	2 (Ignores others)
Promoted in-house	6	
Administrator / Manager	5	
Intervenes locally where necessary	5	2 (Conflict-avoidant)
Business-like / bureaucratic	4	
Participates in team superintendency	4	
Allocates resources for ministry	4	1 (Resources not discussed)
Leads by example	4	
Authoritarian / no collaboration	4 (Decisive)	7 (Too authoritarian)
Impatient with slow collaborators		4
Leading strategic thinking / proactive	4	
Directive leadership	4	
Promotes experiment and risk-taking	4	
Takes lead from connexional strategy	3	1 (Scant regard for connexion)
Gentle leadership	3	2 (Manipulative/ruthless)
Undertakes regular visitation of churches	3	1 (Not done)
Encouraging training	3	
Leadership to serve social need	2	
Consultation before sole decision	2	
Change-leadership	2	
Persuasive leadership	2	1 (Authority rejected)
Influencing appointments	2	
Supervisor	1	1 (Poor supervision)



Table 3.11 shows that superintendents' practice of leadership varied greatly, but that collaborative leadership was cited most (as it was in the 'open' answers in Table 3.1). Similarly, superintendents were cited as delegating some of their duties.<sup>85</sup>

I notice, however, that out of all superintendents cited, one in four did not work collaboratively. Collaboration is mentioned also at the foot of the table where eleven superintendents were cited as being authoritarian and lacking collaboration (although this was not deemed a negative characteristic when 'decisive' leadership was sought). An examination of similar characteristics on the table shows that collegial leadership had an even higher proportion of negative citation of 5 out of 12 (40%). One in four cited superintendents did not listen to others or were impatient with slow collaborators. Superintendents cited as exercising gentle leadership were almost matched by those described as manipulative or ruthless (but there were few cases cited of either). So my data suggests that collaboration *does* happen, but there is possibly a considerable number of examples where it does *not* happen.

Where it did happen, collaborative leadership took place mostly in regular staff meetings (67% were held monthly, 20% were weekly) and CLT meetings (which were generally less frequent than staff meetings). In the smaller circuits staff meetings tended to be infrequent, as the absence of one person for holidays or a funeral had a greater impact on the value or possibility of meeting.

In an apparently small number of cases a hierarchical stance was taken by the superintendent so the inclination for open sharing in the staff meeting was diminished.

*Laissez-faire* collegial *episkopé* was offered over local churches primarily through the local minister and circuit stewards. Does this imply that in local churches *episkopé* is devolved rather than shared – notwithstanding the (few) cases of local intervention by the superintendent where necessary? (See sections 3.2.2.1 and

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<sup>85</sup> The notion of delegation is based on the espoused understanding, rather than the normative understanding of what a superintendent should do (as noted in the introduction to section 3.2.2).

3.2.2.4.) There is certainly a possibility that superintendents could have *less* knowledge about local churches than do the circuit stewards, who attend the church councils. Does this diminish their influence? And is it possible that local ministers can feel abandoned by superintendents who are too *laissez-faire*?

‘Titular’\* superintendencies could be ‘light-touch’ (often with no staff meetings) with the local ministers undertaking some of the superintendent’s work.

In one ecumenical area, where a non-Methodist minister led the circuit but could not for legal/governance reasons be superintendent, the allocation of tasks with the non-leading superintendent had taken considerable negotiation. This separation of personal leadership and oversight of the circuit from the governance tasks of a superintendent raises an interesting question: can the superintendent exercise full personal *episkopé* if governance and management are separated from leadership?

A similar question arises with regard to ‘team superintendency’: I found that task-sharing between the joint superintendents led to a lack of joined-up thinking and confusion as to who was in charge at meetings.

Both the enabling and spiritual leadership roles appear to be more evident in Table 3.11 than in Table 3.1, but, though inspirational/visionary leadership was mentioned, almost as many ‘known’ superintendents were cited as not enabling their circuit to seek vision.

‘Known’ superintendents who were described with pleasure by interviewees inspired and created space for imagination, guiding the development of vision and the sharing of ideas, animating discussion and enabling circuits to review their life, and facilitating, supporting and resourcing the implementation of ideas. Two-thirds of my ‘sample’ superintendents (Table 3.1) encouraged vision-articulation and rationally-assessed risk-taking, but does the lower figure for ‘Leads circuit’s vision’ in Table 3.1 reflect that half the time they allowed *colleagues* to take the lead in vision-seeking, and were not seen to be leading it themselves? One DDE spoke of a superintendent who was very

enabling, being able to give other people a framework within which to work; not being the unique owner of vision, but being able to see beyond what's always happened to something that might be different in the future.

The ability of superintendents to be focused with a clear agenda was cited positively much more than negatively, but few superintendents were cited as proactively leading strategic thinking and change.

### **3.3.1.2 Developing Circuit Policies**

Nine superintendents (60%) were seen to proactively develop circuit policies; six (40%) were seen as reactive/passive. A Chair commented that superintendents would go to meetings

with some clear ideas of where *they* believe the circuit should be going, most of whom are wise enough to consult – some of whom don't and live to rue the day. Others would go without any clear idea at all, but would be very open to hear what others are wanting to say, and would then play their full part in implementation. And some who would just ask the question "What's a policy?"

Some policies were merely about maintenance:

Almost a fear, if anything different was suggested [M].

Too much routine business often prevented creative vision in meetings; 'time seems to kill everything off, we're all so busy'[S]. Local church diversity inhibited some circuit-wide policies. Two superintendents held concurrent circuit committee meetings as a matter of policy, with the unintended consequence of diminishing participation by churches unable to send representatives for every committee.

Yet proactive superintendents were commended:

He's been the prime mover. [C]

He's always thinking ahead to what we should be changing. [C]

Dynamism was sometimes personality-related, but some superintendents were adept at summarising open discussions:

He's happy to take on board other people's ideas and shuffle them. [M]

Table 3.12: Policies developed by superintendents

<i>Area of Activity</i>	<i>Policy</i>
Leadership in Mission	<p>Response to environmental factors (eg new housing estate or new motorway)</p> <p>Mission projects (Street Pastors, food banks): active response</p> <p>Mission funding: obtaining grants and allocating reserves</p> <p>Balancing church-orientated and community-orientated work: employing staff</p> <p>Evangelism: initiating events</p> <p>Congregation-planting: encouraging staff to do this (eg Messy Churches)</p>
Ministry of the Word	<p>Plan-making: responding to diminishing resources</p> <p>Circuit services: agreeing frequency</p> <p>Youth Services: introducing them</p>
Ministry of the Sacrament	<p>Holy Communion presidency: who decides who presides?</p> <p>Baptisms: when to offer infant dedication as an alternative</p> <p>Covenant Services: when they occur</p>
Ministry of Co-ordination	<p>Ministerial staffing and pastoral responsibilities (including team ministry)</p> <p>Circuit use of individual minister's gifts</p> <p>Hospital visiting: to reduce duplication</p> <p>Ecumenical working</p>
Training	<p>Learning and development: proactive policies</p> <p>Training opportunities: allocating funds for external courses</p>
Commissioner of ministry	<p>Lay staffing provision: funding and recruitment</p>
Governance	<p>Church Council agenda standardisation</p> <p>Meeting times</p> <p>Communications</p> <p>Data-collection concerning churches</p> <p>Funeral and wedding fees</p> <p>Chaplaincy income pooling</p> <p>Resources and buildings</p> <p>Approved tradespersons</p> <p>Safeguarding</p> <p>Lay staff terms of service</p>

Ideas were tested collaboratively in staff and CLT meetings before bringing them to the Circuit Meeting. Some used published resources to help their policy discussion – the *Healthy Circuits Handbook* (Johnson *et al* 2011); *Mission-Shaped Ministry* (2013); or the URC’s *Vision4Life* (2013). Table 3.12 lists (non-hierarchically) policies mentioned by interviewees.

Thus some policies concerned the response to changed environments; others aimed to agree the approach to routine business.

Interviewees from all but one circuit described circuit-level policy-making as being ‘a shared thing’[S] taking place in the CLT (see section 3.2.4.2). Reviews of circuit life were described as *circuit* reviews, not as *superintendent’s* reviews, and usually took place reactively due to financial pressures. Conciliar oversight resulted from

on-going conversations between ministerial staff, circuit stewards, and then the individual representatives of churches.[S]

Discussions took place at various circuit-level meetings, though policy discussion was not always inclusive. In one circuit, stewards made decisions without consulting the staff or the superintendent.

In another circuit,

the honest truth is it’s the Staff Meeting [where] you make most progress with the conversation.[S]

Although this superintendent took staff ideas to the CLT for further discussion the Circuit Meeting simply received a report and ‘if anyone asks a question we’ll answer it.’[S]

Perhaps policy discussion was easier in CLT meetings rather than in the much larger Circuit Meetings? It was perhaps easier still in the more frequent staff meetings: discussion there would (possibly unthinkingly) exclude stewards. What are the implications for power relationships and for who drives the agenda?

One reason for making decisions in smaller groups might simply be because collaborative decision-making ‘sometimes takes a long time’[S].

At local church level, superintendents gave more energy to the churches where they themselves had pastoral charge. Their impact on *other* local churches depended on their ability to inspire and empower colleagues.

### **3.3.1.3 Summary of the Role in General**

Superintendents generally exercised some sort of practical leadership of the circuit. Leadership styles varied, but many superintendents worked collaboratively (rather than in an individual capacity) to manage and maintain the work of the circuit and to encourage ‘vision-seeking’. Collaborative working was diminished by the leadership stance taken by a minority of superintendents. Even if superintendents personally did not feel able to lead any vision-seeking in the circuit, some enabled others with appropriate gifts to take the lead. However, superintendents generally concentrated on managing existing local circuit policies, with occasional reference to the wider connexion, and were *laissez-faire* regarding local churches. Generally, the circuit’s work was co-ordinated by collaborative staff and CLT meetings, which were more frequent with colleagues than stewards, and which had focused agendas concentrating in the main on routine business. Occasionally, decisions were made by staff or stewards without consultation with the others.

The task of monitoring and overseeing the circuit seemed to be reactive rather than proactive. There appeared to be devolved *episkopé* as local ministers led their own churches’ decision-making, and superintendents oversaw circuit staff members rather than the circuit’s individual churches. Local church diversity prevented some circuit-wide policies from being suggested or implemented.

Experience of team superintendency indicated that it was easier to share governance and management tasks than leadership.

I have raised questions about the practice:

- Were superintendents more likely to maintain the *status quo* than implement change? Is the identification of a person as a leader dependent on what they have changed rather than maintained?

- Does the apparent devolution of personal oversight to local ministers mean that that oversight of churches is no longer exercised? Do presbyters expect that they themselves will represent the connexion as much as the superintendent?
- How does the separation of governance and management tasks from leadership, and the practice of collaborative oversight, affect personal *episkopé*? Does collaboration diminish personal leadership?
- What are the implications for power relationships and for who drives the agenda when staff and stewards make decisions in separate meetings?

I will return to these questions in the next chapter.

### 3.3.2 Specific tasks

Having described the role in general, I now examine particular tasks undertaken by superintendents.

But first, I look at the task-list as a whole. I asked interviewees what they thought was most important in the superintendent's role and what they saw superintendents spend (or what they themselves as superintendents spent) most time doing.

Table 3.13 presents a great deal of data in one table. For each superintendent in my sample (the rows headed S1 to S15) plus a small number of previous superintendents where data was offered (the row marked 'Other') I tabulate the perceived order of tasks elicited by asking what people thought was most important (the sub-row marked 'E' = Espoused) and what superintendents said they actually spent most time on or were observed spending most time on or emphasising by others (the sub-row marked 'O' = Operant).

In the table cells I show who offered the data: S = Superintendent, M = minister/colleague, C = circuit steward; subscript numerals distinguish two members of the same interviewee type commenting on one particular superintendent (so, for example, two colleagues commented on S2).

It can be seen from Table 3.13 that where a superintendent expressed something as important, for only four tasks across all the circuits did they report that they were able to prioritise that task (e.g. S1 managed to visit the churches, which she also thought was her most important task). Thus for most tasks, superintendents expressed that what they thought was most important was not what they spent most of their time doing. This disconnect implies that superintendents do not, are not able to, fulfil their own expectations. There were nine cases of colleagues and stewards reporting that they saw superintendents prioritising tasks which superintendents had not themselves reported as an e priority (on the table this is shown as a 'C' or 'M' in the 'O' sub-row where there is no 'S' in either sub-row). No superintendents believed that "Discipline and Good Order" was most important. No stewards believed that "Visitation of the churches" was most important.



Table 3.13 Espoused and operant importance of tasks

Supt		Worship	Evangm	Theoly	Policy	D'pline	Care	Visitatn	Train
S1	E	C	S M C		M			S	S
	O		M	S	S M		C	S	
S2	E		S	M <sub>1</sub>	C	M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub> C	M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub> C		
	O	M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub>					M <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub> C	
S3	E			S					
	O	S	M C				C	S	
S4	E				S M C			S	
	O					C	M C	M	
S5	E			S M C	S		S		
	O				M C		C		
S6	E		S		C	M	M		
	O	S M C	M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub> C		M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub> C	C			
S7	E				S		S C		
	O	S			S		C		
S8	E	S	C		M				
	O	M C				S	S		
S9	E	M	S	S			S C	M	
	O	S C					S M		
S10	E	M <sub>2</sub>	S		C				
	O	M <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>		M <sub>2</sub>			C	
S11	E	S	C		S M		S		M
	O				C		M		
S12	E		M <sub>2</sub>	S C	S				
	O	M <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>1</sub>	C	C				
S13	E	C	S M C						
	O	S	M		S	S			
S14	E				S		C		
	O	C	C		S				
S15	E				S				S M
	O				M				
Other	E				S <sub>1</sub> S <sub>2</sub> M	M	S M		
	O	C	C		M <sub>1</sub> M <sub>2</sub> C	M	M C	C	
Total	E	2S 2M 2C	6S 3M 4C	4S 2M 2C	9S 5M 4C	0S 3M 1C	5S 4M 4C	2S 1M 0C	2S
	O	5S 5M 5C	0S 6M 4C	1S 2M 1C	4S 7M 5C	2S 1M 2C	2S 5M 6C	2S 2M 3C	

Note: S2 says their O is administration – which is not a choice offered on the table.

I place the totals in Table 3.13 in a hierarchy in Table 3.14. The columns headed E<sub>S</sub>, E<sub>M</sub> and E<sub>C</sub> are the espoused rankings of the three groups of superintendents, colleagues and stewards respectively; O is the total ranking given by the combined

evidence of the three groups, concerning the operant practice of superintendents; “Ranked E” is the average espoused ranking of the three groups; and “Overall rank” averages all rankings.

Table 3.14: Ranking of Tasks

	E <sub>S</sub>	E <sub>M</sub>	E <sub>C</sub>	O	Ranked E	Overall rank
Worship	5	5	4	3	5	4
Evangelism	2	3	1	4	2	3
Theology	4	5	4	7	4	6
Policy	1	1	1	2	1	1
Discipline	8	3	6	6	6	8
Staff Care	3	2	1	1	2	2
Visitation	5	8	7	5	8	6
Training	5	5	7	8	6	4

Table 3.14 shows that all three groups believe that “developing circuit policy” is the most important task. On average, “encouraging evangelism” and “pastoral care of staff” are next in importance. However, superintendents in practice prioritise “pastoral care of staff”, then “developing circuit policy”. “Visitation of the churches” is seen as least important, especially by colleagues: perhaps due to their desire for the superintendent not to interfere.

It is interesting to note the order of duties described by of one colleague:

You could call the superintendent a chief administrator plus somebody that is attempting evangelical work in an area.

Interviewees found difficulty in distinguishing engagement with evangelism as a superintendent rather than a presbyter. Most interviewees identified evangelism as locally-based, with *encouragement* from the circuit/superintendent.

Most superintendents commented on the formal task of visitation: it was ‘a source of great guilt’ and ‘a ridiculous expectation’; visitation could only be done by ‘separated’ superintendents, without their own Section [2S].

Table 3.15 shows the Spearman rank order correlation coefficients for the different interviewee types. These indicate the level of agreement between the interviewee types, where +1.00 is total agreement, and -1.00 is total disagreement. I note slight positive agreement between the rankings – however, only two comparisons are statistically significant: E<sub>C</sub> compared with O (significant at the 97½% level); and E<sub>S</sub> compared with E<sub>C</sub> (significant at the 99% level).

*Table 3.15 Spearman rank order correlation coefficients*

Ranking	Co-efficient
E <sub>S</sub> compared with O	0.5611
E <sub>M</sub> compared with O	0.5855
E <sub>C</sub> compared with O	0.7536
E <sub>S</sub> compared with E <sub>M</sub>	0.6038
E <sub>S</sub> compared with E <sub>C</sub>	0.8355

The strongest significant agreement is between the espoused views of task-importance of the circuit stewards (E<sub>C</sub>) and the superintendents (E<sub>S</sub>). This implies that superintendents and stewards are most likely to agree on relative task-importance. There is also significant agreement between stewards’ expectations (E<sub>C</sub>) and superintendents’ practice (O).

I comment here that the superintendent is a key player in the appointment of stewards. One superintendent spoke of recruiting

the right sort of people onto the Circuit Leadership Team so that those sorts of leadership roles fit with the direction of travel.

This could imply that superintendents are more likely to permit a person’s nomination as steward if they think that that person will agree with their practice.

Does this agreement of  $E_C$  with  $E_S$  and  $O$  suggest the appointment of ‘yes-men/women’?

On examining periods of service, only four stewards (29%) were appointed *after* the arrival of a superintendent – so the high correlation between their expectations cannot be a result of collusion over the stewards’ appointments. Of these four stewards ( $S_4$ ,  $S_7$ ,  $S_8$ , and  $S_{12}$ ), Table 3.14 shows that in three cases,  $E_S = E_C$  for the most important task; yet in only half the cases (2) are those expectations fulfilled (i.e.  $E_C = O$ ). The sample size is small, and the *cause* of the agreement between the superintendent and steward cannot be inferred.

Conversely, a longer-serving steward would have been involved in inviting a superintendent to serve a circuit, and is likely to invite someone whose image of superintendency as expressed in interview (which is likely to be  $E_S$ ) matches their own image (i.e. the superintendent identified by the Stationing Committee as a possible match has been acceptable to the stewards because  $E_S = E_C$ ).

Whatever the cause of the agreement, however, stewards and superintendents on the whole agreed as to which tasks are important (pastoral care of the staff, developing circuit policies, and encouraging evangelism). And that is what stewards saw the superintendents doing – even if the superintendents disagreed.

Two experienced superintendents said that the most important task was entirely contextual on the circuit and the staff mix:

I would have given you a different answer in different circuits. What you do is actually use the gifts of the members of staff to develop the total – so that it might well be that there are those within the staff who are better equipped than I am, say, to encourage evangelism. [S]

It depends on what circuit you’re dealing with, and their needs. [S]

Having examined the tensions between what superintendents and others thought was most important to do, and what they actually did, or observed superintendents doing most, I now look at individual tasks in detail.

### 3.3.2.1 Visitation of the churches

How did superintendents know what was happening in their circuits?

Most superintendents preached around the circuit, and visited coffee mornings, fellowship meetings, concerts, flower festivals, and social care or youth projects:

If you are doing something specific, he will support it. [C]

Everybody knows [her. She] goes to coffee mornings. [C]

Spectacular at networking! I don't know how he copes, because he remembers the people as well. [M]

One superintendent had a monthly 'circuit meal' at home, inviting church and non-church people from each community covered by the circuit, which allowed informal conversation about the churches.

Specific invitations were offered for 'vision meetings' – a Chair spoke of the superintendents'

being able to share some of the vision within the wider circuit that the local minister might not be able to do or might not know

– and for development or property schemes, often offering advice on procedure.

One new superintendent was deliberately attending all the church councils once – 'I don't stay there for the whole thing – I just show my face'.

Superintendents attended church councils outside their Section for four specific reasons: supervision of a probationer (though 50% attended the probationer's first Church Council only); support of a deacon who was 'the' local minister; assisting in a crisis; and where specifically invited.

Crises included church closure (one superintendent attended a closure service though not the Church Council that had voted for it) and visiting all the churches to explain a circuit staffing reduction. Usually superintendents only attended their own church councils and did not undertake formal visitation.

Two undertook annual ‘virtual’ visitation, by sitting down with each member of staff to fill in the online ‘statistics for mission’ and undertaking *in vivo* analysis of their figures once a year.

It thus appears that superintendents are willing to be seen to be visitors to churches outside their own Section; to gather information and offer support ‘behind the scenes’; and to exercise power in other churches *when invited to do so*. Invitations are not common. Does this imply that superintendents’ personal oversight is not generally in evidence for local churches?

### **3.3.2.2 Providing for worship**

Providing for worship was the most public face of the superintendent’s role: only two interviewees (2C) did *not* mention the making of the preaching Plan as a major way that superintendents provided for worship.

Half the superintendents made the Plan collaboratively with a colleague; 25% made it alone; 25% ‘delegated’ the task to colleagues, always with ‘the right of amendment’. Two used software for plan-making, but colleagues and stewards criticised the ‘erratic’ outcome. While most were efficient at this task, two were criticised for incompetence – with ‘nightmarish’ double-booked churches or preachers, planning preachers for non-existent services, or planning them too often at some churches and never at others. One colleague had ‘lost confidence’ in the superintendent as a Plan-maker due to the number of mistakes.

All superintendents sought to preach around their circuits more than did their colleagues. In the larger circuits, churches would see their superintendents once a year. However, all superintendents prioritised their own Section over circuit-wide preaching to seek ‘the huge value of continuity’[S] and 36% of superintendents rarely or never preached outside their own Section on a Sunday morning, making it impossible to visit some other congregations to lead their worship.

All superintendents gave ministers initial freedom (with occasional adjustment) to plan their Section’s Holy Communion (and baptism) services, and their own pattern of preaching: ministers were planned mainly – in one circuit entirely – in

their own Sections. Their ability to preach in other churches was limited by the spaces left for them by colleagues. Most superintendents presided at Holy Communion only within their own Section.

A minority of circuits (three) used teams of preachers preaching in thematic series. All superintendents provided lectionaries as a guide, not a rule. Some churches (and LP meetings) resisted superintendents who wanted to innovate with worship provision: 'It's probably about keeping people happy.' [M]

Superintendents oversaw doctrinal preaching by awaiting complaints: 'you can only provide for the content of worship in the services that you take' [M]. They rarely heard other preachers, which raises questions about how they can help maintain the quality of worship.

A superintendent said

I do, from time to time, remind people that they are my eyes and ears in worship, and if they have problems they should come back to me.

I note two further practices which seem to be influenced by the quality of preachers:

- All circuits used LPs as a secondary source of preachers, to fill the 'gaps' after planning the ministers.
- Some churches operated 'local' plans, leaving no space for superintendents to plan other preachers, and therefore controlling who preached in their pulpit.

In accepting these practices, are superintendents also accepting that (a) congregations seem to prefer to see their (better-trained?) minister in the pulpit rather than a LP; and (b) some churches want the 'best' preachers? Both conclusions might imply that some preachers are not as 'desirable' to churches. And if so, what does that say about the superintendents' oversight of preachers? How are they maintaining the quality so that people look forward to preachers, rather than avoid them?

Most superintendents had initiated discussions about midweek worship (the Plan generally only shows Sundays) and much new midweek worship was offered –

particularly ‘Messy Church’ (Bible Reading Fellowship 2013) or circuit worship for ‘holy days’. To address a shortage of preachers, most superintendents were urging a reduction of Sunday services rather than recruiting preachers. Four superintendents personally encouraged the use of Worship Leaders, two with locally-written training courses in preference to a connexional course – which raises questions about their approach to connexionalism. Of all church offices, superintendents gave priority to support LPs and Worship Leaders.

Superintendents with Local Ecumenical Partnerships needed to work with the different timescales of other denominations. Plan-making was a challenge in churches that wanted to have the same preacher at every service, or where the minister did not wish to preach elsewhere in the circuit, or wanted weekly services of Holy Communion. On the positive side, URC churches benefited from being provided with preachers.

### **3.3.2.3 Training and Enabling**

Superintendents generally engaged in their own ongoing training at the District and connexional superintendents’ meetings. Several superintendents raised questions about the effectiveness of the connexional training course for superintendents, as Maunder also discovered (see section 1.6.3).

Almost all training of others undertaken by superintendents concerned probationers, LPs and Worship Leaders. Specific training was given for the ‘first’ time probationers undertook each task; it was noted that this could take up a great deal of superintendents’ time.

Superintendents were involved in enabling others’ ministries: discerning vocation, training, authorising and co-ordinating ministry. However, most effort was given to training for preaching and leading worship. LP tutors and mentors worked under the superintendent’s oversight. Two superintendents were LP tutors; another planned training days for preachers and worship leaders.

Beyond probationers, LPs and Worship Leaders, twelve (67%) interviewed superintendents had not themselves actively carried out any training of others, but a



few superintendents had variously developed a learning and development policy; introduced grants for courses; invited external trainers; mentored interns; invited staff to share papers at staff away-days; and organised training for specific ministries: for small-group leadership, church stewards, treasurers, property secretaries, and pastoral or bereavement visitors.

Some superintendents also exerted influence to advocate the employment of youth workers or family workers; conversely, time had had to be given to those facing redundancy as funding streams ended. Most superintendents (64%) encouraged evangelistic ministry in some way – employing lay evangelists; allocating funds; encouraging new congregations (cell churches, ‘Messy Church’), open-air services, evangelistic concerts, leaflet distribution, prayer-visitation, youth holidays, an arts project, or national initiatives (Handwritten Bible, sports events, ‘Back to Church’ Sunday, ‘Mission-Shaped Ministry’). Just four colleagues (31%) said they had seen no encouragement in evangelism from any superintendent.

One superintendent offered himself as ‘circuit evangelism enabler’. One ‘just breathes!’[M] to encourage evangelism; another would ‘beat people over the head with it’[M]; another laughed when asked what evangelism he engaged in.

Five (33%) superintendents encouraged action to serve the community: community audit training, part-time chaplaincies; or social care and world mission projects.

Most superintendents enabled theological discussions as *church ministers* in their own Section; *Circuit Meetings* and *LP Meetings* had little theological discussion or training input. Some superintendents used the *LP Meeting* *occasionally* for theological reflection, such as a session on forgiveness following a local mass-shooting. However, one *LP Meeting* voted in a superintendent’s absence to end the practice of his delivering theological addresses there, arguing that “We’re here for a business meeting”. Of the current superintendents, just three (20%) were seen to be encouraging theological thinking (one, creatively, based the *Circuit Weekend Away* on a film with a theological theme).

I found that just three (20%) superintendents interviewed mentioned a current theological book they were reading as an individual, rather than for a staff meeting (staff occasionally, though rarely, reflected together.) One mentioned his studies in the 1980s; another said he had read helpful books, but could not remember any titles. As one asked, ‘How can we help people to think theologically if we are not thinking theologically ourselves?’

#### **3.3.2.4 Overseeing discipline and good order**

When problems arose, it appeared that ‘the buck’ stopped with the superintendent. Superintendents had variously intervened due to: grant-making money sought without permission; an incompetent treasurer; a non-proactive minister; a minister absenting from duties; curtailment of a ministerial appointment due to breakdown in staff relations or undertaking a ‘secular’ job without permission; breach of Standing Orders; drunken or indebted LPs; sexual misconduct of an LP or minister; schism over adult baptism; and preaching against Methodist doctrines (there were two cases, one preaching against infant baptism, and another preaching Hindu syncretism). Conversations concerning LPs’ ministry generally only took place when specific problems arose, rather than about the ‘quality’ of their preaching (see 3.2.2.2 above).

Conflict avoidance was an issue: ‘Keep everybody happy!’[M]. It seemed to be rare for superintendents to intervene in local churches, perhaps for fear of making things worse.

Nine (20%) interviewees saw no evidence of the superintendent actively ensuring good order – this including failing to respond to problems. One superintendent

buries his head in the sand and hopes the problem will go away – or lets other people deal with it. [M]

On one occasion the stewards had finally had to contact the Chair themselves about problems with a minister because a superintendent had failed to do so. I found cases of power being withheld for the sake of love, but thereby denying justice. Another steward felt unsupported by the superintendent over a badly-handled re-

invitation. Some superintendents had acted without reference to the Standing Orders relating to complaints and discipline.

Maintaining good order included actively enabling colleagues to meet administrative deadlines [5S], though some superintendents were themselves ‘a bit disorganised’ [M].

Often the superintendent only entered a local church situation as a last resort when there was a problem – particularly with the local minister. However, influence could be exerted where

Behind the scenes I might have a conversation. [S]

Three superintendents had supported colleagues against local bullies. Only one superintendent was cited as intervening unhelpfully, worsening the situation.

However, another superintendent had himself been a ‘dictator’[C, M]; by the end of his first year, all four circuit stewards had resigned and the Chair asked the Conference to station him elsewhere. Three interviewees [1S, 2C] spoke of the benefits of itinerancy in moving a colleague away: ‘problem dealt with’.

In the one case of a ministerial resignation I found, the superintendent was involved as a pastoral supporter to the minister.

### **3.3.2.5 Pastoral care of the staff**

Around one-third of interviewees (of all types) mentioned pastoring the staff as a function of superintendency (Table 3.1). Some superintendents took staff to lunch or were available for advice, along with regular texting or telephone calls and the sending of cards and flowers, and ensuring stewards dealt with manse problems. Though one in five superintendents were not cited as undertaking any visiting, eight superintendents (42%) actively sought to give each staff member one-to-one sessions, though only three (16%), *in smaller circuits*, were *systematic* in their care. Seven superintendents (37%) were cited as good at *crisis*-visiting. Support was also given by superintendents who checked that rest was being taken: one colleague’s superintendent telephoned him on his rest day in order to reprimand him if he

answered. Most superintendents treated lay employees in the same way as ministers; two superintendents expected others to care for lay employees.

Two superintendents facilitated *collegial* pastoral care in the staff meeting and therefore colleagues were expected by some to prioritise this meeting in its entirety. This was burdensome for colleagues working in two circuits, neither of whose superintendents had thought about their requiring attendance at every meeting. Similarly, superintendents did not always remember external commitments of ecumenical colleagues who were serving the circuit. Conversely, one superintendent in a small circuit called meetings so infrequently that a colleague felt ‘quite abandoned and isolated’.

The staff meeting had sometimes been a source of pastoral care but was not always a safe space:

I tried sharing in one meeting, and it didn’t work. I don’t know anything about anybody. We’ve never shared our ‘journeys’ or anything – there’s just never been an opportunity. [C]

Outside the staff meeting, one superintendent had introduced a staff rambling group which successfully aided relationships. But in a circuit of two unmarried ministers, social events had been tried but were ‘quite formal’.

Bad pastoral care was cited when superintendents had assumed that everything was alright without asking staff how things were. One expressed concern for a colleague but acknowledged that he had not visited her. A housebound colleague on long-term sickness noted that she had not been offered Holy Communion. One colleague had not had a pastoral conversation with the superintendent in three years. Another, visiting a family member in intensive care for a year, was told, ‘Hopefully you won’t need compassionate leave’. One superintendent inappropriately raised a complaint against a colleague when they were both attending a public gathering. Three superintendents had bullied members of staff.

There were tensions when a superintendent was blamed by a colleague for problems in the circuit:

I used to visit [him] but it took a lot of courage. [S]

Other difficulties occurred when asking colleagues to cover for sickness. [4S]

Some superintendents undertook a single annual visit to supernumeraries\* in order to deliver their *Minutes* to them. Deacons, lay employees, and non-circuit ministers appreciated superintendents remembering their particular needs as this did not always happen.

Two superintendents cared for staff families only if they happened to meet them (though one superintendent had failed to recognise a colleague's spouse.) There had been no pastoral response from the superintendent to severe problems with a colleague's teenager. Some superintendents had never visited staff or their families, nor invited any to their home.

But another bought birthday and Christmas gifts from the circuit for staff children. Two organised social events for staff families.

Two colleagues had experienced a number of superintendents:

Superintendents can have a good effect on ministers and can really help and enable work to develop. Sometimes they can also have a bit of a detrimental effect as well. Good superintendents can be inspiring mentors to ministers who are learning and growing and developing.

All are managers, but some are also pastors – [I'm talking] more a pastoral heart, than the job of a pastor.

Thus superintendents varied in terms of their care for colleagues, but most care was reactive, and not systematic.

Two Chairs denied that they themselves had any pastoral responsibility for a minister's family; yet superintendents cannot pastor their own families. Where staff members were *married* to the superintendent, there was no local 'system' of caring for them. Another Chair acknowledged inconsistency:

We provide ministers with an appalling example of pastoral care of them, and then expect them to be outstanding examples of care for other people.

### **3.3.2.6 Summary of Specific Tasks**

Superintendents are expected most importantly to develop circuit policy, care for staff and encourage evangelism. Superintendents have greater agreement with their stewards than with their colleagues on the importance of their tasks. Visitation of the churches is least expected, especially by colleagues. In practice, superintendents prioritise staff care and then circuit policy (3.3.2)

Superintendents undertook informal visitation and so represented the wider circuit to the local churches, helped them to see the circuit's presence, and enabled themselves to know, and be known by, the circuit, and to support the local minister (and intervene) where necessary. Invitations are not common and formal visitation is apparently non-existent. Does this imply that superintendents' personal oversight is not generally in evidence for local churches? (3.3.2.1)

Superintendents oversaw the making of the preaching Plan, consulting with their colleagues (who had freedom to plan themselves) and generally aiming to themselves preach (but not preside at Holy Communion) in all the circuit churches regularly where the needs of their own Section and of their colleagues did not take priority. The preferences of churches and preachers generally over-rode any centralised provision. Problems with the lack of supply of preachers were generally resolved by dealing with the demand for preachers on a Sunday, rather than recruitment: this included encouraging the introduction of non-Sunday services. Innovation with Sunday worship was sometimes resisted. Superintendents found it easier to encourage the recruitment of Worship Leaders than LPs. I have raised questions about the use and quality of LPs (and hence questions about the superintendents' oversight of preachers), and the balance of local- versus circuit-planning of preachers. Oversight of preachers is difficult if superintendents never hear them preach. (3.3.2.2)

Generally, superintendents themselves attended connexional and District superintendents' meetings in order to receive support and training. Superintendents ensured that training occurred for probationers, LPs and Worship Leaders; training for other roles in the church was carried out by one in three superintendents, mainly

concerning mission and outreach. Some superintendents were proactive in advocating the employment of evangelistic workers, and most superintendents enabled evangelism across the circuit in some way. Superintendents did not generally engage in helping the *circuit* to think theologically and, indeed, few were developing themselves in this area (3.3.2.3)

Superintendents generally oversaw discipline and good order in circuits, though some tried to avoid difficult situations, and when they did act did not always please all parties with their actions, or act wisely. Oversight of doctrine, good order and discipline was generally reactive. It was rare though not unknown for the superintendent themselves to be the cause of problems. (3.3.2.4)

A large minority of superintendents *sought* to give one-to-one pastoral care to their staff, but most did not generally personally undertake systematic pastoral care for their colleagues and colleague's families. Others' care was reactive, being offered in response to particular problems, and, when offered, was usually appreciated, but not always helpful. One in five superintendents was cited as not undertaking any visiting. The staff meeting was not generally used as a place for mutual care (3.3.2.5).

### **3.3.3 Maintaining Connexion**

I consider two facets of connexionalism: that which connects the circuit to wider Methodism, and that which connects its constituent churches to one another.

#### **3.3.3.1 External Connexion**

Table 3.1 shows that half the stewards – though only one-quarter of superintendents and fewer colleagues – mentioned that they expected the superintendent to represent the wider connexion (see section 3.3.1.1). I asked superintendents how they learned of the Conference's decisions (Table 3.16).

Table 3.16: Utilised Sources of Connexional Information

Source of Information	Number of supts. citing source 100% (18)
The General Secretary's Report 2011	37% (7)
Connexional website	26% (5)
Synod	26% (5)
Read the <i>Methodist Recorder</i>	21% (4)
Information from Superintendents' Meetings	16% (3)
Read the Conference <i>Agenda</i>	11% (2)
Read the <i>Minutes</i> of the Conference	11% (2)
Information from Chair or District Officers	11% (2)
Social networking chat-rooms	11% (2)
Watched the Conference on the Internet	5% (1)
Methodist News Service	5% (1)
<i>Over to You</i> (a summary encouraging local discussion of Conference statements) had been helpful	5% (1)

The biggest source of input from the Connexion was the 2011 General Secretary's Report (Atkins 2011), cited by 37% of the superintendents. This report had had a much higher profile than in previous years, and the Conference had specifically asked for it to be discussed in every circuit, hence its prominence in this answer. One superintendent admitted that, though using themes from the report, he had never actually read it, relying on others' summaries:



I'm aware that a lot of people are pushing it, which makes me think, "Actually this must be a really good report." I'm pushing it, and saying how important and dynamic and radical it is compared to previous years. [S]

(This was itself evidence of the normative influence of other superintendents' practice.)

A Chair commented on Circuit Meetings he had attended:

Some proceed as though Conference and District don't exist, and others actually have a presentation on the decisions of Conference, and on what the Synod has decided: "Now what are we going to do in response?"

One in five superintendents read the *Methodist Recorder*, which is a newspaper independent of the connexion (and therefore subject to the vagaries of editorial control):

The difficulty is that I don't think the Connexion's very good at communicating [policies] to superintendents. They assume still that everybody reads the *Methodist Recorder*. [S]

The weekly Methodist News Service was used sparingly – deleted, rarely forwarded; one superintendent filed its emails into a folder – unread.

I noted the practice of 22 superintendents concerning the discussion of connexional policies with colleagues and stewards: 8 of them (36%) paid no or little attention to the decisions of the Conference:

Being entirely reactive, and then only when necessary. [S]

You'd get the report and then you'd work out what the hell you'd do with it, really. It was a reactionary rather than a proactive response. [M]

Another superintendent used reports to stimulate theological discussion in the staff meeting. Three superintendents had specifically worked through *Our Calling* (MCGB 2000b) in their circuits. One superintendent cited problems with the Conference statement on Freemasons (MCGB 1985) when he had a church which was 'packed with them'. In an ecumenical area, denominational statements of the Conference or URC General Assembly were deemed of limited applicability and therefore non-prescriptive.

One superintendent used the internet to keep himself

fairly well-briefed on Methodist Council papers and stuff that's coming up to Conference. [S]

Two superintendents commented that they used Conference information themselves, though they did not discuss it with colleagues. One superintendent distributed the annual *CPD* to his colleagues ten months after its publication: perhaps this timescale is indicative of its importance to him. It seemed that most 'muddled through'. Only four of them cited *CPD* as an influence on their superintendency. Several superintendents told me of instances where they actively ignored Standing Orders.

However, one superintendent said he 'never' filtered connexional information, and passed it all on to his circuit.

The key role of the Superintendents' Meeting as a conduit of information is therefore highlighted. When he or she understood connexional thinking well, the superintendent was able to be effective as the focus for connexionalism in the circuit.

Interviewees spoke of the challenge of connexionalism in particular isolating circumstances. *Geographical* challenges from remote islands and large circuits with inordinate travelling-time required special care for staff. *Language differences* also isolated congregations and ministers from superintendents. *Single-station* superintendencies (i.e. sole minister) were similarly isolating.

*Mapping a Way Forward* (Deeks 2006), a paper focusing on reorganisation, had been discussed by every superintendent, even in circuits where no amalgamations had happened. Two circuits were considering entering into a partnership. Concerning amalgamation, one experienced steward said:

I know too little about our adjoining circuits to be able to comment [C].

Nevertheless, superintendents ensured that governance decisions were made by the relevant bodies (they chaired most meetings within the circuit). Some continued to use the recommended meeting agendas which were formerly printed in *CPD*, despite these being removed after 1996 so that the connexion was no longer

micromanaging local agenda items. Superintendents made statistical returns and completed other reports and schedules – for stationing of ministers, reporting on probationers, and for finance and property. Superintendents had advised on stationing ministers; appointing, managing and appraising staff; charitable status; and on building projects. They oversaw Safeguarding and had been asked for consent for the use of Methodist premises for non-Methodist worship. They ensured sabbaticals and appraisals occurred.

### 3.3.3.2 Connecting the Circuit

Most superintendents attempted to keep the circuit connected by communicating with local churches. Table 3.17 shows methods used.

*Table 3.17 Communication Methods*

<b>Method</b>	<b>Number of circuits</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Local church magazines	10	67%
Superintendent personally	7	47%
Email network	6	40%
Administrator	6	40%
Printed newsletter	5	33%
Meetings	4	27%
Circuit plan/directory	4	27%
Website	4	27%
Facebook	1	7%

The superintendent's preaching around the circuit also enabled communication. Interviewees identified poor communication in eight (53%) circuits. Newsletters were left unread on vestry tables or at the back of churches; one had 'withered on the

vine'. One superintendent exercised veto rights on every article for the circuit magazine.

One circuit 'very sensibly accepted' the superintendent's lack of communication skills 'as a weakness amongst lots of strengths' and so employed a PA to assist him. 'That does help with communication, tremendously', noted his steward.

One superintendent set up a circuit website which failed on his departure from the circuit. In two circuits, volunteers had set up the websites without consultation: 'it looks amateur, and I'm not entirely happy with it'[S].

Superintendents usually relied on Circuit Meeting representatives to relay information, but even in small circuits, 'word-of-mouth is as faulty as it's useful'; 'like Chinese whispers' [2S].

You've got the same people who've gone there for so long because they're from small churches and there's nobody else who wants to be a rep. There's very few things got them animated [C]

Geography affected communication:

The blessing of this circuit is that it's small. [S]

It's got more difficult with a larger circuit. [S]

A colleague who worked in two circuits felt 'closer' to the staff in the circuit where he lived.

Two-person teams had particular difficulties. Two-minister circuits had irregular staff meetings because if one could not attend no meeting happened. In a Team Superintendency, both superintendents had learned by experience that communication had to be worked at:

We're getting liaison sorted out, but we do work in very different ways. [S]

It thus appears that intra-circuit connexionalism is also a problem. Considering also the Sectionalised ways of working and worship provision (3.2.2.2 above) this indicates that local ministers are not working or thinking circuit-wide outside of the circuit-level meetings they are required to attend. Twenty years prior to this study,

each minister had a ‘circuit portfolio’ such as ‘Youth’ or ‘Ministries’: no circuits in my study now adopted a portfolio approach, leaving the superintendent alone to have a circuit-wide role.

One superintendent wanted

to encourage the circuit-mindedness of the staff: the circuit has had a very parochial structure to it, in that most of the staff almost worked as “vicars in their own Section”.

I was surprised by the lack of connexionalism expressed by the data.

### **3.3.3.3 Summary of Maintaining Connexion**

Two-thirds of superintendents used a variety of means of finding out about the wider connexion and the decisions of the Conference, though no single method prevailed, and the use of such information varied. Some passed information on to their colleagues and stewards. Most superintendents passed on required information from the circuit to the connexion. Some circumstances – for example, geography – diminished connexionalism.

Superintendents found it difficult to maintain intra-circuit connexionalism and communication within all but the smallest circuits. People, including ministers *and superintendents*, seemed to prefer working at the local church and Section level rather than the circuit level. Of all the ministers, only the superintendent generally has a circuit-wide role.

### **3.3.4 Governance and Management**

When acting in the administrative role of *episkopé*, superintendents undertook tasks related to governance and management. Administration was mentioned by 17 people [6S,4M,7C]. ‘It’s not an authority role: it’s more of an administrative, organisational role’ which is ‘pretty wide-ranging’ [4S; 1M].

One steward recognised his circuit’s failure to provide professional

administrative support ‘at the moment’; just under 50% of the superintendents had no administrative help – one acting as the circuit property steward.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.3.4.1 Monitoring the circuit

Superintendents were cited as using several methods of monitoring the circuit (Table 3.18).

*Table 3.18 Methods cited as being used by the superintendent to monitor the circuit*

	Superintendents	Colleagues	Stewards
Staff meetings	11 (79%)	0	6 (43%)
Problems occurring	7 (50%)	2 (14%)	2 (14%)
Statistical returns	7 (50%)	2 (14%)	0
Listening to people	6 (43%)	1 (7%)	0
Visiting churches	5 (36%)	2 (14%)	1 (7%)
Monitoring staff	4 (29%)	0	0
Written reports	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	1 (7%)
Circuit reviews	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	0
Watching people	2 (14%)	0	0

Five superintendents (36%) were not seen by colleagues or stewards to monitor and assess their circuits in any way.

Although six stewards (46%) said that *staff meetings* monitored the circuit, *none* of the colleagues claimed that this happened in those meetings; the stewards themselves had no direct evidence for their statements, as they do not attend staff meetings. Stewards also cited *no evidence* of the superintendent monitoring via ‘listening to people’; as there is a circuit steward on each church council, stewards share with the local minister in the circuit’s *episkopé* offered over local churches, and it is the circuit stewards who thus represent the circuit at church councils.<sup>87</sup> Superintendents did not actively seek feedback from the circuit stewards who had

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<sup>86</sup> Maunder (2012) found a similar case in the District he surveyed.

<sup>87</sup> Baker (1965:240) notes the origin of this task of ‘general’ (i.e. circuit) stewards.

attended church councils. Taken together, these figures perhaps indicate on the one hand how little the stewards feel involved in the management or monitoring of the circuit (no one cited the CLT as the place of monitoring), and on the other hand how little their experience of visiting church councils appears to be used in CLT meetings by their being invited to offer feedback. The information flow is thus likely only to be from the superintendent to the local church. Statistical returns were made by every superintendent, but stewards were apparently unaware of this.

In three circuits, superintendents instituted circuit reviews though they did not themselves visit local churches.

Eleven people (24%) said that often assessment only happened after complaints or failures. I note that 'Problems occurring' is not a method of monitoring but a response to information received from unspecified sources. Thus it can be inferred that such monitoring is merely reactive. Although superintendents claimed most of the monitoring happened at staff meetings, none of the colleagues mentioned that they had seen this happening. Superintendents monitored circuits by informally 'listening to people', along with 'visiting churches'.

One superintendent actively sought corroboratory evidence:

Where colleagues claim that great things are happening then I check the statistics to see if that bears that out, and it doesn't in every case! [S]

Another built in annual or six-monthly systems of review in order to assess policies 'where we've involved major changes in circuit patterns' or new projects. Another colleague said her superintendent used meeting agendas to 'make sure that we were talking about where we were going'. However one colleague spoke of the difficulties of measurement when evaluating circuit projects.

But most superintendents did not ensure actions agreed at one Circuit Meeting had been carried out before the next meeting's 'Matters Arising' revealed inaction. Most did not set time-specific goals, or set such 'impossible or vague goals' that could not be assessed. A Chair commented,

Some Supers don't believe they've done anything, and they've had a huge impact; some believe that they have changed the world, and no-one would be aware of it at all.

Four superintendents specifically monitored their staff – to ensure they were not overworking, were taking their days off and holidays, and that they were monitoring their own development. All superintendents oversaw the circuit's finances by signing off the accounts – perhaps this is indicative of the practice of the District Synod publicly announcing those finances that had not been signed off, a practice known among superintendents as 'being named and shamed'.

#### **3.3.4.2 Strategic Management**

I requested a description of the superintendent's approach to strategy under both the management and the leadership questions, in order to elicit whether the answer differed by question context. It did not; indeed it was difficult to find examples of strategy implementation. One colleague complained that despite the superintendent's input in the CLT, 'nothing ever changes'.

Strategic management had however occurred during circuit amalgamations, where the need to determine policies was thereby identified.

The superintendent played a very key role. [C]

One superintendent had inspired his circuit to increase staffing, after commissioning and acting on a report of the DDE, and seeing the proposals through to fruition. Most 'strategic' thinking was actually a response to decline or unexpected events, and was therefore reactive.

Of interviewees who answered the question about the locus of executive management, most identified it as the CLT (Table 3.19).



*Table 3.19 Locus of Executive Management*

	Supts	Colleagues	Stewards	Chairs	Total
CLT	9 (90%)	1 (25%)	7 (64%)		17 (65%)
Staff Mtg		1 (25%)			1 (4%)
Supt	1 (10%)	1 (25%)	1 (9%)	1 (100%)	4 (15%)
Stewards			3 (27%)		3 (12%)
None		1 (25%)			1 (4%)
Total	10 (100%)	4 (100%)	11 (100%)	1 (100%)	26 (100%)

However, I found that in over half the circuits, meetings of either staff or stewards were making some decisions alone without consultation, and therefore these figures may be more espoused than operant.

Table 3.19 shows that very few superintendents tried to manage the circuit on their own: much is collegiate/conciliar. Superintendents managed meetings, people (appointing, training, resourcing, deploying, appraising), resources and communication.

Complaints by two colleagues described poor management practice:

He is the “king-pin”. He is the commanding officer and we are his minions. And no one looks forward to Staff Meetings. [C]

[One superintendent] used to phone us up every morning at 9 o’clock to check what we were doing. It didn’t matter if it was your day off or not. I was hopping mad after a while. [C]

A large minority (38%) of colleagues expressed dissatisfaction with superintendents’ management skills.

Resource management included introducing new staff management groups and working patterns, appointing administrators, implementing building schemes and seeking grants. Most (14 or 93%) superintendents scrutinised finances and the Circuit Assessment\*, and most (64%) actively argued for funding mission and evangelism projects.

Some interviewees spoke of the wise management of preaching resources, planning people in situations where they were best gifted and places which made geographical sense.

Poor resource management was exemplified by superintendents who failed to delegate, engaged in too much micromanagement, failed to appraise lay staff, or neglected contingency planning. Only one superintendent thought about the time he gave to superintendency. Two interviewees had never heard the superintendent speak about the use of resources. One superintendent was

Very much a pastoral person, not someone who talks about practicalities. There's been no lead to it. I think we're suffering from that point of view. [C]

### **3.3.4.3 Changes to superintendency**

I asked about changes in the past decade (Table 3.20). The small number of people offering each response prevents generalisation. I include the results in the 'management' section because it will be seen that the changes identified by the largest number of interviewees can be seen to refer to the functional, administrative tasks of superintendency as being more burdensome than they were.

Quicker 'promotion' concerns the following quotation:

The expectation years ago was that you wouldn't be a superintendent for twenty years,<sup>88</sup> and I went to [my first circuit] as a probationer, came out nine years later having been superintendent for three years – because of the age and experience I had. [S]

I was surprised at the small number of interviewees mentioning circuit size as a factor affecting superintendency in the past decade, especially as most (75%) circuits in the District had been involved in amalgamations or enlargement during this period. Perhaps this is due to superintendency continuing to operate in the same way, despite the increased circuit size. One steward described the effect sociologically rather than numerically:

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<sup>88</sup> Rigg (1887:232) also spoke of a twenty-year normative minimum.

Now circuits are so big, stretching over a massive wide range of different churches – whereas the smaller circuits tended to have churches of the same ilk. The superintendents now are in charge of a much wider variety of people, therefore making the job that bit more complicated. [C]

*Table 3.20 Perceived changes in superintendency in the past decade*

	Supts (18)	Colleagues (13)	Stewards (14)	Total (46)
Increased legislation	26% (5)		14% (2)	15% (7)
More administration	21% (4)		7% (1)	11% (5)
Larger circuits	5% (1)	15% (2)	14% (2)	11% (5)
Safeguarding	5% (1)		14% (2)	7% (3)
Professionalisation		8% (1)	14% (2)	7% (3)
Vision expected	5% (1)	8% (1)		4% (2)
More Conference initiatives	5% (1)			2% (1)
Diminished powers	5% (1)			2% (1)
Information overload	5% (1)			2% (1)
Quicker 'promotion'	5% (1)			2% (1)
Lack of collegiality	5% (1)			2% (1)
Expected to be accessible			7% (1)	2% (1)

#### **3.3.4.4 Summary of Management activities**

Most superintendents relied reactively on second-hand accounts to discover what was happening in their circuit; they did not themselves systematically and proactively monitor the circuit. They did not actively seek feedback from circuit stewards who had attended church councils on behalf of the circuit. (3.3.4.1)

Most superintendents acted administratively rather than strategically, and when strategic thinking did happen, it often took place in the staff meeting, and therefore excluded stewards from the discussion. Strategic thinking related generally to finances – more often as a result of a lack of them, though occasionally the superintendent’s advocacy of the creative use of existing funds. Contingency planning was neglected and the implementation of meeting decisions was poor.

(3.3.4.2)

The increase in circuit size in recent years does not appear to be a factor in the way that superintendency operates in the Newcastle District (3.3.4.3).

### **3.4 Normative Influences on Superintendents**

In my introductory chapter (1.7.1) I examined the two documents (*WIACS* and *CPD*) which set out what is deemed to be the normative model for the practice of superintendency. In the next chapter, I will look at the normative Methodist theology undergirding superintendency. But in this final section of my presentation of my data, I investigate what it is that superintendents *name* as their normative influences in terms of how they understand and practice superintendency. How *in practice* are they influenced by normative documents and expectations?

Cameron *et al.* (2010:54) identify the normative voice as ‘that which the practising group names as its theological authority – an authority which may even stand to correct, as well as inform, operant and espoused theologies’. Such authority, they note, may also include orthopraxy, ‘the traditions and practices recognized by the community over generations as being authentic to its gospel living’ (p.55). With respect to superintendency, what are the sources of normative orthopraxy?

I asked interviewees what influenced them in their thinking about superintendency (Table 3.21). For non-superintendents, the focus of this question was on how *superintendents* had influenced their thinking (Appendix 9, question 6) but they also took the opportunity to note what tools superintendents and they themselves had used.

Table 3.21: Perceived normative influences

Source of influences	Supts (19)	Colleagues (13)	Stewards (14)	Total (46)
Conference statements	79% (15)†	38% (5)	36% (5)	54% (25)
Other superintendents	79% (15)†	23% (3)		39% (18)
Pragmatic superintendency experience	42% (8)	8% (1)		20% (9)
Connexional thinking	26% (5)	8% (1)	14% (2)	17% (8)
WIACS	32% (6)	8% (1)		15% (7)
Superintendents' course	32% (6)			13% (6)
Superintendents' Meetings	32% (6)			13% (6)
Books	26% (5)	8% (1)		13% (6)
CPD	21% (4)			9% (4)
Other denominations' practice	21% (4)			9% (4)
Previous occupations	16% (3)			7% (3)
Bible / spiritual vocation	11% (2)	8% (1)		7% (3)
External training courses	11% (2)			4% (2)
Family members	11% (2)			4% (2)
The practical needs of the circuit	11% (2)			4% (2)
District Chair	5% (1)		7% (1)	4% (2)
Other circuits' practice	5% (1)			2% (1)
Synod	5% (1)			2% (1)
Practical theologians	5% (1)			2% (1)
Understanding of presbyteral role	5% (1)			2% (1)

†Note that specific questions were asked about these sources; therefore they are likely to rank higher in this table than responses not made to such 'leading questions'.

One superintendent said he could think of *nothing* that influenced his thinking about the way he understood, or acted in, superintendency. Such influences would, for him, be subliminal at the most; he thus certainly seemed to be unaware of the processes of socialisation within an organisation or community.

No interviewee mentioned any doctrinal statements of the Conference. I note the inconsistency between Tables 3.4 and 3.21 in which 79% of superintendents spoke

of the influence of Conference statements, yet only 11% said they normally read those statements in the *Agenda*. This would indicate the use of non-written sources of information, such as discussions at Synod or the Superintendents' Meeting, and perhaps written sources (such as the Connexional website, the *Methodist Recorder*) summarising Conference statements;<sup>89</sup> such activities would also be covered by the description 'Connexional thinking'. I note that this echoes Shier-Jones' (2005:64-65) comments on Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes* (Wesley 1976; 1988a) being deemed to be normative but in practice remaining unread. Only 15% of interviewees (mostly superintendents) had read *WIACS*; most stewards and colleagues had not heard of it.

Only 10 out of 27 colleagues and stewards (37%) had seen superintendents specifically refer to Conference statements in meetings, half the rate of superintendents who said that they personally had been influenced by Conference statements. However, note that I had specifically asked about Conference statements in the question to superintendents; it is thus more likely that Conference statements are less normative than the 79% figure would suggest, and perhaps the 11-15% and 37% figures referred to in the previous paragraph are better indicators of overtly-recognised normativity.

My data thus suggests that while written statements of the Conference are held to be normative, in practice superintendents do not generally read them. The formal documents of the Conference – the *Agenda* and *Minutes* – were little read (even though as a matter of practice every circuit minister receives a copy of the latter). This suggests that the force of their normativity may be diminished by lack of use, or that such normativity is transmitted in other ways than via the actual written document.

The description 'Connexional thinking' refers to statements demonstrating vague awareness of thinking happening in the wider connexion without the identification of

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<sup>89</sup> See the quotation in section 3.3.3.1 from the superintendent who was commending the General Secretary's Report (Atkins 2011) as being important whilst not having read it himself.

specific sources of that thinking. This could include information received, for example, at connexional and District superintendents' courses and meetings without the recollection of where that information had been received.

Other possibly normative sources of written material are books on church leadership and the practice of other Christian traditions, and formal theology. Such material, though non-Methodist, may assist reflective superintendents to amend their understanding and practice in ways in which they believe they are being faithful to God's call. But few superintendents found time to read books – one experienced superintendent said 'I don't think I've ever really felt the need'. Only two had read books on leadership: one volunteered that he had found my own Cockling (2012a) helpful. 'Ministers must be trained to lead churches, not as academic theologians.'[S]

Only three interviewees mentioned spiritual or Biblical influences on superintendency. Just two superintendents cited scripture: the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), 'living a life worthy of our calling' (Ephesians 4:17-32) and the washing of the disciples' feet (John 13). I would note that such texts might speak as much to the office of presbyter as to that of superintendent. One superintendent spoke about

trying to think about what leadership is, and the kind of superintendent that I could be, and so there's been an internal dialogue about what that might mean; part of a prayer life of trying to understand what God wants from me.

This suggests that scripture is not seen as normative for the understanding or practice of superintendency. Perhaps this might be different for other roles – for example, a deacon or bishop could read passages in scripture which speak of their office in the early church and make deductions about their role today. Such a simplistic approach is not possible for a superintendent, and, it could be argued, requires more skills in theological reflection.

I note also that only 21% of superintendents saw CPD as an influence on them in their thinking about superintendency. This may reflect that much of what CPD says about superintendency (see section 1.7.1.2) is scattered throughout Standing Orders and it is thus difficult to construct a coherent description of superintendency simply

by reading CPD. Most superintendents stated that they had a ‘working knowledge’ of *CPD*, but did not appear to know it well: most exhibited ignorance of its detailed provisions, including circuit constitutions. For example three quite experienced colleagues asserted that pastoral charge is still the prerogative of the superintendent.<sup>90</sup> Others thought the superintendent could still prevent the Chair from entering the circuit.<sup>91</sup>

I conclude that CPD is not used assiduously as a normative document to understand superintendency.

A third possible normative source, a synthesis of *WIACS* and *CPD*, is my own handbook for new superintendents, commissioned and published by the Discipleship & Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team and used in 2012 and 2013 for the training of new superintendents (Cockling 2012a). This includes practical advice on the implementation of Standing Orders and the expectations of *WIACS*, but it is too new to be yet tested for its normative status. The tasks of superintendency set out in Appendix 3 are, in effect, a written summary of expected norms.

However, I conclude that though statements of the Conference and connexional communications are presumed to be normative, I present here evidence that this is not necessarily the case in practice. Superintendents, pressured by workload, do not proactively read available information. Nor do they take time to resource themselves (*WIACS*§34).

What about orthopraxy? What is the normative influence of other superintendents? One superintendent said:

I’m not sure it has ever been deliberate, but certainly I have learned an awful lot from each of the superintendents that I’ve served with – for good, bad and indifferent.

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<sup>90</sup> This belief is expressly noted as erroneous in *WIACS*§§24, 25. See also footnote 21 [SO 425(2)]

<sup>91</sup> Until 2005, SO425(2) required the Chair to uphold the authority of the superintendent and to ‘strengthen the hand of the superintendent’, i.e. defer to the superintendent when in the circuit.



Others said:

I've seen the autocrat, the collaborative minister, the gentle and unassuming. I've looked at some Supers and thought "I'm not going to be like that" and there are others from whom I learned a lot of how to do what I do now, but I also learned a lot of how I couldn't do it.

My first superintendent was like a father to me: it was a wonderful start. The Super that succeeded him after a couple of years – we just didn't hit it off. I just thought that his *raison d'être* was odd. He would be surprised what I learned from him.

My first two superintendents had never used quarter-days\* and didn't know what they were for, and didn't encourage me to have them. And it wasn't until I had my first sabbatical [after ten years' service] when I suddenly realised that I really ought to be having them, and how useful they were. The first part of *CPD* I now show probationers to is the holiday page – it wasn't done to me – it's something I've had to realise for myself.

Other superintendents were condemned for garrulousness, egocentricity, avarice and incompetence.

In looking for role models in superintendency, one female superintendent automatically assumed that she needed mentoring by another woman. The women superintendents in the District would go out for meals together 'and shared issues or things that might be concerning us.'

One problem with relying on others' behaviour was highlighted by the superintendent who (I would argue erroneously and arrogantly) felt he did not need training to supervise others:

I can probably do supervision reasonably well anyway having received quite a bit of supervision myself. [S]

Another had never thought of having one-to-one conversations with members of staff because he had never experienced that himself.

My data suggests that superintendents are influenced by others' practice, but there is no normative influence on a theology of superintendency.

The non-mandatory superintendents' training course had been used by 13 (68%) of the superintendents (11 attended once, 2 twice). One complained that it was too

functional, another that it was too retreat-like. One colleague noted that waiting until appointment to train for superintendency is too late.

It allows you access to some of the great and the good in Methodism that you don't normally get a chance to have a conversation with or to hear. And quite simply, I've found it useful as a rest. I can't stick silent retreats. But you can deal with some theological things or you can have a pint with a group of superintendents.

The mandatory training course in *supervision* was mentioned by one superintendent as a source of change for the better in his practice.

Though only 26% found the Superintendents' Meetings in the District helpful, the meetings showcased varied practices of superintendency: 'I respect the way that he comes at it, but it's not the way I understand it'. Interestingly, no superintendents reported sharing resources or officers with neighbouring circuits.

Having presented a thick description of my data in this chapter, I now turn to speak explicitly about what it reveals theologically.

## Chapter 4 Towards a Theology of Superintendency

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### 4.1 Introduction

I turn now explicitly to the formal voice in the Four Voices framework. In so doing, I aim to answer my fourth research question (section 1.1): ‘How do my findings affect MCGB’s polity and theology of oversight? What implications are there for the future practice of superintendency?’

In presenting my theological reflections, I do so acknowledging that my framework and imagination for spiritual reflection and the theological dialect in which I speak is a product of my own theological and ecclesiological journey – what Pattison (2000b:139) notes as my ‘own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions’ in dialogue with my familiarity with Christian tradition – with many influences along the way.<sup>92</sup> Using this personal contextual theology, I present my theological reflections on the situation of Methodist superintendency. These reflections incorporate the final data which helps to me to answer how the role of the superintendent minister is understood – the normative theological voice of MCGB.

### 4.2 Interpreting the Data

In the previous chapter I set out how the superintendent’s role is understood and practised in Methodist circuits. I now turn to my second research question: ‘How coherent is the superintendent’s role with the traditions of the Methodists and the church in general?’ What is *affirmed* between normative and espoused expectations of superintendents and how superintendency actually operates? Conversely, where

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<sup>92</sup> See my autobiographical notes in section 1.8.2.

are the *tensions* between the espoused, operant and normative perspectives, and, indeed, between the espoused voices of the different types of participant?

This interpretative task includes identifying the ‘gaps’ or ‘fractures’ between the espoused and operant theologies (Cameron *et al.* 2010:104; Watkins and Cameron 2012:72). Nevertheless, I seek *inductively* to ask what *operant theology* is revealed by the data (Cameron *et al.* 2010:98-99). What is the theology superintendents are working out in practice? I seek to examine the *theological* theories and assumptions which apparently underlie current practice as no practice is value-free (Swinton and Mowat 2006:20,25-27; Ballard and Pritchard 2006:54).

Here I allow the ‘voices’ to speak in conversation using two inter-related categories which have arisen from the data via grounded theory. It will be seen that because of this approach, as I consider each category I do not at first use formal theological terms, so that I do not impose words and concepts that have not been used by the interviewees.<sup>93</sup> Hence I speak of different ‘perspectives’ as opposed to ‘theological voices’. Nevertheless, the concepts I explore are ‘theological all the way through’, as will be seen when I turn to the use of formal theological terms. Only after examining the affirmations and tensions between the perspectives do I then use formal theological language. As I present the espoused and operant perspectives, I integrate and re-present data which is set out in Chapter 3 before introducing new normative material into the conversation.

In using this framework I seek to avoid that mutual critical correlation which might be deemed to place contemporary experience at odds with tradition. The two cannot be separated in the church *in via*, as practices are ‘bearers of tradition’ (Swinton and Mowat 2006:20).

The two categories I use to reflect on the data are ‘personal leadership’ (4.2.1) and ‘representative oversight’ (4.2.2).

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<sup>93</sup> Here I adapt the ARCS method in that, unlike that method, I do not try to make the theology explicit until the normative theological voice enters the conversation.

## **4.2.1 Personal Leadership**

What do people believe about the leadership of superintendents? What is the theological meaning of the way it is exercised? What ought to be happening if superintendents' leadership is to be true to MCGB's normative intentions? And how might the church respond pragmatically or theologically to gaps and tensions between these views?

### **4.2.1.1 Espoused Perspective**

People expect the superintendent to be a collaborative team-leader and to oversee and manage the circuit on behalf of the wider connexion of MCGB. They expect this personal leadership to be exercised as part of the general leadership structures of the church. Superintendents, colleagues and stewards all view the most important task of superintendents as seeking vision and developing policies to enact that vision (3.2.1.1, Table 3.14). Superintendents have greater agreement with their stewards than with their colleagues on the relative importance of their various tasks (3.3.2). There is no general understanding of any operant or espoused theology of superintendents' being 'called by God' into superintendency, or sent to help circuits to fulfil their God-given mission.

People are more likely to talk about their expectations of the superintendent's tasks involved in their leadership role, rather than the tasks relating to management and governance (3.2.1) – though superintendents and circuit staff more than stewards seem to highlight the leadership role (Table 3.1). People expect superintendents to model good practice; enable others' gifts; exercise 'people skills' (such as caring for circuit officers); and manage conflict (3.2.1.1). They do not expect their superintendent to lead in an autocratic way, but expect collaboration (3.2.1.2): they expect the superintendent to maintain unity in direction but their acceptance of the superintendent's authority is subject to their agreement with the direction in which the superintendent is leading the circuit (3.2.2.5). Circuit officers are volunteers, and are prepared to withdraw support if they cannot agree with decisions (3.2.1.2). They particularly prefer gradual to sudden change (3.2.2.5). Staff members, too, do not

accept the superintendent's authority in an unqualified way, and are prepared to express disagreement (3.2.3.1). So the superintendent's personal authority is expected to be about 'influence' rather than 'power' (3.2.1.2). Indeed, there is a lack of clarity over who has 'ultimate' authority over the circuit, with some evidence of a difference of understanding between stewards and superintendents, a large minority of stewards believing themselves to be supervisors of the superintendent (3.2.1.2).

#### **4.2.1.2 Operant Perspective**

In practice, superintendents generally exercise some sort of leadership of the circuit. Leadership styles vary, but many superintendents work collaboratively to manage and maintain the work of the circuit, with the emphasis being on managing existing local circuit policies and undertaking routine business rather than generally seeking to do anything radically new (3.3.1.1, 3.3.1.2, Table 3.11). Perhaps one in four superintendents fails to work collaboratively and is too authoritarian (Table 3.11).

The task of monitoring and overseeing the circuit is generally reactive rather than proactive. A large minority of superintendents similarly approach circuit policies passively, only reacting when circumstances change and decisions have to be made in the light of that change (3.3.1.2, 3.3.4.1). There are few examples of strategy implementation beyond that required by circuit amalgamations or the impact of environmental change (3.3.4.2). Those superintendents who are proactive with respect to the development of policies do so to allow the circuit to work in a better way by encouraging the quest for new vision. Where superintendents personally do not feel gifted to lead any vision-seeking in the circuit, some enable others with appropriate gifts to take the lead in this (3.3.1). Some superintendents delegate aspects of their work to others, such as making the Plan, or chairing meetings (Table 3.11). Yet where superintendents work entirely collaboratively, they are sometimes criticised for failing to offer personal leadership (3.2.1.1).

#### 4.2.1.3 Normative Perspective

Nowhere in Standing Orders is the superintendent defined as the ‘leader’ of the circuit.<sup>94</sup> *WIACS*§18 notes that a superintendent takes the lead in (a) the circuit staff which *as a group* is the primary place of leadership for the circuit; (b) the Circuit Leadership Team which *as a group* exercises leadership in a context of executive management; and (c) the Circuit Meeting which *as a group* exercises governance (my italics).

The bulleted list below is directly quoted from that part of *TNOO* (§1.13) which is cited as a normative definition of leadership in *WIACS*§18. Leadership is defined as:

- inspiring people to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision, and empowering them to share their ideas and act upon them
- articulating and considering the content of that developing vision
- initiating action and encouraging people to follow
- providing examples of taking risks, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and a commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the action to be undertaken
- providing models of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.
- In the context of the Church, these expressions of leadership are always related to the Word, rooted in the sacraments and undergirded with prayer.

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<sup>94</sup> The closest place that this happens is in SO 512(2), relating to Ecumenical Areas, in which it is recognised that the ‘Lead Minister’, where a Methodist, should be the superintendent. Indeed, where the Lead Minister is not a Methodist, then he or she cannot be superintendent – this thereby prioritises governance and accountability over leadership. For similar reasons a non-Methodist authorised to serve MCGB as a presbyter may not be appointed superintendent and must act under the direction of a superintendent. (SO 733(7))

Thus normative leadership is described as inspirational and participatory (i.e. collaborative) in a process of developing a vision, initiating action, and encouraging people to own and follow the decisions of the group. It is a leadership which makes the *group* aware of the ramifications of certain choices and asks the *group* to accept responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions. An individual who leads this act of leadership only has the power to act if they receive authority to do so, and that authority is accepted by those whom they lead. Such acceptance is predicated on a leader's power being exercised in a just and loving way, and in accordance with the calling of the church to root its practices in word, sacrament and spirituality.

Perhaps the avoidance of any description of the superintendent as 'the' leader of the circuit results partly from a long period of schism due to past excessive autocracy – particularly in the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4.2.1.4 Affirmations and Tensions

The **espoused, operant and normative perspectives affirm one another** in that they expect to see, and do see, superintendents exercising leadership in a collaborative and participatory way and seeking to model good practice (though there are tensions in the practice of the minority of superintendents who do not work collaboratively). The superintendent chairs the various meetings and enables participation in leadership, management and governance. Sometimes the chairing of meetings and particular tasks are delegated. The allocation of resources is raised for open discussion by the majority of superintendents. Sometimes participants hear similar discussions in all three meetings – staff meeting, CLT and Circuit Meeting –

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<sup>95</sup> Issues of personal oversight and power struggles with superintendents have helped cause Methodist schism, both in Britain and America (Harrison, Hornby, Barber and Davies 1932; Harnish 2000:32). Such was the American feeling about Wesley's autocracy that by 1786 the Methodist Episcopal Church had rescinded their 'binding minute' of loyalty to him, and Wesley does not appear in the UMC's historic list of bishops (UMC 2012:1). For a discussion, see Kirby (2000:42-49) and Richey (1996:38-39). In Britain, following Wesley's death, there was a feeling that there should never again be a pope in Methodism. In 1838, the Bible Christians\* replaced the title 'Circuit Superintendent' with that of 'Circuit Pastor' and only used the term 'superintendent' for the Chairman of a District.



to ensure that all have participated. Generally, superintendents lead in the way they are expected to lead, and where individuals differ from what is expected, they are in the minority.

Furthermore, leadership is expected to be, and is seen to be, shared on those occasions when other individuals with the appropriate gifts are encouraged to take the lead in meetings. If superintendents presume to lead alone and do not listen to the consensual corporate leadership (and therefore they themselves deviate from the unity of direction) then people decline to follow where they have not agreed to be led.

However, the **operant perspective is in tension with the espoused** in the making of circuit policies. Though people expect the superintendent to take the lead in *vision-seeking*, it is surprising that in practice the circuit policies which are most often discussed are about routine business. People expect *proactive* policy-making, but often see superintendents reacting to change only when necessary. Is there a possibility that superintendents decline to encourage radical changes or take risks for fear of causing complaints? Team superintendency should be a good example of collaborative working in practice, but lack of communication between co-superintendents or between the superintendent and the rest of the circuit can exclude others from the leadership in which they expect to share.

What of **tensions between the espoused and normative** perspectives? It is surprisingly clear that people expect *personal* leadership from the superintendent. The data about team superintendency and the desire for a single figurehead for the circuit affirm this point of view. But this is in tension with the normative view that the superintendent takes the lead only as *part* of the corporate bodies within the circuit – the staff team, the CLT and the Circuit Meeting. Is there a possibility here that the superintendent is expected to take personal responsibility for corporate decisions? That if no decision-making takes place, then that is a failure of the superintendent? Or that in the context of seeing the superintendent as the place where ‘the buck stops’ the superintendent is expected to take the blame for any negative consequences arising from the decisions that these groups have made?

The **operant perspective is in tension with the normative** in that the opportunity for seeking new vision and the sharing of ideas is not always as proactive as it might be. The superintendent chairs routine meetings, and is not generally prepared to take risks. In a minority of cases, insufficient discussion is allowed to take place in meetings, as the agenda is driven by the superintendent from the chair. Furthermore, there are tensions where in practice people decline to follow the decisions of meetings (as opposed to the personal decisions of the superintendent), or where they blame the superintendent if risks are taken and mistakes are made. There are further tensions where in practice people leave decisions to the superintendent and he or she feels isolated and overwhelmed. In my research, I found more evidence where team superintendency did not work, rather than where it did work.

#### **4.2.1.5 Towards a Theology of Circuit Leadership**

What do the gaps and tensions between the espoused, operant and normative perspectives reveal about the theology of leadership of MCGB? What kinds of beliefs are embedded in the data?

In the tensions between the espoused and operant perspectives on leadership I detect a theological gap between activity and passivity, between taking the initiative and responding to it. Christian leadership never arises from a position of the pure personal initiative of the leader. The leader does not simply formulate his or her own ideas *a priori* and then ask everyone else to follow. Christian leaders must first acknowledge that they are followers. Christ called the first disciples not by asking them to *lead* others first, but to *follow* him (Matthew 4:19). The initiative is firstly Christ's. Those who claim to lead must follow Christ in order to know where to lead others – hence the normative expectation that leadership will be rooted in Word, sacrament and prayer. Furthermore, to follow is not simply to let the leader do all the work.

What is the espoused theology of leadership of superintendents predicated on?

Firstly, the espoused theology expects the superintendent to take the lead *in vision-seeking*. What does that mean? I suggest that any quest for vision is not just about the status quo.

The status quo assumes that God has already revealed God's will in the past, and the church has sought to follow that guidance throughout the ages. The Methodist *traditio* understands that the church as it is today is built on the foundations of Methodist forebears. What the church does today is a result of discernment in the past. The make-up of our circuit, the geographical placement of its chapels, the closure of surplus Wesleyan, Primitive or United Methodist chapels following the 1932 union, the way the church orders its affairs, its entire heritage, is predicated on God's revelation and guidance being followed by faithful Methodist servants in the past. If we continue as we are then we are part of that faithful service.

But when the espoused voice expects *vision-seeking* from its leadership it is asking for a *fresh* vision for the future. To expect superintendents to take the lead in *vision-seeking* is to assume that God has a new plan for the church. The task of superintendents is to lead the discernment of that vision in order to discover how the church of today needs to respond to today's needs. God is not a transcendent God of history, but an immanent God of the present. God is not passive, but active in today's church. If the circuit is to faithfully follow in discipleship for today the leadership of the circuit needs to help people to know God's active and current will and help them to fulfil it. Within Methodist tradition, the concept of Christian Perfection is also of value here – the church is *semper reformanda* because it is not yet perfect.<sup>96</sup> That

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<sup>96</sup> This is, of course, not just a Methodist perspective. Vincent of Lérins (*Commonitorium*, 23:54) argued for progress in Christ's church which enlarges, flourishes and ripens towards perfection the knowledge (while not changing the character) of the church. Vatican II speaks of the church constantly moving forward with 'more stable bonds' between Christ and his Bride (*Dei Verbum* 8; *Lumen Gentium* 44). Using the Vincentian canon, Anglican divines such as Ussher and Wake emphasised the Church as *semper reformanda* (Henson 1939:59; Avis 2002:335). Within contemporary theology, Avis (2002:366) argues for a church which has authority contingent on the 'assumptions, needs and demands of time and circumstance' with 'an appeal to reason and learning as competent to modify the interpretation of Scripture and tradition' (p.112). Murray speaks of theology as 'a process of systematic, critical-constructive reflection on the articulations and practice of faith

very lack of perfection requires change in order for the church to engage in more faithful practice.

But the operant theology is in tension with this espoused theology. In practice many superintendents seem to keep to that which is safe: they in the main concentrate on routine business in order to maintain the status quo. Yet this assumes theologically that God's revelation in the past is sufficient for today. This operant theology – faithful service based on what has always been done – causes tensions with the espoused theology because people expect fresh vision for today – and do not see that they are getting it.

The second assertion of the espoused voice is that the superintendent exercises *personal* leadership. This requires the theological assumption that the superintendent is a conduit of God's will, is personally capable of discerning God's will, and is acting under God's call in Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is such an assumption that lies behind the desire for a single figurehead, so that people can know who is in charge. Yet to assume that a superintendent can *personally* lead is to assert that they have a *personal* revelation from God which it is their task to share. There is a third assumption which is the obverse of this: to seek a single leader excludes others from the leadership task.

But the normative Methodist theology of leadership pushes against this view, for Christian leadership is not about a single leader. MCGB understands leadership to be *shared*. The discernment of God's will in (post-Wesley)<sup>97</sup> Methodist tradition is

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with a view to enriching their quality' (2014:267) so that the practice of faith might be deepened, enhanced and transformed and 'might more adequately witness to the Kingdom' (2010:44).

<sup>97</sup> Methodists have not always eschewed personal leadership. Charles Wesley was the first to exercise personal leadership and oversight of his religious society at Oxford in 1727. He handed it to his elder brother when John returned to Oxford in 1729 as a Fellow of Lincoln College: John thus became the 'Father of the Holy Club\*' (Peirce 1872:3; Edwards 1965:45). Other religious societies later operated 'in connexion with Mr Wesley' as they freely placed themselves under John Wesley's personal authority which he acknowledged 'the Providence of God had cast upon me, without any design or choice of mine' (Whitehead 1796:325). As the Connexion grew, Wesley held that the final authority on matters of discipline in the local society lay with his Assistant (Batty 1992:31-40; Carter 2002b:41, 163n.46) and the Connexion believed that 'Christ had entrusted the Church ... not to the

based not on an individual heroic leader's 'hotline to God', but on the practice of Christian conferring.<sup>98</sup> The normative theology of leadership places discernment in those places of conference – the staff meeting, the CLT, the Circuit Meeting. Conferring is by definition a *corporate* activity. God does not reveal God's will to one individual, but to all who seek it. The normative theology of leadership assumes not just *inspiration*, but *participation*. Therefore, if the people of the circuit want to experience Christian leadership, they should not look to the sole occupant of the superintendent's office, but to the corporate bodies of Christian conference. Furthermore, the corporate nature of leadership requires that there is a concomitant corporate responsibility (WIACS§32(c)). God does not simply want to involve one or two people in discerning God's will, but a whole community of faith (and ultimately the whole of creation – Romans 8:21). And if the whole of creation participates in God's acts of redemption, then that certainly means that the decision-making in a circuit should not be left to one individual. If people leave decisions to the superintendent, and blame the superintendent for those decisions; or if the superintendent presumes to act alone then there is a failure in the corporate leadership and responsibility which God wills. The task of leadership is therefore to ensure that the *whole* community is stimulated to engage in theological reflection (WIACS§32(b)) and 'that colleagues enable the voice of the least and lowest to be heard and the poor and disadvantaged to be included' (WIACS§32(d)). This means that circuit conferring goes beyond those in power at the Circuit Meeting, but includes everybody who sits quietly at the back in the local church.<sup>99</sup> For this

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people but to the ministers of the Gospel ... they are not at liberty to give up the steering or government into other or less skilful hands.' (Joseph Benson, speaking in 1796, quoted in Batty 1992:15-16.) Such an approach was to be one of the contributory factors to the first major Methodist schism, as the Methodist New Connexion broke away in 1797 (Townsend 1897; Vickers 1988:281-85; Carter 2002b:63).

<sup>98</sup> The first 'conference' of six ministers (plus four laymen invited in for the day) was held in 1744, and was named for the opportunity for people to confer about the 'work of God' (Vickers 1988:67-70).

<sup>99</sup> This may even include the participation of people *beyond* the church, who have ideas about what the church should be like. From an ecumenical perspective, Sykes (2006:145) comments that

normative voice to be truly heard, then people need to be *empowered* to share their ideas and act on them (*WIACS*§32(a)). It is for this reason that when in practice decisions are made by a few in separate meetings, those decisions are *ultra vires*.

There is a further theological point which arises from the practice of people only to follow a lead when it is something with which they agree. It involves a paradox: on the one hand, people ask for a leader; on the other they all want to participate in decision-making, so that they do not have to follow anything with which they disagree. This suggests that an individual leader of leadership (the normative definition of the superintendent (*WIACS*§18)) should ensure that such leadership is not ‘over and above’ but is ‘amongst and within’.

There is a diversity of views within Methodism as to whether the ordained exercise a distinctive sole leadership, or work in partnership with all the other leadership ministries of the church (*MPG*§§069-070). Leadership is exercised in both ways – through a focal person, and through communal, collaborative, forms of leadership. In this, *MPG* explicitly affirms *BEM*§26: ‘The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way’. Yet I also note that the report recognises the particular dangers of professionalisation, in that those ordained

acquire a body of knowledge and experience which separates them from other people, ... tempted to believe that they are the sole guardians of expertise and insight in their area of competence; defensive, self-perpetuating, oppressive and indifferent to the needs and wisdom of those they are intending to serve; and conversely, non-professionals easily become unduly dependent upon professional expertise and lose confidence in their own gifts and skills. (§073)

So *BEM* (*Ministry*§27) argues that ‘Strong emphasis should be placed on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community’. All Christians are called to offer their gifts in ministry for the building

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‘Exclusive clerical, episcopal or papal control of decision making in the church has ceased to be generally acceptable to an educated and informed lay Christian public. Even a Church without a formal means of elected representation finds itself accountable in the media of a modern democracy, and failure to adapt to such conditions may seriously interfere with the Church’s mission.’

up of the church (*BEM*§5; *ECS*§140). This concurs with early Methodism: ‘They cannot watch over one another in love unless they are thus united together’ (*Minutes* 1748:Q3; Vickers 1988:91).

Secular leadership theory defines leadership as participatory, ‘the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts towards goal-setting and goal achievement’ (Stogdill 1997:114-15; also Bass 1990:15-16). The leader needs to help achieve the group’s ‘preferred outcomes’ (Cartwright and Zander 1968:304). People need ownership of decisions. I venture to suggest that one of the factors lying behind the move to people focusing on the leadership of their local minister rather than the leadership of the superintendent (which I discuss further in 4.2.2.5) is that they want to know that the leader ‘belongs’ to them – and the superintendent is just a little further removed than their own minister. Thus any practice where leadership is exercised from the ‘centre’ or ‘elsewhere’ is tested and found wanting by this need for participation. (It also lies behind the comment that ‘we’re a long way from London’ (3.2.2.3)). The whole people of Israel participated in the renewal of the covenant at Shechem (Joshua 24:18-24) – not just Joshua on their behalf. The people of the circuit need empowerment for vision-seeking and participation. Such an approach requires more than communication or consultation – but a commitment from all parties to inclusive and involved participation.

There is a further paradox. This voice which calls for participation is not simply *corporate*. The Body of Christ which is the new Temple is made up of individual stones, each with their own place and ministry. To participate in this corporate leadership is to participate as an individual and to accept individual responsibility for the decisions that are made – and therefore to commit oneself to an individual quest for vision and discernment of God’s will. It is for this reason that the corporate act of the Methodist Covenant Service, where the congregation joins in an annual recommitment of dedication to God, has as its central focus a solemn recommitment to God which is said in the *first person* (*MWB* 288-90). Each individual must freely enter into it.

## 4.2.2 Representative Oversight

What do people believe about oversight by superintendents? What is the theological meaning of the way it is exercised? What ought to be happening if superintendents' oversight is to be true to MCGB's normative intentions? And how might the church respond pragmatically or theologically to gaps and tensions between these views?

### 4.2.2.1 Espoused Perspective

There are two aspects to consider in relation to shared oversight: oversight of the *circuit* and oversight of *local churches*.

It is recognised by all in circuit leadership that the circuit itself is part of a larger connexion from where the superintendent is sent. Stewards particularly see the superintendent as representing that wider connexion, as 'middle managers' (Table 3.2), responsible for connecting the 'top' and 'bottom' parts of the organisation (3.2.1.1), but this is not a view generally emphasised by either superintendents or staff colleagues. This is possibly a result of their believing this to be the task of *every* minister (3.2.1). Some people argue for circuit policies to be aligned to connexional policies, though others (mainly superintendents) argue that local differences are possible and often desirable (3.2.2.5). The superintendents do not expect to uphold *CPD* to the letter, and, indeed, do not generally know it in detail (3.2.2.5).

People expect superintendents to exercise personal oversight of the *circuit* (3.2.1). Most people see the superintendent as a sort of executive officer of the circuit (3.2.2.3). They expect superintendents to ensure that good governance arrangements exist so that resources are used wisely and agreed tasks are performed. (3.2.2.5) Stewards and colleagues are twice as likely as is the superintendent him- or herself to describe the superintendent as the co-ordinator of the circuit (3.2.1).

Local connexionalism is seen in way that superintendents are expected to encourage the implementation of circuit-level decisions in the local churches, and encourage the local churches to work together (3.2.2.3).



*Colleagues* have a particular view of the way that the superintendent exercises their oversight of the *circuit*: they are more likely to describe it not as being exercised over the circuit as a body, but over *themselves* as individual ministers. Perhaps this indicates a greater expectation that the oversight of the *circuit* is a collegial activity, in which they also share. (3.2.1, 3.2.1.2) Conversely, however, when the superintendent's role is described as *additional* to the role of a presbyter, this could imply that they themselves do not expect that a presbyter should share in the oversight of the *circuit* as a whole (3.2.1.1).

Although people expect superintendents to be overseers of the work of the circuit, this does not mean that they expect superintendents to oversee the *individual churches* which comprise the circuit. They see that task as belonging to the local minister. People do not expect superintendents *as superintendents* to exercise any authority (in ordinary circumstances) in the local church; indeed any notional authority has no day-to-day impact on colleagues (it is exercised only in extreme cases of disciplinary problems) (3.2.1.2). People, especially colleagues and stewards, do not expect formal visitation of the churches (Table 3.14) – they eschew hierarchical terms, preferring to emphasise superintendents' primary role as presbyters. Nevertheless people regard the superintendents as personally representing the circuit when they visit local churches *informally*. Superintendents generally aim to preach (but not preside at Holy Communion) in all the circuit churches regularly as part of this representative ministry (3.2.2.1, 3.2.2.4).

Where superintendents *do* have oversight of local churches it is only in their own capacity as the hands-on practitioner who is the presbyter in charge of those local churches (3.2.1, 3.2.1.1). There is a recognition that superintendency removes superintendents from, and diminishes the time for, their ministry as presbyters in pastoral charge of local churches (3.2.1.1).

People expect superintendents to perform specific tasks, though they recognise that superintendents are able to delegate aspects of their work (3.2.2), and in so doing recognise that those tasks that are delegated are normatively the responsibility of superintendents (1.7.1.1). Nevertheless, these delegations are always recognised

as temporary arrangements and such arrangements may be ended by the present or next superintendent. People expect superintendents to make the Plan collaboratively – allowing colleagues to make their own plans, and local churches sometimes to invite their own preachers. People expect them to oversee LP recruitment and training and to support evangelistic initiatives. The superintendent is expected to be the normal supervisor for probationers.

People also expect superintendents to offer good pastoral care to staff (3.2.2.2). This expectation is shared by superintendents, with some aiming to have one-to-one pastoral conversations with staff.

#### **4.2.2.2 Operant Perspective**

In practice, two-thirds of superintendents use a variety of means of finding out about the wider connexion and the decisions of the Conference, though no single method prevails, and the use of such information varies. Some pass information on to their colleagues and stewards. This means that a large minority – one-third – ignore the connexion except when necessary. Most superintendents pass on required information from the circuit to the connexion. Some circumstances – for example, geography – diminish connexionalism (3.3.3.1). Most superintendents do not rigidly adhere to *CPD*. (3.3.2.4)

Superintendents undertake informal visitation and so represent the wider circuit to the local churches, helping them to see the circuit's presence, and enabling themselves to know, and be known by, the circuit, and to support the local minister (and intervene) where necessary. Invitations to intervene are not common and formal visitation is apparently non-existent. Thus it is the local minister who is affirmed in being the presbyter in charge in the local church. I found only one example (for pastoral reasons) of the superintendent regularly chairing the church council of a church where a colleague was in pastoral charge (see section 3.2.1.1).

Oversight of doctrine, good order and discipline is generally reactive. Superintendents generally oversee discipline and good order in circuits, though some

try to avoid difficult situations, and when they do act they do not always act wisely.  
(3.3.2.1)

Generally, the work of the circuit as a whole is overseen and co-ordinated by collaborative staff and CLT meetings. Colleagues are more likely than stewards to describe the superintendent as ‘collaborative’ – perhaps this reflects the greater frequency of staff meetings compared with CLT meetings (3.2.1, 3.3.1.1). The Plan is made collaboratively and superintendents ensure LPs in training and probationers receive the required support.

*Most* superintendents are competent managers (though a large minority are not) and all could improve on their skills. Yet most act administratively rather than strategically, and do not undertake contingency planning. In practice, any weakness of individual superintendents is mitigated in that the executive management of the circuit is a shared enterprise co-ordinated by the CLT (3.3.4.2).

Superintendents find it difficult to maintain intra-circuit connexionalism and communication within all but the smallest circuits. People, including ministers *and superintendents*, seem to prefer working at the local church and Section level rather than the circuit level (3.3.3.2). Local church diversity prevents some circuit-wide policies from being suggested or implemented (3.3.1.2). Presbyters, who seem to view collegial oversight of the circuit as important do not share in that oversight by preaching around the circuit (3.3.2.2). Of all the ministers, only the superintendent generally has a circuit-wide role, and usually leads worship outside his or her own Section more than do the other presbyters. However, in practice superintendents preach in some congregations extremely rarely, if at all. They rarely preside at Holy Communion outside their own Section - the needs of their own Section and of their colleagues take priority. Indeed, they are often welcomed as ‘visiting preachers’. Does this imply that superintendents’ personal oversight is not generally in evidence for local churches? (3.3.2, 3.3.2.2, 3.3.3.2)

Looking at the practice of oversight of local churches, superintendents are almost always *laissez-faire* regarding local churches that are not their own – though ‘power-struggles’ are occasionally described, and a minority of superintendents sometimes

act in a hierarchical way (3.3.1.1). This shared *episkopé* is actually devolved: local ministers lead their own churches' decision-making, and superintendents oversee these ministers rather than the circuit's individual churches. Inevitably, superintendents have more influence on the churches where they themselves have pastoral charge (3.3.1.2).

Superintendents chair Circuit Meetings, and CLT, staff and LP meetings, which have focused agendas concentrating in the main on routine business with occasional reference to the wider connexion. There is, however, a potential conflict when groups meet separately: occasionally, decisions are made by staff meeting alone or stewards meeting alone without consultation with the others (3.3.1.2). A minority of superintendents do not work collaboratively. Communication to the circuit is more often than not judged to be poor, and monitoring of the circuit is patchy, often relying solely on the annual returns. Most superintendents rely reactively on second-hand accounts to discover what is happening in their circuit because they do not systematically visit churches that are not their own. Nor do they actively seek feedback from circuit stewards who have attended church councils in those churches on behalf of the circuit. (3.3.4.1)

Most superintendents do not generally visit colleagues and colleagues' families. When care is needed for particular crises, however, most superintendents willingly offer it – they prioritise staff care over developing circuit policy (3.3.2) – although perhaps one in five do not undertake any visiting of colleagues. The staff meeting is not generally intentionally used as a place for mutual care, but is a business meeting (3.3.2.5).

#### **4.2.2.3 Normative Perspective**

*The* normative theological writing for MCGB is scripture, which is deemed to record 'the divine revelation' which is 'the supreme rule of faith and practice': albeit that scripture requires interpretation for every age (*CLP*§1.2.8, *DU*cl.4). The Conference is the supreme interpreter of scripture, explicitly in *Conference statements*, including *WIACS*, which affect the understanding of superintendency (*FAOC* 1984a; 1984b;

1984c; 1984e; 1984f; 1999; 2000a; 2000e; 2002a; 2002b; 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2008), and implicitly in Conference *decisions* which affect the *practice* of superintendency and are contained in CPD and Standing Orders (MCGB 2013b).

Normatively, the Conference expects superintendents to adhere to its interpretation of Christian doctrine, and uphold connexional rules and initiatives. This means that the Conference expects superintendents to read the reports and minutes of the Conference in order to keep up-to-date.<sup>100</sup>

It is expected that the superintendent is responsible for the management, implementation and review of governance decisions of the Circuit Meeting, along with exercising oversight of property and finance, legal matters and Safeguarding (1.7.1.1). The superintendent is the chair of all meetings in the circuit, and particularly oversees the training of LPs (SO 502(1)(a); 564A(1); 566(2)). Superintendents' governance responsibility includes ensuring compliance with church regulations and external legislation (*TNOO*§1.11). Their management responsibility includes deployment of resources and the monitoring and assessment of how the objectives set by meetings are being met (*TNOO*§1.12).

Superintendents share oversight of the circuit. *WIACS*§§12,14 make use of the sections of *TNOO* which refer to the circuit (§§3.1-3.12) and to shared oversight (§§2.22-2.24). *TNOO*§2.22 states that

An important feature of the Methodist understanding of oversight since the time of Wesley is ... that it has always been corporate in the first instance and then secondarily focused in particular individuals and groups (lay and ordained).

'Superintendent' is defined in DU§1(xxxiii) as 'the presbyter or presbyters identified as such in the list of presbyters appointed to the Circuit'. Those who seek a further definition are referred in the index of *CPD* (2015:[41]) to the word 'Presbyter'.

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<sup>100</sup> Brake (1984:186) also makes this point.

There are two strands to this corporate oversight – that exercised collegially by presbyters, and that exercised corporately by particular groups and office-holders.

For presbyters,

A core emphasis of their ministry is to exercise *pastoral responsibility* on behalf of the Conference in a way that is always meshed with their ministry of the *word* and *sacrament*. ... At the same time, they are under the oversight of the Conference and its representatives ... and are expected to give an account of the ways in which they exercise their role. (*TNOO*§2.23)

The Conference receives presbyters into Full Connexion and ordains them

to embody its oversight in the particular situations to which they are sent. ... It therefore involves guiding particular congregations, groups and individuals in their explorations of the ways of God and their responses to the grace of God. (*TNOO*§2.24)

However, this oversight is not designed to be exercised as an individual.<sup>101</sup> The Guidelines on *Episkopé* (FAOC 2000a:§114) state that ‘The Methodist Church values personal *episkopé* in every part of the Church’s life, but believes that such *episkopé* should be exercised within a collegial or a communal context.’ Therefore

Presbyters who are appointed to exercise pastoral charge in a circuit are appointed by the Conference to do so collectively across the whole circuit. They are not appointed to have charge of or be a servant to particular churches in the circuit.’ (*TNOO*§3.3)

Nevertheless, normative practice from the Stationing Committee expects profiles to indicate of which churches a prospective presbyter will have pastoral charge.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> As, for example, an apostle in the New Testament, such as Barnabas, acted with personal authority (Acts 11:22-24). Jerome (*Commentary on Galatians* I:1) argued that the office of apostle derives from the *shaliach*, a personal representative who can speak in the name of his principal and act as plenipotentiary. His authority was delegated and lasted only as long as his mandate, but was not merely task-specific. The *shelihim* of the Great Sanhedrin were sent as messengers and as collectors of subscriptions from the Diaspora. *Shelihim* could also be appointed to act in the name of a congregation (*Mishnah, Berakhot*, 5:5; Dix 1957:229). The Pastorals and 1 Clement evidence the post-apostolic continuation of the office of *shaliach* (Dix 1957:267; Farrer 1957a:vii-viii).

<sup>102</sup> This is one reason that superintendents do not have the power to change the pastoral charge of presbyters on the basis of their own personal whim. Should an appointment need to be varied at a later

The collective oversight by presbyters of the circuit and its individual churches is expected to be exercised in the circuit staff meeting, which ‘is not primarily for the purposes of governance or management (decision-making) but for taking counsel in order to help provide *leadership*’ (TNOO§3.9). Such taking counsel involves ‘the development of vision and strategy through rigorous group reflection and a collective seeking of wisdom’. This is also an aspect of the doctrinal oversight expected by presbyters, as the words of SO524 note the

urgent need that the main doctrines of the Christian faith ... be more plainly and systematically set forth in public preaching, so that the Methodist people may be established in the faith and better defended against error and uncertainty (SO524)

Superintendents are expected to lead and supervise staff in the staff meeting (section 1.7.1.1; WIACS§19), and as such they need to be enabled to lead and manage appropriately and complete the tasks required of them (section 1.5; TNOO§6.2).

The staff meeting should also be a place of care, as the superintendent not only exercises the role of *pastor to the pastors* (SO 700(9)) but also receives care in return, participating as a ‘leader amongst peers’ and receiving mutual support and supervision (WIACS§19). Superintendents have a particular oversight of probationers (SO 484(2), 700(8)).

Circuit oversight is not the prerogative of presbyters alone: the circuit stewards are also responsible with the circuit staff ‘for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit, and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting’ (SO 531(1)). WIACS§21 warns against lay people presuming that the superintendents are the executive officers of their decisions. Furthermore, it is important to define the intentions of the staff, CLT and Circuit Meetings ‘to ensure that their boundaries are

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date from that notified to the connexional Stationing Committee when the presbyter was stationed, then this variation is the decision of the Circuit Meeting on the advice of the CLT. See also note 21.

not transgressed' (*WIACS*§20; *TNOO*§3.11) and that decisions are not made by one group of people alone.

*TNOO*§3.2 argues against the recent 'growing tendency in some areas towards local autonomy and congregationalism, which has shifted the balance away from the circuits to the local churches. Yet without the relationships of close inter-dependence which are embodied in a circuit many local churches would not flourish spiritually or materially'. *CLP*§4.6.2 states that there is mutuality and dependency of local churches within circuits; *TNOO* §3.4 adds that these 'entail a proper form of dependency and a proper degree of autonomy' which 'preclude both independency and autocracy as modes of church government' (*CLP*§4.6.6.) Therefore 'Circuit structures represent interdependence, relatedness, mutual responsibility and submission to mutual jurisdiction' (*CLP*§4.7.4).

#### **4.2.2.4 Affirmations and Tensions**

The **espoused, operant and normative perspectives affirm one another** in that the superintendent is expected to share in, and does in practice share in, oversight of the circuit as a whole. Oversight, as expected by both MCGB and the local people, is exercised first and foremost in a corporate way in the CLT and the Circuit Meeting, meetings in which laypeople and ministers share together in policy-making and governance. The Conference expects circuit staff to share in the oversight of the circuit, and the staff members themselves expect this: in all circuits, staff meetings take place (albeit not always frequently, regularly or collaboratively). The Conference and the people locally expect the superintendent to oversee management and governance aspects of the circuit's life. This is generally affirmed in the way that superintendents operate. Collaborative production of the preaching Plan and oversight of LP and Worship Leader recruitment and training is affirmed from espoused, normative and operant perspectives. Probationers are expected to be, and are, well supervised and mentored by superintendents or their nominees.

The **espoused and operant perspectives affirm one another** in that people expect oversight of the circuit to be undertaken mainly by the superintendent and not



his or her colleagues, and that local churches will be overseen by their ‘own’ minister but not the other staff. The superintendent is expected to be *laissez-faire* towards local churches, and indeed trusts presbyters to run their own churches. When discipline and good order go awry, people expect the superintendent to help out, and this indeed happens.

However, the **operant is in tension with the espoused** in several areas. Firstly, people expect superintendents to represent the Conference – but surprisingly one in three do not find out what has happened each year at the Conference, relying on hearsay.

Secondly, people expect the superintendent to preach around the circuit – but in practice opportunities for doing this are restricted, and superintendents often do not achieve this aim. This is not just due to practicalities of planning – some superintendents view the needs of their own Section as having a higher priority. Their colleagues’ Sections see their own minister often, so the superintendents’ own churches should not get poorer treatment simply because their minister is also the superintendent.

Thirdly, people, including the superintendents, expect good pastoral care to be offered to the staff. However, in practice good intentions are not fulfilled. Staff members only receive care when they need it because of a problem or crisis, and the staff meeting in practice is not a place where mutual care is received. Although the superintendent usually works collaboratively in these meetings (and only a minority do not), there is a slight hierarchy in that there is little sense that staff are watching over one another in love or that the superintendent is also accountable to his or her colleagues. Furthermore, despite the normative warnings of the possibility, boundaries are occasionally crossed, and the staff meeting makes decisions in which the stewards do not share. (Less commonly, stewards meet separately from staff and also make decisions without sufficient consultation). This has implications for the balance of power in a circuit. Tensions also exist between the normative and operant perspectives when superintendents see Standing Orders as capable of local amendment.

There is a further **tension between the normative and operant perspectives** concerning the staff meeting. The normative perspective expects the meeting to be a place for counsel, reflection and shared leadership between peers, meeting primarily to seek vision and only secondarily to conduct business – especially business which should be shared with stewards. But in practice, routine agendas dealing with business take first place, and there is little space for conversation about the work of God.

Other tensions exist between what the Conference normatively expects to happen with shared oversight and what is the local expectation or reality. Firstly, the Conference expects that *all* presbyters in their capacity of representing the Conference will share in pastoral responsibility throughout the circuit. However, presbyters do not actually *expect* to have circuit-wide responsibilities – only the superintendent has that; the practice of circuit-wide portfolios ceased from the mid-1990s onwards when the connexional ‘divisions’ were disbanded and stopped looking for a locally appointed minister to represent their interests.

Secondly, the corollary of this normative expectation of circuit-wide oversight is that presbyters do not have their ‘own’ churches which they look after alone: all churches are to be looked after collaboratively. In reality, presbyters expect to have their own churches, and expect that the superintendent will play no part in overseeing these churches, except insofar as he or she exercises oversight via the conversations he has with them. Nor do they expect any involvement from their colleagues. In practice, superintendents do not oversee the churches that are not their pastoral charge, and are not able to directly monitor what is happening in them. I would also add that in practice staff members have been excluded from any normative involvement in one another’s churches because the Conference has now removed the right of every presbyter to have a seat on every church council (SO 610(4)(i)). This means that the Conference’s expectation that all presbyters oversee all local churches can no longer happen, by decision of the Conference itself. It also means that superintendents are in practice excluded from active oversight of most local churches in their circuit.

Tensions also exist over the way that preferences of local churches and preachers generally over-ride any centralised provision. Firstly, there is the issue of control – local churches do not want the superintendent to control who leads their worship. Secondly, there is the issue of quality. The implication is that there are some preachers who those churches do *not* want planned in them, because they do not find their preaching helpful. This latter issue perhaps reflects the lack of proactive oversight of preachers that superintendents actually exercise. Their oversight of preachers is reactive, on the receipt of complaints, because superintendents generally do not hear them preach. Complaints are more often about doctrine rather than quality, because it is easier to define bad doctrine than poor quality preaching.

A further tension is apparent over the balance between what happens locally and what is deemed to be a circuit-wide activity. Firstly, I note that normatively LPs belong to the circuit, and exercise a circuit-wide ministry. In practice they may be more locally planned. Secondly, is evangelism better planned at the level of the circuit or of the local church? It is often funded by the circuit but is exercised in the local church. Thirdly, people do not expect the superintendent to organise circuit-wide training for ministries not concerned with preaching – and in practice only a minority of superintendents undertake this activity, mainly for evangelistic ministries. Perhaps this relates to where those ministries are seen as being exercised.

A final tension I want to highlight is over the task of the superintendent to stimulate theological thinking. This is normatively expected as a regular activity of the staff at their staff meeting. Yet not only does it not take place as a regular activity among the staff, people in the circuit do not expect it at circuit events (although they expect the superintendent to stimulate theological thinking in his or her capacity as a local minister). Notwithstanding expectations, superintendents themselves do not regularly find time for their own theological growth and development.

#### 4.2.2.5 Towards a Theology of Representative Oversight

What do the gaps and tensions between the espoused, operant and normative perspectives reveal about the theology of oversight of MCGB? What kinds of beliefs are embedded in the data?

At its simplest level, to ask who has oversight for something is to ask who ultimately is responsible for ensuring it is working correctly. From an organisational point of view, the overseer ensures that leadership, management and governance are in place in the organisation and are doing what they are meant to do. So when the espoused viewpoint describes the superintendent as the overseer of the work of the circuit, it is describing the responsibility of the superintendent for the organisation under his or her oversight. But as with Christian leadership (4.2.1.5), Christian oversight is similarly derived from elsewhere. When a superintendent is described as having oversight, it is recognised that that oversight is exercised by someone who are themselves accountable. The espoused view of this oversight is that the superintendent exercises oversight on behalf of the Methodist Conference.

But over what is that oversight exercised? It is too simplistic to say that it is over 'the circuit', because the circuit could refer to the whole entity, or to the individual parts of that entity. The general view is that the oversight of superintendents is not exercised over the local churches. That oversight belongs to local presbyters who are also responsible to the Conference.

Furthermore, the espoused view of colleagues is that the superintendent's oversight is over the *staff*, and I have suggested above (4.2.2.1) that that is possibly because the colleagues see oversight over the circuit as something in which they share. By implication, there is pastoral care involved for the staff as the superintendent's oversight of them is not simply about how they do their jobs, but also about how they *are*. God visits God's people to show God's care for them.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Carter argues (2002a:15-16) that Wesley's organisation of the Methodist connexion was for the purposes of *positive episkopé*: he gave personal *episkopé* to his Assistants to 'monitor the work of the

The espoused view is that oversight is a collegial activity. The staff members share with the superintendent as a body overseeing the circuit. And individual presbyters oversee local churches as a collegial act on behalf of their colleagues. This actually *reduces* the burden for all.

This says something about the way that God oversees God's people. A Methodist minister is not simply accountable to the Conference, but beyond it. For a Christian, Christ is the 'shepherd and overseer' of souls (1 Peter 2:25); and the ultimate judge of whether Christians are remaining true to their purpose is God Godself (Luke 19:44; Micah 7).<sup>104</sup> A superintendent thus exercises oversight on the one hand on behalf of the Conference and on the other on behalf of God.

What therefore is this espoused theology trying to say? Although God is the ultimate judge and overseer, God exercises that oversight through *people*, who are invited to participate in God's activity in the world. So when as Christians we speak of accountability, we can speak of accountability to *people* as well as to *God*: though, as I said earlier, that accountability is derived. There is, in one sense, no *personal episkopé* – rather there is personal accountability to God, expressed through intermediaries. As God works through individuals, so the oversight of the circuit works through individuals. The superintendent uses the ministers in pastoral charge of the churches and trusts them with what they are given charge of – just as the stewards were trusted with the talents in the hope that they would grow (Matthew 25:14-30). When the ministers speak of being overseen by the superintendent, they speak as those who give an account for that which is entrusted to them. Such accountability need not bring admonition: it might bring affirmation and blessing, as it did for two of the stewards in the parable. Furthermore, the master does not

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lay officials, especially the class leaders [\*], and to enforce the rules'. Oversight of local officers is for practical support as much as inspection and oversight of doctrine, from the earliest decision of the 1744 Conference that the Assistant should oversee the 'stewards, leaders, schoolmasters and housekeepers' (*Minutes* 1744).

<sup>104</sup> For a fuller list of Biblical references to ἐπισκοπή see Appendix 10.

reclaim the talents so that he himself can do a better job – he hands them on to someone else to act on his behalf. The espoused theology is one of delegated oversight. Such delegation brings non-interference and trust.

There is a further point I believe is implicit in this delegated *episkopé*. It involves the understanding that oversight is not about ‘one size fits all’. The stewards in the parable were given different talents. Perhaps the best oversight is exercised in subsidiarity; local oversight is best done with local understanding. Such an approach recognises that there is *variety* in God’s creation.

The operant theology recognises that oversight does not require tight control, but trust. Could it be that not all connexional policies are relevant in every local church? And who is the best person to judge that? What does a ‘one size fits all’ policy say to fresh expressions of church? Within MCGB there are congregations worshipping in many different ways and utilising the riches and resources of many different cultures. Even in a small circuit, churches are very different. So when superintendents make the Plan in consultation with their colleagues, they are acknowledging the expertise that those colleagues are able to share.

Another aspect of the operant theology is shown in the oversight of local churches being exercised by stewards, who represent the circuit on the church council. Oversight is thus shown not to be a special ministry restricted to the ordained, but is something laypeople can share in.

The normative theology expects formal visitation. But is actual visitation necessary for oversight to occur? After all, the Conference oversees all the circuits, but the President of the Conference, who exercises personal oversight of the connexion on behalf of the Conference (SO 111(2)) does not visit all the churches.

The normative theology of oversight is that it is corporate. All presbyters represent the Conference. The normative voice presumes that ‘corporate’ means that every presbyter shares in oversight of every church. Whilst this expresses the principle, the operant voice and espoused voices differ.

The normative voice speaks also of mutual oversight. Here there is a ‘watching over one another in love’. This speaks of equality of people who ultimately will all be judged by God. Wesley (1988b:99-100) placed *himself* under the oversight of a ‘select company, to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve’, in which everyone had ‘an equal liberty of speaking, there being none greater or less than another.’ This mutuality also removes from superintendents the burden of being the sole pastoral carer of the ministers. Systematic pastoral visiting is not needed in a situation of mutual care. Such mutual care echoes the command of Jesus to his disciples to wash one another’s feet (John 13:13-15).

How may ministers exercise accountability for the way they oversee their own congregations? The normative view is that this is in the staff meeting. But where the staff meeting is a business meeting with an agenda controlled by the superintendent, this does not allow the supervision to take place. The normative voice invites the sharing of what is happening so that others can advise.

#### **4.2.3 New modes of Superintendency?**

In the final part of this section, I summarise my data relating to possible changes in the practice of superintendency. The very nature of these differing practices means that they are experimental, non-standard and do not yet have a normative theological voice from the church. There is, in any case, a typically pragmatic approach to the development of normative theology in MCGB. The 1824 Wesleyan Conference recognised this pragmatic approach to theology as arising from the ‘leadings of the providence of God’ in the ‘signs of the times’ rather than a ‘preconceived plan of man’ (*Wesleyan Minutes* 1824, V:529). *NCC* (FAOC 1984d:7) speaks of the Church having a ‘developing life ... which under the guidance of the Spirit should be richer as time goes on, with fresh manifestations as ... new apprehension of divine truth is given’. Thus I submit the data from my interviewees as part of the discernment of the signs of the times and reflection on fresh manifestations.

- (1) Interviewees rejected ordination of superintendents to the ministry of oversight. The strongest objection was from colleagues. Negative perceptions

of bishops prevailed. Normatively, the function of a bishop includes the transfer of ministerial authority (1.6.4) and superintendents have not participated in ordinations *qua* superintendents (1.8.1). Therefore in any discussions with other churches about the possible introduction of ‘the’ historic episcopate into MCGB, it is clear that the view from the circuits is that superintendents are not the appropriate office holders to exercise that role.

- (2) The possibility of lay superintendents was more acceptable to colleagues and stewards but superintendents themselves opposed the idea (3.2.3.3). The main ecclesiological argument against the practice would be that laypeople are not representatives of the Conference in the same way that presbyters are. Undertaking the work of a superintendent would not change the need for a superintendent in Full Connexion with the Conference. A comparative example is where the superintendent of another circuit is appointed concurrently to the superintendency of a circuit where no presbyter is appointable as superintendent: in practice the local presbyters do much of the work, but it is the superintendent appointed by the Conference who holds the ultimate responsibility (3.3.1.1).
- (3) Interviewees generally argued against team superintendency in theory. Those who had experienced it in practice were more than twice as likely to say that it did not work. It was felt that clarity of role was needed, and that people generally prefer one figurehead. In practice, communication suffers when there is more than one superintendent (3.2.3.4, 3.3.1.1).
- (4) Interviewees were almost equally divided over the possibility of separated superintendency, but the balance was against it: although it would permit a greater amount of formal visitation (1.7.1.1) superintendents needed to be rooted in the pastoral role (3.2.3.5). Perhaps laypeople were persuaded against this possibility because of the cost of paying the stipend of a superintendent who does not have pastoral charge of a church.



## Chapter 5 Conclusions

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### 5.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I highlight the evidence I have presented in answering my initial research questions. I note the importance of aiming for pragmatic coherence (5.2). I then summarise the theological (5.3) and practical (5.4) implications that need to be explored in order to resolve the tensions explored in Chapter 4.

Finally, I spell out what I believe is the contribution to knowledge that my thesis makes (5.5). This relates not only to superintendency, but also to my theological method. I also suggest further research related to my work generally, as opposed to one of my specific theological points. Concluding remarks are in section 5.6.

### 5.2 Research Questions and Findings

My research aimed to answer four questions (section 1.1):

**(i) How is the superintendent presbyter's role defined, understood and practised in the MCGB in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?** My contribution to answering this question is set out in Chapter 3 and in the normative theology presented in chapter 4.

**(ii) How coherent is the superintendent's role with the traditions of the Methodists and the church in general?** My contribution to answering this question is set out in Chapter 4, as I examined the affirmations and tensions between the operant, espoused and normative voices of Methodist theology

**(iii) What is the continuing adequacy of *WIACS* as a normative document?**

*WIACS* in its non-prescriptive nature in terms of practical examples remains of value for the Methodist understanding of superintendency. I found insufficient evidence to refute this. Superintendents still exercise a ministry of word, sacrament

and pastoral responsibility. They still exercise communal authority on behalf of the conference along with their staff and steward colleagues. The theology embedded in *WIACS* has not been challenged by the operant and espoused data I have discovered, and it is therefore of enduring value. The only failure is the lack of attention it has received.

**(iv) How do my findings affect MCGB's polity and theology of oversight?  
What implications are there for the future practice of superintendency?**

The main tensions which need resolution are between:

- The desire for leadership which seeks to help the church better serve the present age which is in tension with the passivity of stable management and risk-aversion
- The normative view of shared and inclusive leadership compared with the practice of personal leadership
- How the circuit is structured and how a diversity of local churches operate in practice
- How personal *episkopé* can operate beyond or within collegial and communal *episkopé*
- Independence and accountability, and the search for mutual *episkopé*.

I now summarise the theological and practical implications of my research which I have identified throughout this thesis. They are set out as non-numbered bullet points because they are interlinked, and any numerical system would suggest a hierarchy.

### **5.3 Theological Implications for Superintendency**

I now turn to answer the first part of my fourth research question. How do my findings affect MCGB's polity and theology of oversight? The pragmatic task of practical theology is to make a constructive theological response to what has been discovered: to suggest new insights into tradition in the light of particular questions

from the contemporary situation and to suggest positive steps in new directions in faithful transformative action which progress the *missio Dei* (Swinton and Mowat 2006:25-27). I seek to avoid being normatively and dogmatically prescriptive (Pattison 2000a:248). However, I do adopt an applicationist approach in this respect: I believe that any response which is *faithful* needs to be recognisably part of Methodist tradition, and a response which is capable of being recognised by the wider church as part of ecclesiological tradition: otherwise my response is incapable of serving, truly, the practical and faithful living of church (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:13; Swinton and Mowat 2006:11; Fiddes 2012:19; Watkins 2015:28).

What do the operant and espoused voices have to say to that voice? How consistent is the contemporary practice and understanding of superintendency with the normative theology which what *ought* to be going on? Are there any discontinuities, interruptions or tensions which challenge that normative voice? (FAOC 1984: §19; Avis 2002:112; Shier-Jones 2005:12; Ballard and Pritchard 2006:85; Cameron *et al.* 2010:146)

- I discovered a lack of connexionalism operating in circuits and a drift towards congregationalism. This has theological implications for a church which believes normatively that its primary identity is connexional. Is the ‘Missional Nature of the Circuit’ out of date in the context of the increasing diversity and size of circuits? Should an entire method of church oversight be seriously considered which MCGB might learn from other denominations which are more congregational in structure? Or even from other Methodist Churches in the WMC – like the UMC – which long ago abandoned circuits. Could the increasing oversight of the Chair learn something from DSEs in the UMC? The normative theological tradition of connexionalism is being tested by practice.
- Superintendents are *laissez-faire* in their oversight of local churches, with a move *away* from personal oversight at the *circuit* level accompanied paradoxically with a move *towards* the personal oversight of the individual presbyter at the local *church* level. There needs to be a re-examination of the

Methodist understanding of personal *episkopé* in the light of these findings, especially in relation to personal oversight at the local church level. Other members of the WMC operate in this way, and MCGB could learn from them.

- There needs to be a recovery of the shared oversight which comes from mutual accountability of ministers. If ministers are becoming more independent as representatives of the connexion (and therefore being trusted to act as such) then there needs to be a concomitant emphasis on accountability. The staff meeting – and the Methodist heritage of mutual *episkopé* and ‘watching over one another in love’ – need to be developed to fulfil this theological task, as ministers accept their accountability to God for their vocation within a community of other ministers.
- With the increasing variety and missional foci of local churches, there needs to be recognition that CPD can no longer be as prescriptive as it was. This could entail a transformation in ecclesiology which is as radical as was the first movement of Methodism.
- The drift towards congregationalism need not be divisive, but may be a source of resourcing and learning for the rest of the connexion. As God is doing new things, what is that saying theologically to the rest of MCGB?
- This means that there needs to be more theological work on how MCGB remains connexional whilst at the same time exists in a life of great diversity. There therefore needs to be work on the Methodist theology of oversight.
- My research affirmed that there is no espoused or operant view of an ontological distinction between superintendents and presbyters.
- There needs to be a rediscovery of the historical Methodist theology of Christian conferring, as leadership is acknowledged to be a corporate activity, and as meetings move from being focused on business to focused on the activity of God.
- Were the historic episcopate to be introduced into MCGB, my data confirms that it would not be best placed at the level of the superintendent minister.

## 5.4 Pragmatic Implications for Superintendency

Osmer's final task for practical theology (section 2.2.1) is "How might we respond?" The final part of my last research question asks 'What implications are there for the future practice of superintendency?'

What are the implications of my research for the practice of superintendency?

- Perhaps a radical pragmatic approach to the operant theology of local church-based ministry would be to formally recognise the practice of the Stationing Committee and station presbyters to Sections rather than to Circuits. The stationing within circuits is almost a legal fiction when compared with the way presbyters, circuits and superintendents operate.
- Superintendents need training in a number of different skills: leadership, management, conflict management, teamwork and supervision (as also evidenced by Maunder 2012). This can only happen if the initial training for superintendents becomes compulsory. They also need to be equipped to help people to think strategically.
- WIACS is not being used in practice in circuits. It has no impact on the setting up of appointments, and is not used in recruitment and selection or the setting up of training outcomes. If the connexion still wants WIACS to be taken seriously by circuits, then it needs to be taken seriously by the Stationing Committee.
- CPD needs to be amended to reflect the actual practice of superintendency. The church can learn from the way superintendency currently operates.
- There needs to be a recovery of theological reflection in MCGB. This might entail training superintendents in the skills needed for it. Superintendents certainly need to be encouraged to set aside time for theological engagement, and to actually read some theology. Staff meetings should be used less for business and more for reflection. They would be more helpful to staff if they had collaborative agendas.

- Superintendents should recognise that the idea of preaching around the circuit is no longer helpful. With a move to sectionalisation their own churches will suffer if they are always elsewhere. There are many different ways of undertaking informal visitation outside the Sunday context.
- Superintendents and staff need to be more aware of the benefits of the shared oversight that circuit stewards offer. Their representation of the circuit on church councils is underutilised
- Circuits need to undertake new thinking about how they undertake the resourcing of lay ministries in the circuit – especially that of LPs and Worship Leaders. Focusing on the local churches means that different ways of support and oversight need to be found.

## **5.5 Contribution**

I submit that my research is the first doctoral-level research focused on the general practice of superintendent ministers in MCGB since the office of superintendent arose nearly three centuries ago. It offers an answer to the request raised by Raymond George in 1974 that there should be some research into the meaning of superintendency.

I have added to the smaller contribution of Maunder (2012, 2014) by (a) concurring that superintendents are not the managers of their colleagues; (b) noting that I too found superintendents struggling with the burden of administration; (c) confirming with my own data that there is a drift towards congregationalism in Methodist circuits; and (d) noting, as Maunder did, that there is a need for leadership skills to be imparted to Methodist superintendents.

I have engaged in exploratory research which has identified issues for further research. I have supplied data which others may use as a comparison set with similar or subsequent research.

I have offered my own contribution and adaptation of the use of Four Voices of ARCS as part of the research community's ongoing exploration of its usefulness as an interpretative framework.

Though my research is limited to one District, I believe that itinerancy ensures it is sufficiently representative of the whole of MCGB. It would, however, be interesting to see how a similar single-case study of another District would confirm or deny this. If I were to undertake this research, I could also test how much my subjects were subject to the effects of compliance: in another District where I had not held office, this would not apply; but it might also diminish interviewees' participation rate.

My findings are tentative, and would require further research. Not least, the pragmatic responses suggested could be tried and analysed in a further Action Research phase. In particular, my research would be aided by research into whether:

- the findings in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District are matched with equivalent research in other Districts
- the practice of interviewees has changed as a result of the interview conversation
- the introduction of the historic episcopate into MCGB would make any difference to the practice of superintendency
- the circuit is indeed the unit of mission in practice
- the nature of cultural diversity in a changing Britain has an impact on superintendency.

## **5.6 Concluding Remarks**

I would contend that the goal of all *episkopé* is *unity*: to exercise leadership, management and governance of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in such a way as to dwell in the love of the Creator by maintaining the unity of the Body of Christ within the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in order to serve God's purposes.

Within Methodist tradition the emphasis has always been on the connexion. Connexionalism is thus *the* priority for superintendency as a means of maintaining unity.

I began my research by examining a personal office. I conclude it by recognising that that personal office only has meaning in the context of shared leadership and shared oversight. Any less would diminish the richness and diversity of God's grace.



## Appendix 1 Glossary of Terms

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This Appendix defines terms marked with an asterisk in the text of my thesis. Unless specified otherwise, all terms are as applied or used in MCGB\*. (References may be found in the Bibliography.)

**Adopted Statement.** A report which is presented to the Methodist Conference\* may be adopted by the Conference by two-thirds majority as a considered Statement of the judgement of the Conference, following a previous meeting of the Conference commending a period of connexional\* study, discussion and response from circuits\*, Districts\*, and other bodies or individuals. Other reports are simply ‘received’ (SO 129).

**‘Appointed to’.** Although most ministers\* are stationed\* in circuits\*, some are appointed to District\* or connexional\* work, work in ‘other appointments’ (such as chaplaincies) or are supernumeraries\*. Only those presbyters\* appointed to the circuit share with the superintendent\* in the *pastoral charge\** of that circuit (SO 700, 701).

**Assistant\*.** The itinerant Preacher appointed by John Wesley to care in Wesley’s absence for particular Societies\* and to travel around them in a regular circuit of preaching and distinguished from *Local Preachers\** by the term ‘Mr Wesley’s Preacher’. Also called Helper\*. (Vickers 1988:70)

**Bible Christian Church.** A Methodist\* denomination established by William O’Bryan in 1815, who felt called to prioritise missionary preaching over his duties as a Local Preacher\* towards established congregations, and for which the superintendent\* expelled him from membership of Wesleyan\* Methodism\* in 1810. (Vickers, 329-33, 361-61, 626)

**Bishop.** In the context of the United Methodist Church\* (USA), a person exercising general superintendency on behalf of the General Conference\*. Each episcopal jurisdiction has a minimum of five bishops, for up to 300,000 members. The bishop shares *episkopé* with the District Superintendents\* (UMC 2012:¶¶403, 404, 414).

**Chair.** The presbyter\* appointed to lead a District\*. In most Districts, they are ‘separated’\* and are thus not stationed\* in or *appointed to\** any circuit.\* The *pastoral charge\** of all circuits remains with the superintendent\* and other presbyters appointed to the circuit. (SO Section 42, 700(10))

**Church Council.** The governing body of the Local Church\*. The superintendent\* is the chair, but in practice delegates the chair to the presbyter\* in *pastoral charge\** (SO502(1)).

**Circuit.** Individual Methodist\* churches in Britain are grouped into circuits, so named from the early Methodist itinerant\* preachers’ practice of riding round to each Society\* in a regular circuit. Circuits were formally arranged as early as 1746. (SO Part 5; Vickers 1988:86).

**Circuit Assessment.** The contribution made quarterly (and called the ‘quarterage’ in the early days of Methodism\*) (Baker 1965:240) by each Local Church\* towards the expenditure of the circuit\* and its contribution to the wider church. The major part is usually the stipends\* and allowances of the *circuit staff*.\* (SO 515(3)). The assessment may be an imposed or voluntarily agreed amount, but, once accepted in the annual budget, is the first charge on the funds of the Local Church (SO 650(4)).

**Circuit Leadership Team.** [‘CLT’]. A meeting set up by circuits\* in order to provide a forum for leadership discussions between ministers\* and Circuit Stewards\* (SO 515(2)). The concept of circuit leadership teams in which the diverse gifts of lay\* people might be better utilised was introduced following the 1988 Conference\* report *The Ministry of the People of God* (FAOC 2000f). As all circuits in my survey had CLTs, it can be assumed that most circuits have them.

**Circuit Meeting.** The principal meeting responsible for the affairs of the circuit\* and the development of circuit policy, acting as ‘the focal point of the working fellowship’ (SO 515) of the Local Churches\*, and overseeing their pastoral, training and evangelistic work. It determines how much each Local Church should pay in Circuit Assessment\*. It consists of ministers\* *appointed to*\* the circuit, certain lay\* officers, and representatives from the Local Churches\*. It should encourage leadership between lay people and ministers.

**Circuit Staff.** See *Staff Meeting*\*.

**Circuit Steward.** Each circuit\* has at least two stewards – lay\*, voluntary, officers – who are elected by the Circuit Meeting\* to work alongside the *circuit staff*\* to provide leadership and conciliar oversight for the circuit and its ‘spiritual and material well-being’, and to uphold and act upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting (SO Section 53). Circuit Stewards are particularly responsible for the circuit’s finances, the provision of manses, the payment of stipends\*, and issuing invitations to ministers\* – (the formal request that the Conference\* might station\* a particular minister in their circuit). They were originally called ‘General Stewards’, chosen by the Assistant\* from the ‘particular’ stewards (i.e. Society Stewards\*) to be responsible for the conduct of all circuit activities. (Baker 1965:240)

**Class, Classes.** The groups of members into which the earliest Methodist\* Societies\* were divided; each led by a Leader\*. (Vickers 1988:95)

**Conference.** The supreme governing body of Methodist\* churches (except in those Methodist churches that have a General Conference ruling over the annual conferences). The first Conference of six ministers\* (plus four lay\* men invited in for the day) was held in 1744, and was named for the opportunity for people to confer about the ‘work of God’. Conferences now include lay members and most meet annually. In MCGB\*, membership of the Conference is both *ex officio* and by election from the Districts\*, and also

includes a small number of representatives from partner churches. It is the final doctrinal authority for the church. (Vickers, 67-70; DU,cl.5)

**Connexion, Connexional.** (US usage: ‘**Connection**’). MCGB\* always uses the eighteenth-century spelling. In 1743, John Wesley, desiring to introduce a common governing system for the religious societies which had placed themselves under his authority (and were ‘in *connexion* with Mr Wesley’ as their ‘Father in God’), published his rules for Methodist\* societies and in 1749 the London Society was recognised as the parent society\*. This document inaugurated a common discipline and single authority which ensured the interdependence, or ‘*connexionalism*’, of the societies connected with the Wesley brothers. Although in MCGB the term ‘the connexion’ is sometimes misused to refer to the Connexional Team\*, the term is properly applied to the *network* of ministers\*, people, Local Churches\*, circuits\* and Districts\* who are ‘in connexion’ with the Methodist Conference\*. The term refers to a Methodist denomination in general. (Wesley and Wesley 1747; DU 1(x); Baker 1965; FAOC 2008:§3.1.2)

**Connexional Team.** Within MCGB\*, people appointed by the Conference\* to serve the connexion\* as a whole. (SO300-368)

**Deacon.** [MCGB\*] A person ordained\* to a life-long ministry of service and witness in the office and ministry of a deacon in the Church of God, and admitted into Full Connexion\* with the Methodist Conference\*. Deacons also constitute the membership of a religious order known as the Methodist Diaconal Order. (FAOC 2004; SO701(1))

[UMC\* (USA)] The deacon is a member of the clergy who is ordained to the servant ministry. (UMC 2012:¶328)

**Deed of Union.** [‘DU’] The current form, as amended by subsequent decisions of the Conference\*, of the deed poll between the Wesleyan\* Methodist Church, the Primitive Methodist Church\* and the United Methodist Church\* (GB) executed on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1932 under powers granted by an Act of Parliament (the Methodist Church Union Act 1929) to form a new united church in Britain to be known as The Methodist Church\*. (Great Britain 1929; MCGB 2013c:203-37)

**District.** Since 1791, circuits\* have been grouped into ‘Districts’, under the oversight of the ‘Chair’\* of the District. Originally, Districts had a maximum of twelve circuits (*Minutes* 1791; Stevens 1861:34; Smith 1866:88-89). The words ‘Chair’ (originally ‘Chairman’) and ‘District’ are always capitalised in this thesis, thereby indicating a formal use. (SO Part 4). In 2012 there were 31 Districts, with a range of 1 to 37 circuits (mean 13, median 12). Newcastle-upon-Tyne had 12 circuits.

**District Development Enabler [‘DDE’].** A connexional\* role in existence from 2008-2013 which was designed to help circuits\* to map a strategy for the future. I was the DDE for the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District during the interview phase of my research (MCGB 2007a).

**District Superintendent.** [‘DS’ pl. ‘DSes’] An elder\* in the United Methodist Church\* (USA), who is appointed at the pleasure of the bishop\* to share in extended episcopal oversight with the bishop. DSes are the ‘chief missional strategist’ of their district: they oversee clergy, advise on clergy deployment, and serve on the bishop’s cabinet. They also, *ex officio*, have Conference\* responsibilities. (UMC 2012:¶¶403(2), 419, 424)

**Elder.** The term for a presbyter\* in use in the United Methodist Church\* (USA). Elders are ordained to a ministry of ‘word, sacrament, order and service’. (UMC 2012:¶¶306, 307, 332-334)

**Episkopé.** The Greek word underlying the concept of oversight. The term may also be spelt ‘episcopé’; my preferred usage is, I believe, a better transliteration of the original Greek word, ἐπισκοπή.

**Full Connexion.** Admission into Full Connexion with the Methodist Conference\* means that a presbyter\* or deacon\* and the Conference enter into a solemn covenant relationship with one another. The act, in which the Conference members solemnly vote by rising to their feet, is also a resolution by the Conference to ordain that person as a presbyter or deacon, should they not already be ordained\*. Such a resolution happens at the end of a probationary period (see ‘Probationer’\*), and admits a person to the status of a presbyter or deacon of the Methodist Church\*. (DU cl.1; SO700, 701, 728, 728A)

**General Conference.** See Conference\*.

**Helper.** A term used at first interchangeably with Assistant\*. It was later used for those preachers who assisted the Assistant\*. (Vickers 1988:116-19)

**Holy Club.** This derisive title of John and Charles Wesley’s religious society at Oxford was coined by Merton College students and prevailed over other terms of derision, such as ‘sacramentarians’, used by students of Christ Church, and ‘Bible moths’. It preceded the term Methodist\*. (Edwards 1965:43-44)

**Itinerancy, Itinerant.** All ministers\* are appointed annually to their stations\* by the Conference\*, and thus accept that they may be moved to a new station by the Conference. As the Conference meets in June or July, and all stations are effective from 1<sup>st</sup> September, this may entail just eight weeks’ notice of a removal to a new station within the connexion.\* (SO 700, 701, 740)

**Lay.** When used in relation to the MCGB\* *formally* means a person who is not a minister\* (DU (1)(xivA)). *Informally*, this term excludes probationers\*, as they are informally referred to as ministers.

**Leaders.** The lay people who led Classes\* from the earliest days of Methodism.\* (Vickers 1988:94-95)

**Local Church.** The term ‘Local Church’ is a technical term, as a Local Church may use more than one chapel, and one chapel may be shared by two or more Local Churches. It is a group of Methodist\* members who are formally

recognised as one of the constituent units of a circuit\*, and who meet together for worship which is resourced by the circuit. (SO Part 6)

**Local Preacher.** [‘LP’] A lay\* preacher, formally accredited and approved by the Circuit Meeting\* after following a connexionally-approved training course. Named ‘Local’ preacher because he or she remains ‘local’ to the circuit\*, unlike the ordained\* preachers who practice itinerancy.\* (DU 1(xvi); SO Section 56)

**Local Preachers’ Meeting.** Each circuit\* has a Local Preachers’ Meeting which oversees the circuit’s Local Preachers\*, holding them accountable for their ministry, ‘considering in particular their character, their fidelity to doctrine and their fitness for the work’ (SO561). It offers an opportunity for fellowship and development, and a place for conferring so far as the role of Local Preachers and worship are concerned. (DU 1(xvii); SO 560-61)

**Methodism.** The practice and faith of those who are called Methodist\* . (DUcl.4)

**Methodist.** A follower of, or that pertaining to, Methodism\*. The term ‘Methodist’ was not applied until 1732, when John Bingham of Christ Church, Oxford, observed that ‘a new set of methodists ... has sprung up amongst us’ (Davies and Rupp 1965:44, 216, 263; Lofthouse 1965:116; Cracknell and White 2005:10). There were other Methodists not in connexion\* with Wesley.

**Methodist Church.** [GB] [‘MCGB’] The title ‘Methodist Church in Great Britain’ is legal rather than strictly geographical, and arises from The Methodist Church Act 1976, §1 (Great Britain 1977). The church formed in 1932 from the Deed of Union\* executed by the Wesleyan\* Methodist Church, the Primitive Methodist Church\* and the United Methodist Church\* (GB). In 2013, MCGB had Local Churches\* in Great Britain, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, Gibraltar and Malta. Note that the Methodist Church in Ireland is a separate connexion\* and covers the former Kingdom of Ireland; (Great Britain 1929; Harrison *et al.* 1932; MCGB1932b; 2014:203-37; Methodist Times and Leader 1933)

[USA] The church formed in 1939 by the reunion of the northern and southern factions of the Methodist Episcopal Church\* with the Methodist Protestant Church\*. (McEllhenney and Yrigoyen 2010:447)

**Methodist Conference.** See Conference\*.

**Methodist Episcopal Church.** The church founded in Baltimore in 1784 by Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke after Wesley had ordained\* them as superintendents.\* They shortly afterwards adopted the title ‘Bishop’. The church split into two during the American Civil War after a slave-owning bishop was suspended, with the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. (McEllhenney and Yrigoyen 2010:450-51)

**Methodist New Connexion.** This church was formed from the first secession from Wesleyan\* Methodism\*, which occurred in 1797 over the right of preachers to administer the sacraments; the right of societies\* to hold preaching

services during the time of, and separate from, the public worship of the parish church of the Church of England; and the rights of lay\* people. (Vickers 1988:281-85)

**Methodist Protestant Church.** An American denomination formed after an 1828 convention in Baltimore to form an association of Methodists\* who were opposed to episcopacy and supported lay\* representation in policymaking. Its pastors were appointed by a conference\* rather than a bishop\*. (McEllhenney and Yrigoyen 2010:447)

**Minister.** When used in relation to MCGB\* means a presbyter\* or deacon\* (DU(1)(xix)). Note that these distinctive ministries are complementary, mutually exclusive, and non-hierarchical. Thus a presbyter may be *subsequently* ordained\* deacon, but must first resign from Full Connexion\* (SO 718). (In the United Methodist Church\* (USA), deacons\* and elders\* who transfer between orders remain in full connection\* with their Conference\* (UMC 2012:¶309(3)). In Britain, the term ‘ministers’ is often used informally to include probationers\*.

**Ordained.** A person who has been set apart by the act of ordination, which involves prayer and the laying-on of hands by the President\* of the Methodist Conference\*. It is carried out by the authority of the Conference, and is considered an act of the Conference. Only those who have been received into Full Connexion\* may be ordained. (SO 495, 728, 729)

**Pastoral Charge.** Each Local Church\* is in the pastoral charge of a presbyter\* *appointed to\** that circuit\*. Superintendents\* share the pastoral charge of the circuit with the other presbyters appointed to the circuit. Pastoral charge of churches cared for by probationers\* belongs to the superintendent. All pastoral responsibility is exercised on behalf of the Conference\*. (SO 700)

**Plan.** The plan of who is preaching at which Local Church\* at which service is usually published quarterly. Not simply a rota matching preachers to places, the Plan indicates which churches are in the circuit\*; which services are required to be held; Local Preachers’\* accreditation and seniority; indicates when the superintendent\* determines times and presidency of Holy Communion; authorises visiting preachers (both Methodist\* and non-Methodist) to lead public worship in the circuit; and is the formal means of publication of official announcements in the circuit. (SO011(1), 498(2), 521, 561, 563(2),(5), 566(8), 566B, 570(7), 634, 685, 711(2), 743)

**Presbyter.** When used in relation to MCGB\* means a person ordained\* to a life-long ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility in the office of a presbyter in the Church of God, and admitted into Full Connexion\* with the Methodist Conference\*. (FAOC 2002b; SO700(1))

**Presidency.** The Presidency is the collaborative leadership of the President\* and Vice-President\* of the Methodist Conference.\* The Vice-President or a former President or Vice-President may exercise delegated powers from time to time in the name of the Presidency. (DU cl.29A)

**President.** The President of the Methodist Conference\* is the presbyter\* elected by the Conference to preside over its sessions, and to exercise personal *episkopé* over the Methodist Church in Great Britain until the next annual Conference. He or she is elected by ballot at the Conference preceding the year of office, during which he or she bears the title ‘President-designate’. A formal election in which the Conference members solemnly vote by rising to their feet occurs at the beginning of the Representative Session\* of the Conference, and the President takes office immediately. (SO110,110A)

**Primitive Methodist Church.** The church, connexion\* or denomination founded by Hugh Bourne, William Clowes and others after Bourne’s expulsion in 1808 from Wesleyan\* Methodism\*, for organising unauthorised religious meetings. The name ‘Primitive’ reflected a desire to be true to the original spirit and genius of John Wesley and the early Methodists\*. (Vickers, 316-21, 375-79)

**Probationer.** A person who has been admitted by the Methodist Conference\* upon probation for the ministry of a deacon\* or presbyter\* and is stationed\* by the Conference but has not yet been admitted into Full Connexion\* (DU (1)(xxviii)). This period is under the supervision of the superintendent\*, and usually lasts two years.

**Protestant Methodists.** A secession from Wesleyan\* Methodism in 1827 over the right of the Conference\* to over-rule the local Leaders’\* Meeting. The Conference supported the trustees of a chapel who wished to install an organ against the Leaders’ Meeting’s wishes; over one thousand members seceded. The Protestant Methodists became a constituent member of the United Methodist Free Churches\* in 1857. The Leaders’ Meeting, constituted by the Ministers\*, Local Preachers\*, Society Stewards\* and Class\* Leaders, was the main governance body of the local church until Church Councils\* were constituted in 1976. Only then were the responsibilities of the Leaders and the Trustees combined into one body, thereby removing the possibility of contrary decision-making. (Vickers 1988:396-8)

**Quarter-Days.** An entitlement for each minister of a break of three consecutive weekdays each quarter, if possible away from home, in addition to the 35 days holiday. (CPD:745)

**Representative Session.** The Representative Session of the Methodist Conference\* numbers 306 persons – presbyters\*, lay\* people and 14 deacons\*, either elected by the Districts\* or ex-officio members of the Conference. All presbyters who are members of the Representative Session meet in Presbyteral Session prior to the Representative Session. The Conference changes the Presidency\* after the Presbyteral Session.

**Section, Sectional, Sectionalisation.** Although ministers\* work as a team within a circuit\* (they are stationed\* in the circuit rather than being appointed to individual Local Churches\*), it is common to refer to the church or churches for which they currently are assigned specific pastoral responsibility as their

‘Section’. In this thesis, the word ‘section’ when used in this technical sense, is always, for the avoidance of doubt, capitalised. It is not in formal use in church polity. In addition to their duties as superintendent\*, almost all superintendents have their own Section in which they carry out the ordinary duties of a presbyter\*; those that do not have local *pastoral charge*\* are referred to as ‘separated’\*.

**Separated.** When a Chair\* is not *appointed to*\* any circuit\*, or a superintendent\* is not appointed as the pastor of any Local Churches\* in the circuit, he or she is referred to as ‘separated’ (i.e. separated from *pastoral charge*\*).

**Society, Societies.** The local group of Methodists\* connected with and attending one place of worship. Now more usually referred to as a Local Church\*. (DU (1)(xv))

**Society Stewards.** The lay\* people who, from the earliest days of Methodism, assisted John Wesley or his Assistant\* by administering the local Society\*, looking after the money and property. (Vickers 1988:70; Baker 1965:225-26)

**Staff Meeting.** A meeting of the ministers\* stationed\* in a circuit\*, together with lay\* workers employed by the circuit, to ‘take counsel together respecting the affairs of the Circuit’ (SO 523). Most have more than one member of staff, who may receive a stipend\* or salary, or work voluntarily. However, no formal distinction is made between those who are full-time or part-time, paid or unpaid. Staff may be ordained\* or may include lay-people who work among families, children, young people, schools or communities. In some circuits there are supernumerary\* ministers and non-Methodist ministers who are authorised by the Methodist Conference\* to serve the Methodist Church\* – usually in Local Ecumenical Partnerships. (SO732, 733, 733A)

**Standing Orders.** [‘SO’] The rules and regulations made by the Conference\* of MCGB and published in *CPD*. Under the Methodist Church Act 1976 s.9 (Great Britain 1977) they have legal force for charitable trusteeship purposes. (DUcl.19; *CPD*, 261-718)

**Station, stationed.** All ministers\* (except separated\* Chairs\*) are stationed in a circuit\* by the Conference\*. Those who are *appointed to*\* serve the circuit are allocated *pastoral charge*\* of Local Churches\*. Note that they are not stationed to Local Churches, but to circuits (SO 700,701). See also ‘Section’\*.

**Stipend.** The living allowance paid to a minister\* in lieu of his or her having to earn a salary. In MCGB\* all ministers stationed into appointments within the control of the church who are available for itinerancy\* receive the same amount in stipend, though are given extra allowances of up to 30% for additional responsibilities. A superintendent\* receives an allowance of 7½% of stipend, or in 2014, £1697 per year. (SO801; *Minutes* 2014:150)

**Superintendent.** Formally ‘Superintendent Presbyter’ or ‘Superintendent’, but often abbreviated informally to ‘Super’. The superintendent is the presbyter\*



appointed by the Methodist Conference\* to be the leading presbyter in a circuit\* (DU (1)(xxxiii)). Superintendents share the *pastoral charge*\* of the Circuit with the other presbyters *appointed to*\* the Circuit and have oversight of all the ministers and probationers\* stationed\* in the Circuit. (SO 700(9))

**Supernumerary.** In some circuits\* there are supernumerary ministers\* who have retired from 'active' work, but who are expected to continue to exercise life-long ministry in the circuit as they are able. 'Supernumeraries' are thus named because they are additional to the number of 'active' ministers. (SO700(1); 701(1); 792(1)(a))

**Tickets.** A quarterly ticket of membership ('class ticket') first issued by Wesley as a guarantee of the fidelity of a member of the Society\*. Wesley also issued 'band' tickets, for those who were in smaller, more intimate 'bands'. (Vickers 1988:25)

**'Titular' Superintendent.** This informal phrase refers to the stationing of a presbyter\* who is not appointed\* to a circuit\* to be its superintendent\*, because none of the presbyters (if any) appointed to or stationed\* in the circuit are able and willing to serve as such. The informal use of the word 'titular' is a misnomer, as the appointment is not honorary, but *de jure*. Usually such a superintendent is the District Chair\* or a superintendent in a neighbouring circuit. (SO552,785(3)(b),(4)(a))

**United Methodist Church. [GB]** The church, connexion\* or denomination formed under or pursuant to the United Methodist Church Act 1907, as a union of the Methodist New Connexion\*, the Bible Christian Church\* and the United Methodist Free Churches.\* (Vickers 1988:622-26).

**[USA]** The American church formed in 1968 from a union of the Methodist Church (USA)\* and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. (McEllhenney and Yrigoyen 2010:500)

**United Methodist Free Churches.** A denomination founded in 1857 on the union of the Protestant Methodists\* (1827), the Wesleyan Methodist Association (1836) and the Wesleyan Reform Movement (1849), which were each formed due to a desire to restrict the power of the Conference\* or the ministers\* over the societies\*. (Harrison *et al.* 1932:144-54)

**Vice-President.\*** The Vice-President of the Methodist Conference\* is the deacon\* or lay\* person elected by the Conference to preside over its sessions, and, as part of the Presidency\*, to exercise *episkopé* over the MCGB\* until the next annual Conference. He or she is elected by ballot at the Conference preceding the year of office, during which he or she bears the title 'Vice-President-designate'. A formal election in the which the Conference members solemnly vote by rising to their feet occurs at the beginning of the Representative Session\* of the Conference, and the Vice-President takes office immediately. (SO110,110A)

**Wesleyan.** The common description of the church, connexion\* or denomination founded by The Revd John Wesley in the latter end of 1739 from those who

had freely entered into connexion with him in a religious society. (Wesley and Wesley 1747)

**World Methodist Council.** [‘WMC’] The global partnership of 77 self-governing Methodist connexions (including MCGB\*), with headquarters in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. The largest partner connexion is the United Methodist Church (USA)\*. The World Methodist Council has no formal authority over individual connexions. (World Methodist Council 2013)

## Appendix 2 Questionnaire and associated ‘voices’

Question	‘Voice’
1. ‘If you were asked by someone outside the Methodist Church what (your role as / the role of) the Superintendent Minister is, what would you tell them?’	E
‘What power does a superintendent have?’	E
‘If you were to compare the church with a secular organisation, how would you describe the superintendent using secular terms?’	E
‘Here’s a list of functions a superintendent might find him or herself fulfilling: “Providing for worship”, “Encouraging evangelism”, “Helping people to think theologically”, “Developing circuit policies”, “Overseeing Discipline and good order”, “Pastoral care of the staff”, “Visitation of the churches”, “Training others”.	
‘Thinking about the role of the minister <u>as</u> superintendent rather than as a local minister, how much does this list reflect what (you / a superintendent) actually (do / does)?’	O
Can you give me an example of a time when (you or) a superintendent you have known exercised each of the functions?’	O
Do you think it’s a helpful list?	E
What’s most important?	E N
What does it miss out?	E
‘This next question is about <i>governance</i> . What do you see as the superintendent’s role in this?’	E O
‘Can you give examples of specific actions (you or) a superintendent you have known have undertaken in relation to circuit policy?’	O
‘How (do you / does a superintendent) monitor and assess the work of the circuit?’	O
‘Where do you see the executive management lying in your circuit?’	E O
‘What do you see as the superintendent’s role in this?’	E O
‘Can you give examples of specific actions (you or) a superintendent you have known have undertaken in relation to circuit strategy?’ <sup>105</sup>	O

<sup>105</sup> Answers concerning the superintendent’s approach to strategy are discussed in the section on circuit policy (3.3.1), as interviewees used the two terms interchangeably (when speaking of dynamic rather than static policies).

‘How (do you / does a superintendent) ensure that resources (human resources, money and buildings) are best deployed in the circuit?’	O
‘How is communication enabled in the circuit?’	O
‘In what ways (have you exercised leadership in the circuits where you have been the superintendent? or) has leadership been exercised by superintendents you have known?’	O
‘Thinking about superintendents you have known in the past, are there any who you would say have particularly influenced the way you think thought about the role of a superintendent?’	N
(To superintendents only) ‘To what extent have Conference statements affected the way you undertake your work as superintendent?’ (To non-superintendents only) ‘Can you give examples of the way superintendents you have known have implemented statements or policies of the Methodist Conference?’	N
‘What has empowered you in your ministry as superintendent?’	E
‘What has drained you in your ministry as superintendent?’	E
‘What do you think are the expectations other people have of superintendency?’	N
‘What do you think (the situation of this circuit / your situation / your experience) has to say about the role or function or the superintendent minister?’	E N
‘How do you think the role of the superintendent minister has changed in the past ten years?’	E N
‘And what do you think is the future of superintendency?’	E
‘How would you feel about people being ordained as superintendents?’	E
‘What would be different if a layperson were allowed to be a superintendent?’	E
‘What about the concept of Team superintendency?’	E
‘What about superintendents only doing that role, and no longer also having local churches to look after?’	E
‘Is there anything you expected to talk about, but we haven’t covered in our conversation?’	E N

## Appendix 3 Tested aspects of *WIACS*

Source	Evidence sought	Weight (score, p)
<i>WIACS</i> 3, 37	<i>WIACS</i> is being used by superintendents for encouragement and stimulation to themselves and their circuits	0
<i>WIACS</i> 5, 30	Superintendent helps the circuit to embody the means and structures for 'holiness' to assist people to grow in love for God and for the world	>0.5, 0.05
<i>WIACS</i> 5, 16, 24, 30	Superintendent helps the circuit to embody the means and structures for evangelism	>0.5, 0.05
<i>WIACS</i> 5, 16, 24, 30, SO500(1)	Superintendent helps the circuit to embody the means and structures for service to the world	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6	Superintendent helps the circuit to discern and respond to the dynamics of the Kingdom of God	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6	Superintendent is accorded the right to exercise authority by his or her colleagues	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6	Superintendent maintains order in the Local Churches	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6, 16, 24	Superintendent ensures the provision and ordering of worship and preaching	=3, 0.0001
<i>WIACS</i> 6	Superintendent ensures the organising of discipleship groups	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6	Superintendent exercises oversight of membership admittance and expulsion	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6	Superintendent oversees appointments	0
<i>WIACS</i> 6, 24	Superintendent oversees accounts	0
<i>WIACS</i> 7	Superintendent oversees preachers	> 0.5, 0.05
<i>WIACS</i> 7	Superintendent walks closely with God	>1.5, 0.05; >1, 0.005
<i>WIACS</i> 7	Superintendent understands and loves discipline	>1.5, 0.01
<i>WIACS</i> 7	Superintendent resources preachers	>1, 0.05
<i>WIACS</i> 11	Superintendent shares in and upholds conciliar oversight	>0.5, 0.05
<i>WIACS</i> 11	Superintendent shares oversight with lay officers	>1, 0.05; >0.5, 0.005
<i>WIACS</i> 12	Superintendent shares oversight with other presbyters	>1.5, 0.05; >1, 0.005
<i>WIACS</i> 12	Superintendent ensures the presbyter has a presiding role in the local church	>1.5, 0.05 >1, 0.005
<i>WIACS</i> 15	Superintendent ensures governance in the circuit is theologically informed	0
<i>WIACS</i> 15	Superintendent ensures management in the circuit is theologically informed	>0.5, 0.05
<i>WIACS</i> 15	Superintendent ensures leadership in the circuit is	>0.5, 0.05

	theologically informed	
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role as representative	>1.5, 0.05; >1, 0.0005
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role as focal point	0
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role as animator	>1, 0.05; >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role as guide	>0.5, 0.05
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role in presiding over the ministry of the word	>2, 0.05 >1.5, 0.005
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role in presiding over the ministry of the sacrament	0
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral role in presiding over the ministry of pastoral responsibility	>1, 0.01; >0.5, 0.0005
WIACS 17	Superintendent exercises presbyteral service in contexts beyond the gathered congregations	0
WIACS 18	Superintendent helps the staff meeting to take prayerful counsel together	0
WIACS 18	Superintendent uses the staff meeting for mutual support of staff	0
WIACS 18	Superintendent uses the staff meeting for mutual supervision	0
WIACS 18	Superintendent uses the staff meeting to develop vision	0
WIACS 18	Superintendent helps the CLT to articulate vision	0
WIACS 18	Superintendent helps the CLT to formulate recommendations for strategies to enact vision	0
WIACS 18, 32(g)	Superintendent helps the CLT to prepare business for Circuit Meeting and to act on its decisions (executive management)	0
WIACS 18, 32(g)	Superintendent chairs the Circuit Meeting in its role of governance and ensures governance decisions are made by relevant bodies	>1, 0.05 >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 20	Superintendent helps to define intentions of different types of gathering and ensure boundaries are not transgressed	0
WIACS 21	Power is exercised by superintendents in a way that recognises they are working with volunteers	0
WIACS 21	Circuit stewards recognise authority of superintendent, not simply an executive officer	0
WIACS 21, 22, 32(f)	Power is not exercised by superintendent in an autocratic way	>1, 0.05; >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 22	Superintendent helps lay people to accept accountability	0
WIACS 24	Superintendent provides interpretation and apologetics in the circuit	0
WIACS 24	Superintendent oversees provision of sacraments (and authorisations to preside)	>0.5, 0.05
WIACS 24, 25	Superintendent ensures discussions concerning pastoral charge take place in Circuit Meeting or its delegated body	0

WIACS 24, 32(g)	Superintendent facilitates proper organisation in the circuit for meetings to fulfil legal requirements	0
WIACS 25	Superintendent ensures ministers are resourced and supported	0
WIACS 26	Superintendent recognises own accountability	>1, 0.05; >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 27	Superintendent enables circuit staff to be accountable to the Circuit Meeting	0
WIACS 28, 30	Superintendent ensures gifts and skills of laypeople are supported and utilised (training programmes)	>2, 0.005; >1.5, 0.0005
WIACS 29	Superintendent ensures ministers are released for ministry	0
WIACS 30, 31	Superintendent helps circuit to create a strategy for worship and mission, witness and holiness	0
WIACS 30, 31	Superintendent helps circuit to create a policy for worship and mission, witness and holiness	0
WIACS 30	Superintendent helps circuit to work alongside the poor and disadvantaged	0
WIACS 30	Superintendent emphasises mission and growth, not maintenance	>1, 0.05; >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 30	Superintendent inspires the circuit in a vision to look beyond the institution to the Kingdom of God	0
WIACS 31	Superintendent creates a culture of growth and grace [inc discipline]	>2, 0.005; >1.5, 0.0005
WIACS 31	Superintendent helps the circuit to understand the communities and institutions it serves	>0.5, 0.001
WIACS 31	Superintendent helps the circuit to understand the nature and activity of God	0
WIACS 31	Superintendent enables circuit review - staffing, churches, ecumenism, demographics, church planting	>1, 0.001; >0.5, 0.0005
WIACS 31	Superintendent confronts oppressive traditions	0
WIACS 32(a), 33, 36(e)	In leadership, superintendent inspires and creates space for imagination, development of vision and sharing of ideas	>0.5, 0.01
WIACS 32(a)	In leadership, superintendent inspires implementation of ideas	0
WIACS 32(b)	In leadership, superintendent stimulates theological reflection	0
WIACS 32(b)	In leadership, superintendent helps people to learn from failure	0
WIACS 32(c)	In leadership, superintendent helps rational assessment of situations and responsible risk-taking	0
WIACS 32(d)	In leadership, superintendent ensures that colleagues enable the voice of the least and lowest to be heard	0
WIACS 32(e)	In leadership, superintendent exercises power with authority, justice and love	0
WIACS 32(f)	In leadership, superintendent challenges abusive exercise of	0

	power	
WIACS 33	In leadership, superintendent enables leadership	0
WIACS 32(g), 33	In management, superintendent co-ordinates strategies and systems to enact decisions	0
WIACS 32(g)	In management, superintendent sets up systems to review Circuit Meeting decisions	0
WIACS 32(i)	In management, superintendent helps deacons and lay workers to exercise their roles	0
WIACS 32(j)	In management, superintendent ensures induction, supervision, support and assessment of probationers	>0.5, 0.05
WIACS 32(k)	In management, superintendent ensures appropriate and adequate supervision of colleagues in professional practice	0
WIACS 32(l)	In governance, superintendent ensures that schedules are completed	>0.5, 0.05
WIACS 32(l); 520(2)	In governance, superintendent ensures that Standing Orders are followed	0
WIACS 32(m)	In governance, superintendent ensures that information is co-ordinated to enable the whole circuit to participate in Circuit Meeting processes	>2, 0.05 >1.5, 0.0005
WIACS 32(n)	In governance, superintendent enables the Circuit Meeting to formulate policies	0
WIACS 32(o)	In governance, superintendent ensures that the Circuit Meeting holds itself accountable to its local churches and the wider connexion	>1, 0.01 >0.5, 0.0005
WIACS 32(p)	In governance, superintendent ensures that the circuit adheres to and fulfils its purposes	>2, 0.05 >1.5, 0.001 >1, 0.0005
SO 500(1), 32(h)	Superintendent ensures effective deployment of people, property and finance in relation to churches of the circuit	0
SO 500(1), 32(h)	Superintendent ensures effective deployment of people, property and finance in relation to churches of other denominations and ecumenical work	0
SO 500(1), 32(h)	Superintendent ensures effective deployment of people, property and finance in relation to local communities	0
WIACS 32(q)	In oversight, superintendent models in practice the values, rules and regulations of the Methodist Church	> 1, 0.05 >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 32(r)	In oversight, superintendent helps the people in the Circuit to understand ministerial role and its stresses	>0.5, 0.005
WIACS 32(s)	In oversight, superintendent helps colleagues to discern unrealistic and irrelevant priorities of the members and churches	0
WIACS 32(s)	In oversight, superintendent helps colleagues to take steps of faith in new missionary opportunities	0
WIACS 32(t), 36(e)	In oversight, superintendent helps colleagues in their own spirituality and theological reflection	0



WIACS 33, 36(d)	Superintendent exercises representative role of circuit to ecumenical partners	>1, 0.05 >0.5, 0.01
WIACS 33	Superintendent exercise representative role of circuit to district	0
WIACS 33	Superintendent exercises representative role of district to circuit	0
WIACS 33	Superintendent exercises representative role of circuit to wider connexion	0
WIACS 33	Superintendent exercises representative role of wider connexion to circuit	0
WIACS 34	Superintendent allocates time to superintendency	0
WIACS 34	Circuit provides adequate administrative support for the superintendent	0
WIACS 35	There is no evidence of a prevailing autocratic male-dominated model of superintendency	>1, 0.05 >0.5, 0.005
WIACS 35	Superintendent delegates	0
WIACS 36(a)	Superintendent is theologically and spiritually aware	>0.5, 0.05
WIACS 36(b)	Superintendent is highly sensitive to the way he or she interacts with others	0
WIACS 36(c)	Superintendent is able to negotiate collaborative working and mutual accountability	0
WIACS 36(d)	Superintendent is adept at promoting inclusiveness in terms of multi-ethnicity and disability	0
WIACS 36(d)	Superintendent is adept at promoting interdisciplinary working	0
WIACS 36(e)	Superintendent creates space for creativity, sensitivity and awareness within agencies in the wider community	0
WIACS 36(e)	Superintendent creates space for creativity, sensitivity and awareness within the circuit	>0.5, 0.005
WIACS 36(e)	Superintendent shares theological reflection with the circuit	0
WIACS 36(e)	Superintendent shares theological reflection with the agencies in the wider community	0
WIACS 37	The expectations of people are not inhibiting the superintendent's fulfilment of their responsibilities	0
WIACS 37	Superintendent receives support	>0.5, 0.05
WIACS 37	Superintendent has attended ongoing training	>1, 0.005 >0.5, 0.0005
WIACS 37	Superintendent accepts staff meeting supervision	0
WIACS 37	Superintendent does not feel guilty	0
SO 524	Superintendent enables systematic preaching of 'our doctrines'	0
SO 521(1)	Superintendent makes preaching Plan	0
SO 564	Superintendent interviews candidates for preaching	0

SO 710 (3)(a)	Superintendent assesses doctrinal fidelity of candidates for ordination	0
SO 542(2), 782(1)	Superintendent fills in stationing forms	>1, 0.05 >0.5,0.0005
SO 920; 928	Superintendent gives consent for non-Methodist worship on church premises	0
SO 522	Superintendent undertakes Visitation of the churches	0
SO 502	Superintendent chairs meetings	>0.5, 0.05
SO 012(4), 015, 502, 903, s.94, s.95, 965(3)	Superintendent oversees property and finance	>0.5, 0.05
SO 725(4)(a)	Superintendent reports on probationers	>0.5, 0.05
SO 760(2)	Superintendent is involved in advisory committee for ministerial resignations	0
SO 358	Superintendent makes statistical returns	>2, 0.05 >1.5,0.0005
SO 743	Superintendent undertakes staff mentoring	0
SO 802	Superintendent oversees chaplaincy time and fees	0
CPD p.733- 35	Superintendent oversees Safeguarding	>0.5, 0.05
SO 1104, 1105, 1110, 1150	Superintendent has appropriately engaged in Complaints and Discipline	0
Handbook	Superintendent oversees and encourages Local Ecumenical Partnerships	0
Handbook	Superintendent oversees and resources staff holidays and sabbaticals	0
Handbook	Superintendent invites district officers to preach	0
SO 513	Superintendent helps Circuit Meeting to ensure it is representative	0
SO 050	Superintendent liaises with Methodist school chaplains	0
SO 523	Superintendent arranges frequent staff meetings	>0.5, 0.005

## Appendix 4 Theses on District Superintendents

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This Appendix lists theses on the role of the District Superintendent, which have not been included in the bibliography, as they have been noted but discounted on the grounds of the DS being a different ministry from that of the British superintendent. Note that this list includes a Wesleyan Church resource.

- Bailey, Paul C. *From grief to greeting: supervising the pastor-parish relations committee and pastor through termination and start up*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- DeMore, Philip D. *Modeling grace: the district superintendent's role in promoting health/wellness for clergy and the church*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- Gómez, Roberto L. *The district superintendent as spiritual leader*, Perkins School of Theology Southern Methodist University, 1989.
- Heisley-Cato, Deborah Joyce. *Effective use of the office of the district superintendent to encourage healthy disciple-making churches*, Wesley Theological Seminary, 2008.
- Isaman, Ronald V. *Identifying and promoting effective spiritual leadership through the role of district superintendent in the Northeast Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church*, Asbury Theological Seminary DMin Theses, 2005.
- Kammerer, Charlene P. *The spiritual life of the district superintendent: barometer of vitality for the denomination*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- Matthews, Eugene W. *The district superintendency, bond of denominational renewal: a mission statement as a catalyst for church renewal and vitalization*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- McMillan, Bobby J. *The desk extends to the pulpit and the altar: a pastoral and priestly model for superintending*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- Morrison, Martha V. *The district superintendent as catalyst for prophetic ministries*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- Reed, James R. *The pastoral role of the United Methodist District Superintendent*, Phillips Theological Seminary, 1998.
- Tomlinson, K. Edward *Sowing the seed, anticipate the harvest: the district superintendent as church planter*, United Theological Seminary, OH, 1991.
- Vermilya, James P. *The role of the district superintendent in the Wesleyan Church*, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of Trinity International University, 1998.

## Appendix 5 Comparative texts of TNOO and WIACS

The Nature of Oversight, §§1.11-1.13	WIACS, §32
Leadership is the set of interactions through which	Superintendents have a responsibility in terms of leadership
people are inspired to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision, and are empowered to share their ideas and act upon them;	to inspire people, lay and ordained, to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision by empowering them to share their ideas and act upon them;
the content of that developing vision is articulated and considered	to encourage and enable colleagues and others to discern the work of God by stimulating theological reflection and helping people to see that they can learn from failure as well as from success;
action is initiated and people encouraged to follow	
examples are provided of taking risks, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and a commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the action to be undertaken;	to provide examples of taking risks, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and a commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the action to be undertaken;
guidance is given about what actions are likely to entail unwarranted risk and contravene Christian principles or the law (or both)	[see ' <b>challenging, guiding and advising</b> ' below]
models are provided of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love'.	to provide models of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love;
	to ensure that colleagues enable the voice of the least and lowest to be heard and the poor and disadvantaged to be included; to challenge colleagues and other who exercise power in other ways.
Management is the process by which	In terms of management they have a responsibility:
specific strategies are formulated for enacting the organisation's policies and fulfilling its purposes	<b>to ensure that</b> after governance decisions are made by the relevant bodies (e.g. the Circuit Meeting) appropriate people, systems and strategies are set in place to enact them,

	<b>to ensure that</b> the circuit adheres to and fulfils its purposes
monitoring and assessing the fulfilment of those purposes	and proper processes established to review them;
particular objectives are set concerning the implementation of those strategies; human, financial, capital (e.g. investments and buildings) and technological resources are deployed to achieve those objectives	to ensure that human, financial, capital (e.g. investments and buildings) and technological resources are deployed to fulfil the particular objectives set for the implementation of those strategies;
	to help any other presbyters appointed to and stationed in the circuit to fulfil their presbyteral role to the best of their ability and similarly, where appropriate, to help any deacons and lay workers in the circuit to exercise their roles; to ensure that any probationers in the circuit are appropriately inducted into the exercise of public ministry, and properly supervised, supported and assessed;
the performance of individuals and groups in meeting the objectives is monitored and assessed.	to ensure that colleagues are appropriately and adequately supervised in their professional practice; to embody in their practice to the best of their ability the values, rules and regulations of the Methodist Church, and thereby to provide a model for colleagues and the circuit;
Governance is the exercise of formal authority in: setting parameters for the implementation of those policies	In terms of governance they have a responsibility:
formulating and adopting the principal purposes and policies of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit	to enable the Circuit Meeting to formulate policies under the guidance of the Spirit, <b>challenging, guiding and advising it as appropriate</b> ; to ensure that information is co-ordinated and thereby enable the whole circuit to participate in the processes that lead to the Circuit Meeting making policies;
making rules and regulations for the organisation;	to ensure that all schedules and other tasks required by Standing Orders are completed;
ensuring that the organisation complies with both its internal regulations (e.g.	to ensure that the Circuit Meeting holds itself accountable to churches in the

Standing Orders, doctrinal standards) and external legislation (e.g. accounting rules, Charity law, data protection).	circuit and to the wider connexion;
Oversight is the process of reflecting on experience in order to discern the presence and activity of God in the world. It includes elements of:	In terms of general oversight or pastoral charge they have a responsibility:
caring for an individual, a group of people or an organisation as a whole body; reviewing the life and work of the individual, group or organisation and seeing how the parts of it fit into the whole ensuring that both the parts and the whole flourish and fulfil their purposes;	to help the people in the circuit to develop an understanding of the proper role of presbyters (and, where appropriate, of deacons and lay-people) and of the stresses and strains which it might entail;
seeking to catch a vision of what God might require of an individual, a group, the Church or the world, and to proclaim that prophetically; developing plans for how that vision might be enacted; taking the decisions necessary to begin to implement those plans;	to help colleagues to discern which expectations or priorities of members and churches are unrealistic or irrelevant and thereby help to liberate people from them so that they can take imaginative steps of faith in the light of new missionary opportunities;
reviewing progress regularly, reflecting on it prayerfully in the light of the word of God, offering it all to God and receiving it back from God transformed in worship	to help colleagues to inspire confidence in the Gospel of grace through their own spirituality of prayer, confidence, enthusiasm, happiness, and vulnerability and through their Bible study and theological reflection.

## Appendix 6 Ethical Approval and Interviewee Consent

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I present here an edited version of my ethical approval form, which includes the question schedule, a participants' information sheet, and a sample consent form

**Title of project:** 'The British Methodist Superintendent Minister: A study of personal oversight, with a particular focus on the Circuits of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District'.

**Proposed means of publication:** Doctoral thesis

**Aim of the project:** To ascertain whether the practice of Superintendency actually matches the theory and theological metanarrative, and to what extent it is responding effectively to the contemporary situation of the Methodist Church.

**Please state who has conducted an expert independent review of your proposed project, and his/her verdict.** Prof Paul Murray – approved.

**Design of study and methodology, in brief:** Research will be by interview. Superintendents and their colleagues will generally be interviewed alone, using semi-structured questions; lay officers will be interviewed in pairs or small groups. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

### **Participants:**

**Who are they?** Ministers, lay employees and Circuit Stewards.

**How many?** Around 80.

**Selection:** Adults of both genders, mainly over 40 years old.

**How are the participants to be recruited?** By the office they hold. All Superintendents in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District will be interviewed, plus one staff colleague and at least two Circuit Stewards from each circuit. Pilot and supplementary studies will include similar office-holders from elsewhere. A telephone call will initially be made to ask for consent to being interviewed for the research.

**Is there any link with the investigator?** Some are former colleagues.

**How are the participants to be involved in the study?** They will be interviewed concerning their views on the office and role of a Superintendent Minister.

**What research tools do you plan to use?** Interview.

**What discomfort, danger or interference with normal activities will be suffered by the participant, if any?** The participants will be asked to give a maximum of two hours of their time.

**State precautions to minimise them:** The interviews will aim for one hour length.

**State special arrangements for indemnification in the event of injury or non-negligent harm to the participants.** Interviews only.

**What benefit (e.g. in terms of increased knowledge) is it hoped will arise from the work?** An understanding of how practitioners and their colleagues view the

work of a Superintendent minister. No doctoral level research has previously been carried out.

**Has statistical advice been sought on study design?** Yes

**From whom?** Dr Mathew Guest

**Please describe the statistical/other rationale for the sample size/number of participants to be used in this study and how the study size will yield meaningful research results.** The sample is a case study which thereby dictates its size. Analysis of sampling error has been undertaken to determine that the results would be generalisable, as the sample falls within the required standard error if it had been randomly selected from the entire population.

### **Consent**

**Who will explain the investigation to the participant?** The investigator.

**Will written explanation be given to the participant as a summary of the project written in layman's language?** Yes

**Will written consent be obtained?** Yes

**How and where will consent be recorded?** On a form. All forms will be kept with the project documentation.

### **Confidentiality**

**Please indicate what steps will be taken to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant's records, and confirm that the requirements of the Data Protection Acts will be complied with.**

Participants will be identified by case number. Some individual participants may be identifiable by reference to publicly available directories, but comments will remain confidential to the investigator.

**Will tape or video recordings and any written transcriptions from these be destroyed at the end of the project?** No

**If NO, what further use do you intend to make of the recordings and what arrangements will be made for their secure storage?** The recordings will be anonymised, and I will retain them for the use of any future bona fide researcher.

**Will consent be requested for this future use?** Yes

### **Project Duration**

**When do you hope to commence the project?** Early 2011

**When will the project finish and how long will it take to complete?** 2013 – two years.

**Where appropriate, please state the source of funding for the work.** Some funding from The Methodist Church



## Appendix 7 Participant Consent Form

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**TITLE OF PROJECT:** The British Methodist Superintendent Minister

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

*Please cross out*

*as necessary*

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES / NO

Who have you spoken to? Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Prof./The Revd .....

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

\* at any time and

\* without having to give a reason for withdrawing YES / NO

Do you understand that any recordings made of your conversation with the researcher will remain absolutely confidential to the researcher and his supervisors and examiners, and will be deleted at the end of the period of research? YES / NO

Do you consent to your conversation being recorded?

YES / NO

**Signed** ..... **Date** .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....

## Appendix 8 Participant Information Sheet

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**TITLE OF PROJECT:** The British Methodist Superintendent Minister

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project!**

The research is being undertaken by me, The Revd Neil Cockling, in my capacity as a doctoral student at the Department of Theology. I have been a Methodist Minister since 1989, I was a Superintendent Minister for 11 years, and I currently serve as District Development Enabler for the Newcastle-upon-Tyne District of the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

The Methodist Church is changing – and so is the role of the Superintendent Minister. The purpose of this research is to make a contribution to the thinking of the wider church as to the future role of Superintendents. Your views are valuable for this thinking, and you are being included so that as wide a range of people as possible have been consulted.

Please note that all identities of participants will remain totally confidential to the researcher. If your views are quoted in the text of the thesis, you will be identified by a number, and your circuit will be identified by a letter. Neither you, nor your circuit, will be identified by name, in the final thesis.

It's really helpful if a recording can be made of the conversation. It means that the conversation can flow without my needing to write too many notes. It also means that I can listen again to anything you say that it's important to hear – and so that I can quote your exact words rather than a half-remembered summary. I'm therefore asking for your permission for this to happen. The only people who will listen to the recordings are academics in a carefully controlled setting, and I will personally look after the recordings and restrict access to them. You won't be identifiable by name from the recordings.

Once again, my thanks for your participation in this research – and your contribution to the future thinking of the church.

**My contact details are as follows:** The Revd Neil Cockling [Home Address] [Home telephone number] [Personal email]

**If you have any concerns following this conversation, please contact my main supervisor, Prof Paul Murray, at** Department of Theology and Religion [Address] [Email]

**Approved by University of Durham Theology and Religion  
Departmental Ethics Committee**

## Appendix 9 Interview Schedule

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Q1. If you were asked by someone outside the Methodist Church what (your role as / the role of) the Superintendent Minister is, what would you tell them?  
What power does a superintendent have? [How would you compare the role with a secular organisation?]

Q2. Here's a list of functions a Superintendent might find him or herself fulfilling. [A card contains the following list: *Providing for worship; Encouraging evangelism; Helping people to think theologically; Developing circuit policies; Overseeing Discipline and good order; Pastoral care of the staff; Visitation of the churches; Training others.*]  
Thinking about the role of the minister as Superintendent rather than as a local minister, how much does this list reflect what (you/a Superintendent) actually (do/does)? Do you think it's a helpful list? What's most important? What does it miss out? Can you give me an example of a time when (you / a Superintendent you have known) exercised each of the functions?

Q3. This next question is about *governance*. The Methodist Church understands *governance* as the making of policy for the church and the implementation of those policies. What do you see as the Superintendent's role in this? Can you give examples of specific actions (you / a Superintendent you have known has) have undertaken in relation to circuit policy? How (do you / does a Superintendent) monitor and assess the work of the Circuit?

Q4. This next question is about *management*. The Methodist Church understands *management* as formulating strategies to make sure that policies are enacted and purposes are fulfilled. Where do you see the executive management lying in your circuit? What do you see as the Superintendent's role in this? Can you give examples of specific actions (you have / a Superintendent you have known has) undertaken in relation to circuit strategy? How (do you / does a Superintendent) ensure that resources (human resources, money and buildings) are best deployed in the circuit? How is communication enabled in the circuit?

Q5. This next question is about *leadership*. In what ways (have you exercised leadership in the circuits where you have been the superintendent? / has leadership been exercised by superintendents you have known? Can you give examples of specific actions (you have / a Superintendent you have known has) undertaken in relation to circuit strategy?

Q6. This next question is about how you have been influenced in your thinking about the role of a superintendent. Thinking about superintendents you have known in the past, are there any who you would say have particularly influenced the way you think thought about the role of a superintendent? [(To superintendents only) To what extent have Conference statements affected the way you undertake your work as Superintendent?] [(To non-superintendents only) Can you give examples of the way superintendents you have known have implemented statements or policies of the Methodist Conference?] [(To superintendents only) What has empowered you in your ministry as Superintendent? What has drained you in your ministry as Superintendent?] What do you think are the expectations other people have of superintendency?

Q7. I'm particularly interested in your view of Superintendency because ...

- There is a co-superintendency
- It is an ecumenical area with an Area President and a separate superintendent

Or you

- Are an Anglican minister
- Are a United Reformed minister
- Are a District Chair
- Are a Lay worker
- Are a supernumerary minister

What do you think (the situation of this circuit / your situation /your experience) has to say about the role or function of the superintendent minister?

Q8. How do you think the role of the superintendent minister has changed in the past ten years? And what do you think is the future of superintendency?  
How would you feel about people being ordained as superintendents?  
What would be different if a layperson were allowed to be a superintendent?  
What about the concept of Team superintendency?  
What about superintendents only doing that role, and no longer also having local churches to look after?

Q9. Do you have anything else to say about superintendency that you haven't had the chance to tell me so far?

## Appendix 10 Ἐπισκοπή in Scripture

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Both the Septuagint<sup>106</sup> and New Testament use the word ἐπισκοπή (Beyer 1964): my taxonomy here suggests increasingly-close oversight.

Firstly, ἐπισκοπή is used to speak of *personal oversight* exercised through an *office*. It is used to speak of the *role of overseeing* (Numbers 4:27).<sup>107</sup> Eleazar's role was overseeing sanctuary care: the tabernacle (Numbers 4:16b), its equipment (4:16a), and the Levites' work (3:32). Peter uses Psalm 109:8 to speak of Judas' *leadership responsibility* (Acts 1:20): the KJV translates ἐπισκοπήν as 'bishoprick'; Wesley as 'apostleship'.<sup>108</sup> Paul (1Timothy 3:1) uses ἐπισκοπῆς to speak of an *office*: variously translated as 'bishop' (D-R; KJV; NKJV; ASV; GW) 'overseer' (ESV; NASB; NIV), 'elder' (NLT; ISV), and 'supervisor' (CEB).<sup>109</sup> Beyer (1964:615) notes that in the early church, ἐπίσκοποι is only used to speak of the leaders of settled congregations.

Secondly, ἐπισκοπή speaks of the *general role of the officer: keeping watch*. Ἐπισκοπή shares with ἐπισκέπτομαι (a later form of ἐπισκοπέω) the root σκεπ-. Beyer (1964:600) argues that whereas ἐπισκέπτομαι is a single act of looking or consideration, ἐπισκοπέω refers to 'continuing and careful scrutiny'. It could be self-scrutiny. The Greeks spoke of the gods looking down in protective blessing. Peter speaks of the 'ἐπίσκοπον of your souls' (1Peter 2:25).

Thirdly, closer watch entails *visiting* to inspect. The Septuagint translators used ἐπισκοπή to translate *pqd*. Its basic meaning is 'to visit', but it could also mean 'to

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<sup>106</sup> Maddox (2011:16-17) helpfully indicates Wesley's emphasis on the value of the Old Testament and its intertextuality with the New Testament.

<sup>107</sup> Beyer (1964:603) argues this might be the source of the word's use in the early church.

<sup>108</sup> This use in Wesley (1976) (Acts 1:20), but in Wesley (1988b:92) he uses the word 'Bishop'.

<sup>109</sup> I note the translators' debt to their ecclesiological tradition – episcopalian (D-R; KJV) or congregationalist (NLT; ISV).

worry about’, ‘to look upon something with concern or interest’, ‘to attend to with care’, ‘to undertake extensive oversight’, ‘to inspect, correct’ and ‘to arrange’.<sup>110</sup> The Greeks spoke of such inspection by a king, a supervisor, or a doctor. Visitation could show concern or offer help: as in Acts 7:23 (Moses visiting the Israelites) or 15:36 (Paul and Barnabas visiting the churches). Beyer (1964:601) notes that the Septuagint translators used ἐπισκοπή to speak of a shepherd’s care: of counting and noting absence or needs.<sup>111</sup> Hence Peter’s ‘*shepherd* and ἐπίσκοπον of your souls’ (1Peter 2:25).<sup>112</sup>

Fourthly, an inspector exercises *judgement*. The translators thus used this Greek religious term to speak of God’s visitation for judgement – for punishment in Numbers 16:29; Isaiah 10:3; 10:15; 11:23, 23:12, 48:44 [LXX 31:44], 51:18 [LXX 28:18], 46:21 [LXX 26:21], 50:27 [LXX 27:27]; Hosea 9:7; and Micah 7:4. Jesus links God’s visitation in this way with his own coming to Jerusalem – Luke 19:44. Yet God also brings blessing for the righteous (1Peter 2:12).

Fifthly, the inspector *responds*. God visits to care and provide for Job (Job 10:12). Meeting practical needs was offered by those with oversight of the tabernacle’s external frame (Numbers 3:35-6), as Temple guards (2Kings 11:18); for priestly duties (1Chronicles 24:3, 19; 2Chronicles 23:18); to oversight of a region (1Chronicles 26:30) or city (Ezekiel 9:1); as gatekeepers to the sanctuary and sacrificial slaughterers (Ezekiel 44:11); and as royal accountants (2Chronicles 24:11): ἐπισκέψασθε refers to the provisions or equipment stored (Numbers 4:32).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Schottroff (1997:1019) lists extensive scholarship. It is beyond this thesis’ scope to examine the root in depth: Speiser (1958:21) notes, “there is probably no other Hebrew verb that has caused translators as much trouble as *pqd*” (Williams 1997).

<sup>111</sup> Jeremiah 23:2; Zechariah 11:16, Ezekiel 34:11-12; 2Chronicles 24:6.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Ἐπίσκεψιν refers to a group of people being overseen (1Chronicles 23:11).

<sup>113</sup> I note that Hellenistic writings contemporary with LXX use the word ἐπίσκοπος to describe the treasurer of cultic organisations (Hatch 1881:26-30, 36-37; Brown 1971:37, n.22).

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