

# ***Mission Team Life***

***Transformative discipleship***

***and***

***leadership development in context***

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology

by Ian Geoffrey Silk

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The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

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*Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.*

Romans 16:15

My prayer is that this study will be an inspiration to many to live a *mission team life*.

Ian Silk

## **Mission team life: transformative discipleship and leadership development in context**

### ***Abstract***

Mission team life - the lived experience of missioning together that is given shape and meaning through relationships, practices, processes and values - is a social reality and modus operandi whose transformational potential has been largely unrecognised. The way discipleship is currently being reimagined for churches is impoverished by this lack of recognition. This study investigates the shape of mission team life in lived experience and its impact on those who participate in it.

Using qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviewing, thematic analysis, theological reflection and poetic reframing I draw on the life-stories of thirteen mission leaders in a variety of local contexts to explore both the constituent elements and the overall character of mission team life. As a reflective practitioner and facilitator of mission teams I bring my own experience to the interpretation of their narratives.

I demonstrate that mission team life comprises six interweaving relational dynamics: synergia (co-working), koinonia (the sharing of lives), diakonia (serving), pneumatika (spiritual practices), mathemata (lessons learned) and euremata (attending to surprise discoveries). The character of the whole is relational, complex, chaordic, adventuresome and Spirit-filled. Such life together is a way of discipleship in which vocations are mutually discerned and leadership emerges in context.

An understanding of the dynamics and character of mission team life can equip the Church's theological imagination in vital areas. This research addresses debilitating dichotomies highlighted or implied in recent official reports through a robust conceptualisation of discipleship and an account of practice based in lived experience. Reflective practitioners whose values in ministry are formed through mission team living demonstrate an understanding of collaboration, compassion, hospitality, spirituality, co-empowerment and prophetic imagination. When these qualities also become the hallmark of the mission teams they lead the result can be a way of discipleship that is both imaginative and transformative.

My conceptualisation of the relational dynamics of mission team life is thus a fresh paradigm, offering to churches, missions and the academy a way of seeing, understanding and living a transformative discipleship rich in spirituality, synergy, community, ministries and leadership potential.

## Summary of portfolio

My University of Chester DProf research journey took place from 2010 to 2021. At the outset I wanted to develop new skills in research as a reflective practitioner and produce an original piece of work that would be interdisciplinary in nature, within the field of leadership and teamwork in Christian mission, that I could use in teaching, training and mentoring. Over the course of the DProf programme I built an informal research network of practitioners, theological educators and writers, including colleagues in the overlapping cohorts on the course. This learning community provided an excellent matrix for my studies.

In my DProf Part 1 literature review I surveyed mission teams in Scripture, history and contemporary practice, identifying recurring themes and common threads. This led to initial reflections on what a practical theology of mission teamwork might look like. I suggested three lines of approach: a broad categorisation of types of mission team in contemporary settings, an enquiry into the dynamics of a spirituality of mission relationships, and a study of how 'mission' might be creating 'church'.

My publishable article *Putting the Angel back into Evangelism: How can we Reimagine Evangelists as Good News People?* used the metaphor of the angel to examine perceptions of the ministry of evangelism in today's world. I argued that evangelists need to let the spiritual show, be storytellers, live beautiful lives, practise hospitality, and be links between heaven and earth. I concluded the paper by listing ideas for training evangelists based on these observations.

My Reflection on Practice paper drew upon the metaphor of weaving to explore my professional development through different seasons of mission teamwork. My overlapping roles – participant in community, teacher, evangelist, pastor, leader – suggested warp threads that remained stretched out through these different phases of activity represented by the accumulation of weft threads.

Building on these studies I submitted a research proposal that would enable me to investigate the lived experience of mission teams. My aim was to help practitioners and theological educators grasp the significance of mission team life for the growth of healthy teams and effective church communities. My research proposal received ethical approval.

Throughout the DProf course I have continued to develop the strands of my thinking represented in these discrete exercises. I have experimented with the practical application of these themes through lecture courses, reflective group exercises and informal reciprocal mentoring.

# Introduction

## Mission team life: treasure in the field

*A Life Together, listened to and heard –*

*For not to live together – how absurd.*

*A mission has emerged that resonates.*

### A fresh paradigm

This project is an investigation into the nature and character of mission team life. Mission team life is a puzzle. You can be in it without realising it. It can change the direction of your life. But what is it? This enigmatic but important aspect of Christian discipleship has hitherto not been the subject of a study in its own right.

Mission team life exists in the New Testament: it is a social reality and modus operandi for Jesus and Paul and their friends. It can be glimpsed in history in the journals of missionaries and in accounts of churches serving their local communities. However, the temptation to view mission team living as taking place in faraway times or faraway places is a strong one. Is the life of Christian discipleship currently being reimagined without this vital dimension? What would mission team life look like and feel like in today's world?

My thesis maps the contours of a landscape that I and others have found ourselves journeying through. I present mission team life as a fresh paradigm, offering to both churches and missions a framework for understanding and living a dynamic, transformative way of discipleship. I show that reflective practitioners whose values are formed through mission team living demonstrate an understanding of collaboration, compassion, hospitality, spirituality, co-empowerment and prophetic imagination that energises and sustains the mission teams they facilitate: a shared journey of discipleship is made real in the life of the Church. Mission team life can be discovered and claimed. There is treasure in the field.

## **Project prompts**

Promptings in four areas led to this study - in my own professional practice, academic prompts, journalistic reflections on teamwork and leadership, and the somewhat anxious debates in the Church on the nature of mission, ministry and discipleship.

### **A prompt from my own professional practice**

My professional practice has taken shape both through the teaching of English to adult international students and in a variety of roles in ordained ministry.

For me mission team life has been an exciting voyage of discovery while taking part in all sorts of mission teams over the years – student teams, parish mission teams, church staff teams endeavouring to live a life of mission together, events teams large and small, a cathedral team, a diocesan team, ecumenical teams, teams containing a variety of nationalities, at home and abroad. I have realised that I have a passion for being in and co-creating environments in which mission teams can be revealed, assembled and live a mission team life: praying and working together, sharing as human beings, serving, learning, discovering. Placement students from ministry training courses sometimes came to spend time in the parish where I was vicar for over twenty years. I would encourage them to accompany the mission teams involved with our charity shop, preschool, care homes, sports activities and schools outreach and ask them to tell me what they had experienced. Their reports would often describe a quality which I now call mission team life – elusive and yet concrete at the same time: in the words of 1 John 1:1: “That which we have seen with our eyes and our hands have touched.”

But what are the contours of such a life? And how can it best be nurtured and developed?

### **An academic prompt**

My academic background is that of a classicist and theologian. I value an interdisciplinary approach to academic enquiry and am committed to lifelong learning.

My Literature Review for the Chester DProf Part 1 explored *Mission Teams in Scripture, history and contemporary practice*. I had wanted to scratch an itch: my unease with the way theological tradition could so easily portray a mission team leader such as the apostle Paul as a superhero rather than as a human being among friends and associates, living with them a mission team life. In this literature review I explored resonances between the accounts of teamwork in Scripture and in the later history of missions and began to identify such dynamics as *synergia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*: co-working, sharing life together, serving. I started the DProf Part 2 with the itch half-scratched: I wanted to be in pursuit of other possible resonances. What are the *dynamics* of mission team life today? Could I argue for its *transformative* character in the lives of participants? Could there be a *spirituality* of mission team life? What sort of *leadership* might be emerging in such lived experience? I find in the discipline of Practical Theology the necessary tools for such an investigation:

Theology is thoroughly practical, or practice-oriented. Practice is the living resource by which Christians become the bearers of inherited tradition through the outworkings of everyday discipleship. Theological discourse is the guardian and critic of faithful practice; a rich depository of stories, rules of life, values and visions by which people can faithfully order their lives (individually, collectively) under God (Bennett, Graham et al, 2018, pp. 77-8).

### **A societal prompt**

A third prompt for the project comes from journalistic commentary on leadership and teamwork in contemporary society. A disabling sense of loss of team is communicated by a health professional in this account:

Junior doctors feel increasingly like shift workers... In a pressurised, unforgiving hospital environment in which no one really knows you, and you don't know them, it's easy for young doctors to feel cut adrift. "Where are your teams?... You all seem as though you're just going from one crisis to another" (Clarke, 2017, p. 52).

The perception is that ‘tight-knit teams’ and ‘comrades-in-arms’ are what is missing: a mission team life. Such accounts of dislocation, dysfunction and dis-ease reveal a desire for greater humanity and deeper community. A contrasting account bears this out. When Liverpool Football Club won the English Premier League in 2020 by a huge points margin, commentators uncovered significant values in teamwork and team life: “the importance of the collective. The concept of togetherness” (Reddy, 2020, p. 84) and “no separation between the players and staff or between the groundsmen, cleaners or coaches – everyone is important” (p. 85). “Who I am is bound up with who we are” (Marshall, 2019, p. 25).

### **A prompt from contemporary experience of mission and church**

It is sometimes said that the people who benefit most when a team is engaged in Christian mission are not so much the people being missioned to as the people in the mission team itself. If this is so, how can these benefits be described? Assuming we are not just talking about superficial virtue-signalling or mission tourism, can we discover practices and values in the lived experience of missioning which have the power to influence personal development over time in the lives of mission team members? What processes of transformation are going on behind observable phenomena and how are these processes influencing the shape of discipleship?

This positive view of discipleship development for some exists against a sometimes-voiced background of dissatisfaction at a lack of reality in discipleship for others. “It is now commonplace to hear church leaders and theologians in the West calling for a renewed focus on “discipleship.” There appears to be a corporate sense that the church has failed in some way in this area” (Peppiatt, 2012, p. xiii); “When churches... become absorbed with function rather than learning how to belong together, then those who struggle with the church find themselves looking for the exit door” (Stockitt & Dawson, 2020, p. 19). Why is there a lack of momentum and transformational impact in mainstream organised congregational Christianity? Is creeping managerialism threatening to cut off mission from the very lived experience in which mission is made real? It seems that ‘discipleship’ and ‘leadership’ can become ships without moorings, adrift on an ocean of transient programmes and initiatives; and the legacy of disappointment has left a deep wound in the

soul of the Church. I have felt these things deeply in my professional practice. I think I have also glimpsed something impossibly different and aching real – a landscape of multifaceted teams-in-mission: local churches and intentional communities in a missional terrain far more varied and exciting than previous approaches may have allowed for. As Stanley Grenz observes:

The Enlightenment fascination with individualism led thinkers in the modern era to place the community dimension of the church's mandate on the periphery. However, the waning of the focus on individualism in recent years has sparked a renewal of interest in the concept (Grenz, 1994, p. 498).

Where is the life to be lived that includes a radical encounter both with God and with one another?

## **Mission, team and life: clarifying terms**

The term *mission team life* is my own. Each of its three elements is capable of a range of definition.

### ***Mission team life***

What exactly is Christian mission? For David Bosch mission must not be defined “too sharply and too self-confidently. Ultimately, mission remains undefinable... the most we can hope for is to formulate some *approximations* of what mission is all about” (Bosch, 1991, p. 9). In this project I use ‘mission’ and ‘missions’ in the way Bosch describes in his *interim definition*:

We have to distinguish between *mission* (singular) and *missions* (plural)... *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people. *Missions* (*the missiones ecclesiae*: the missionary ventures of the church), refer to particular forms, related to specific times, places or needs, of participation in the *missio Dei* (p. 10).

Is there a distinction between 'home' and 'overseas' mission? Bosch helpfully points out that theologically speaking, 'foreign missions' is not a separate entity: "The difference between home and foreign missions is not one of principle but of scope" (pp. 9-10). This is important for my project as I look to identify general principles for mission team life rather than features specific to a particular field or type of mission. I also agree with Bosch's assertion that mission includes evangelism as "one of its essential dimensions" (p. 10). My own working definition of mission is *the movement whereby the good news of God in Christ is announced, embodied and enacted in lived experience*. This includes an important ecclesiological-eschatological dimension:

The Church-in-mission... [as] sacrament and sign... is challenged to be God's experimental garden on earth, a fragment of the reign of God, having "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23) as a pledge of what is to come (2 Cor 1:22) (Bosch, p. 11).

Bosch's horticultural metaphor invites the encounter with mission team life that this project explores.

### **Mission team life**

What is a team? Formal definitions of team tend to focus on task and purpose. Katzenbach and Smith draw a distinction between teams and working groups within organisations: a working group gets assigned tasks done with less personal investment (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 89), whereas a team contains people with complementary skills who are "equally committed to a common purpose, goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 92). For James Lawrence, one way to define a *Christian* team is a "number of interdependent people committed to a common purpose, who choose to co-operate in order to achieve exceptional results for the glory of God" (Lawrence, 2020, p. 27). Both these definitions of team focus on performance and effectiveness: the commitment is towards the task and its ownership rather than for the building of community.

Some commentators emphasise community as an essential element of the task of Christian mission: “Since God is revealed through healthy human relationships... the community is the evangelist. So forming a mission *community* is a mission activity in its own right (Moynagh, 2012, p. 299). Team can even be equated with community: in Celtic-style evangelism “members usually went out on mission trips in a team. The team was the message! Even when they went solo, they carried the ‘aroma’ of the community with them” (Martin, 2020, p. 7). My working definition of team implies this overlap with community: *team is a purposeful combination of people working and sharing together in the pursuit of a goal.*

### **Mission team *life***

“Team life creates emotional and spiritual capacity to continue when the demands are arduous” (Newcome, 2016, p. 24). My investigation focusses on the *life* of mission teams rather than the effectiveness of the mission. What happens to individuals when they find themselves in a mission team? What sort of life develops, whether planned or unplanned? What is the impact of such a life on the lives of participants and the team as a whole? Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s iconic work *Life Together* (Bonhoeffer, 2015) indicates the dynamics and disciplines of relationship in a purposeful community. My own study is concerned with the same territory: relationship to God, relationship to one another, relationship to self-in-community. In his discussion of the essence of mission Stefan Paas indicates a mission team *life*:

Like all people in all times and places the first Christians were social beings; they were steeped deeply in all kinds of communicative behaviour... they bonded with friends, talked with relatives, worked together... they shared the ‘tidings of great joy’ they had heard (Paas, 2019, p. 7).

Paul Williams links mission with exile and pilgrimage, again strongly indicating a life to be lived and understood rather than merely a task to be accomplished: “I have sought to give biblical metaphors we can inhabit... it is time to... become a people of the Way” (Williams, 2020, p. 230).

My own definition of mission team life is this: *a lived experience of missioning together that is given shape and meaning through relationships, practices, processes and values.*

## **Studies of mission team life: surveying the field**

Mission team life relates to overlapping areas of practice, fields of study and “pools of literature” (Cameron & Duce, 2013, p. 65).

### **Mission as lived experience**

Thinking on mission over the last three decades has often taken the *Five Marks of Mission* as a starting point (Snow, 2021, p. 13):

To proclaim the good news of the kingdom;

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;

To respond to human need by loving service;

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation;

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the Earth.

These *Five Marks* aim at a unitive definition of mission. The approach has then been to “implement” a “strategy” “in local ministry” (Greenwood, 2000, p. ix), using local human resources to bring about the mission desired. In his foreword to Greenwood’s *Ministry Team Handbook* the Bishop of Chelmsford commends a plan avowedly rooted in “a simple trinitarian dynamic – of diversity in unity – [a dynamic which] releases the energies of the Spirit within all Christians to find our special calling and to follow it – within daily life, at home, in the community, in the local church and the wider world” (p. ix). Disappointingly, Greenwood’s toolkit offers only constructed examples of what are considered to be typical scenarios in local ministry, rather than case studies based on qualitative research relating to lived experience; and the overall effect of the study is a reliance on hints and tips for implementing a top-down approach to mission.

By contrast, *Mission-shaped Church* (The Archbishops' Council, 2009) offers a view of mission from below built on examples from lived experience, theologically and methodologically reflected upon and influencing proposals for “an enabling framework for a missionary church” (p. iii). Serving, church-planting communities imply a mission team life: but what sort of life?

*Witness* (The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, 2020) celebrates local initiatives in which imaginative responses have made a difference to situations of human and spiritual need. This study “is intended to offer a picture of the great joy of Christian witness in the world, to help readers imagine...” (p. 7). In its balance of accessible reflection and case-study testimony *Witness* is close to *Mission-shaped Church* in style and a more successful attempt to capture people’s imagination than the lengthier *Kingdom Calling* (Faith and Order Commission, 2020) published in the same year.

Anna Ruddick’s seminal work on *missional pastoral care* (Ruddick, 2020) throws light on the relationship between mission strategy and the effects of mission. Her case studies, built on rigorous qualitative research, strongly indicate the dynamics of a mission team life:

Missional pastoral care is mission shaped from the ground up... As team members have remained courageously open to God’s unexpected work in their mission, and community members have found new ways to flourish in community, in their relationships with one another they demonstrate the mission of God to all people, building mutual communities of care, a foretaste of God’s incoming *shalom* (Ruddick, 2020, pp. 198-9).

My own study takes this insight as a starting point.

### **Emergence and hybridity**

My curiosity about the patterning of mission team life places me in proximity to the work of others who use a variety of terms to describe phenomena in lived experience and give an

account of the processes they see at work. Practitioners and commentators seek a satisfying way to give an account of lived experience that balances stability and exploration, elements of *order* and *chaos*, the *solid* and the *liquid* (Ward, 2002, 2017), the *established* and the *prophetic* (Brueggemann, 2018). Roland Allen famously calls for an acknowledgement of *spontaneity* as well as *design* in the Apostle Paul's missionary methods (Allen, 1962, 2006). Gareth Morgan's seminal work on the shape and character of organisations (1997) contrasts *mechanised* and *organic* paradigms as well as presenting other accounts of the shape of lived experience, using powerful root metaphors. Morgan states that "organisations are many things at once... complex... multi-faceted... paradoxical" (Morgan, 1997, p. 347). The solid structure of mission support can be portrayed as a *trellis*, the unpredictable shape and course of growth as a *vine* (Marshall & Payne, 2009).

Broad insights from *complexity theory* have been used to conceptualise underlying processes, especially the unpredictable, emergent qualities of lived experience. Kevin Mihata provides a useful definition of *emergence*: "The concept of emergence is most often used today to refer to the process by which patterns... arise from interactive local-level processes." Such patterns "cannot be understood or predicted from the behaviour or properties of the component units alone... In the doctrine of emergence, the combination of elements with one another brings with it something that was not there before" (Mihata, 1997, p. 473). Boulton, Allen and Bowman also stress the importance of combination in their description of the main features of complexity theory; the world cannot be understood by taking apart the bits and understanding them separately; factors work together synergistically: the whole is different from the sum of the parts; history and story matter and the order of events influences future shape; one size does not fit all: by generalising we risk throwing out the very information that sheds light on why things happen and what might happen next (Boulton, Allen & Bowman, 2015, p. 8).

The concept of *hybridity* is applied to the emergent potential that characterises *third space thinking* (Baker, 2009), a liminal space where mission team life develops its characteristic relational shape. Such forms, shapes and patterns may be discerned in Scripture: theologians give interpretive clues from lived experience and frame metaphors to push thinking forward – a 'double helix' for the DNA of a mission team life that is both *solid* in

Jerusalem and *liquid* in Antioch (Alexander, 2008, chap. 11), and a 'mixed economy' by which *traditional* congregations and *fresh expressions* of church may perhaps discover a multidimensional mission team life (The Archbishops' Council & The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2012, p. 188).

There is thus considerable conceptual variety in the ways commentators describe and account for the relationship between framework and flexibility, the solid and the liquid in lived experience: a satisfactory ontological account necessarily remains elusive. Tim Harle is committed to enabling reflective practitioners in Christian ministry to learn from this field of study (Harle, 2011, 2015, 2016). He questions whether change in organisations can be managed through the sort of control that a cause-and-effect paradigm might tempt us to believe is possible, instead highlighting the significance of non-linearity, emergence, self-organisation and fractals, as well as seeing boundaries as places of potentially significant meeting and exchange. How might these observations shed light on the nature and character of mission team life, its unpredictability and possibilities?

### **Dimensions of discipleship**

We might be concerned we are facing a crisis in our practices of discipleship. However, all crises of practice in the church exist because we have first had a crisis in our thinking. In order to renew our practices, we need to examine our thinking, our theology of discipleship (Peppiatt, 2012, p. xv).

Studies of the nature of discipleship constitute a third pool of literature relevant to mission team life. Western studies appear to focus overwhelmingly on the character of *individual* discipleship, especially *inward* disciplines - a range of themes well covered in the *Grove Spirituality Series* (Rider, 2009; Seddon, 2013; Helm & Hoare, 2019). Discipleship in its *outward* individual mode traditionally focusses on acts of personal witness and voluntary Christian service: of the many courses available on coming to personal faith and sharing faith in word and deed *The Alpha Course* (Gumbel, 2018) remains probably the most well-known globally.

The challenge for Western Christians is to understand and practise a discipleship which links these inward and outward individual modes with inward and outward *communal* modes. Bonhoeffer charts this terrain in his classic *The Cost of Discipleship* (Bonhoeffer, 1959) and so does David Watson in *Discipleship* (Watson, 1981). Their commentaries and theological reflection on the sharing of lives and bearing with one another highlight challenging territory that treatments of discipleship as something individual usually avoid. Is the costly sharing of lives in Christ a hidden link between the practice of individual spiritual disciplines and such outward communal expressions of discipleship as mission? “Mission has always formed disciples. It has always enabled disciples to understand their identity...” (Cotterell and Hudson, 2012, p. 9); however, understanding the links between discipleship and mission continues to be hampered by dichotomies between inward and outward, and individual and communal practice.

Church leaders today appear to be looking for ways to re-integrate important strands of discipleship within a proper holism. *Pilgrim: A Course for the Christian Journey* (Cotterell et al, 2013) invites participants on a shared discipleship journey modelled on catechesis, learning the faith together in small groups in local contexts. It presents discipleship in the Church of England as having several strands - doctrine, spirituality, ethics, lifestyle - that can be studied in parallel at distinct levels: *Follow* for parish contacts and enquirers and *Grow* as a continuation into lifelong learning for all Christians. However, an emphasis on discipleship *courses* may have obscured other ways forward - in her course Beki Rogers asks participants:

Why do you think that the church is drawn to giving courses...? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to this model? There are other ways of engaging with people and helping them to grow in their faith that don't involve attending a course (Rogers, 2020, p. 50).

The author believes that “some of this is about creating opportunities for people on the edges to experience the lives of those closer to Jesus. These may be formal or more informal, but they are ways of travelling alongside one another and going deeper into life” (p. 50). Could this call be met through discipleship within mission team life? Cris Rogers is

one of a growing number of practitioners who are concerned to be *Leading and Shaping a Discipleship Culture* (Rogers, 2019). Martyn Snow believes the emphasis should be on everyday faith and everyday witness (Snow, 2021).

The debate about the way forward for discipleship in the Church is also bound up with reflections on vocation, ministry and leadership. *Kingdom Calling* (Faith and Order Commission, 2020) provides a theologically reflective account of the interrelation between vocation, ministry and discipleship. Its concern is a perceived culture in the Church that despite a succession of initiatives - from *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (Tiller, 1983) onwards - still prioritises ordained before lay ministry. *Kingdom Calling* seeks to address "a theological deficit" (p. 1), envisaging a Church in which there is "mutuality of calling... fruitful complementarity" (p. 1). There is a recognition that "good theology has failed to capture people's imagination" (p. 3) and that "healing in how we imagine and understand ourselves" (p. 3) will be necessary before the culture can change. The authors recommend that their work be studied in conjunction with other Church reports. *Senior Church Leadership* (Faith and Order Commission, 2016) asks what attributes and culture are needed for effective leadership of God's people at the highest and widest level. It examines "the rise of leadership language in the life of the church" (p. 9) and mines "traditional resources of 'Scripture, tradition and reason'" (p. 9) for its theological reflection. The report aims to stimulate discussion as to what "*faithful improvisation*" (p. 10) could look like in practice. Could an understanding of mission team life help here? My qualitative research reveals compelling links between discipleship, ministry, vocation and leadership in mission team life.

In an intriguing study from a Methodist perspective, Philip Meadows examines *The Wesleyan DNA of Discipleship*, arguing for "fresh expressions of discipleship" rooted in mission-ecclesial history (Meadows, 2013, p. 4). He describes the characteristics of six *genes* - scriptural holiness, spiritual discipline, accountable fellowship, transformative worship, personal service and evangelistic witness – that define a dynamic, holistic discipleship. These indicators of *Wesleyan DNA* suggest the dynamics of a mission team life. My own study closely examines the interweaving discipleship strands in mission team life today.

## Learning from history

Scriptural and historical sources can and should be mined for accounts of mission team life in practice.

The Scriptural accounts of Jesus' and Paul's mission teams are an obvious prime source. These are illuminated through scholarship and imaginative reconstructions (Bruce, 1985; Gooder, 2018; Rivers, 2007). Rodney Stark and Alan Kreider construct the missional-communal life of the Christian Church under the Roman Empire (Stark, 1996; Kreider, 2016). The journals of missionaries can be examined as 'living human documents' (Graham et al, 2005, chap. 1). Among the plethora of missionary biographies and church-historical studies, of particular value are those that pay careful attention to a leader's context among colleagues and to the development of team relationships: illuminating treatments of the nature of mission team life can be found in *Hilda of Whitby* (Simpson, 2014), *Teresa of Avila* (du Boulay, 1991), *John Calvin* (Brownell, 2009), *Five Women of the English Reformation* (Zahl, 2005), *The Journey to the Mayflower* (Tomkins, 2020), *John Newton* (Pollock, 1981), *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (Cook, 2001), *George Whitefield* (Kidd, 2014), *The Clapham Sect* (Tomkins, 2010), *William Wilberforce* (Hague, 2007), *David Livingstone* (Tomkins, 2013), *The Cambridge Seven* (Pollock, 2006), *William and Catherine Booth* (Hattersley, 2000), *Hudson Taylor and Maria* (Pollock, 1983), *Bonhoeffer* (Metaxas, 2010; Marsh, 2014), *Mother Teresa* (Kolodiejchuk, 2008) and *Billy Graham* (Pollock, 2005). The perspicuity of these accounts enables mission team life to emerge from the shadows of great leaders, becoming a subject in its own right: relationships between individuals, in community, in relation to God, are given proper treatment. Teresa, for example, is shown to be a pioneer mission team leader and participant as well as a spiritual guide; we learn that Wilberforce was part of a circle of friends-in-mission; and that Billy Graham similarly was ensconced in community, not just a charismatic personality on a platform. Stephen Tomkins, his titles exploring mission team life in three different centuries, is not afraid to point out dysfunctionality in team relationships where that needs to be done. The compound witness of this literature is that mission team life exists, emerging in lived experience and deeply influencing both mission and discipleship. My research explores how this happens today.

## Objectives and summary of the thesis

Mission team life - the lived experience of missioning together that is given shape and meaning through relationships, practices, processes and values - is a novel concept. Mission strategies may have teams and targets yet no accompanying record of the lived experience of participants and the impact of mission team life on their discipleship, vocations and ministries. The transformational potential of mission team life is largely unrecognised. In my research I address this lacuna by providing theological reflection and conceptualisation based on narrated accounts of mission team living. I present a new framework for understanding the relationship between discipleship, mission and ministry in theory and in practice.

My objectives are as follows:

Firstly, to hear the life-stories of experienced participants in mission team life and learn from their reflections and evaluations. Second, to conceptualise and define the constituent elements of mission team life and map its overall character. Thirdly, to understand how personal and vocational development takes place in the context of mission team life; and finally to articulate ways in which an understanding of mission team life can contribute to current debates in the Church about the way forward for discipleship, vocation and ministry.

In Chapter 1 I present my research design and qualitative approach, locating myself as a reflective practitioner within mission team life. I introduce my research participants and their contexts, backgrounds and geographical distribution. I describe my implementation of semi-structural interviewing and a bricolage approach to data interpretation that includes thematic analysis, theological reflection and poetic reframing.

In Chapters 2 to 4 I examine the constituent elements of mission team life, presenting an account of six interweaving relational dynamics. These are presented in an order representing general observability, starting with recognisable activities and moving towards more hidden dynamics.

Chapter 2 presents the dynamics *synergia* (co-working) and *koinonia* (the sharing of lives). I begin by surveying the purposeful character of synergy in the various types of mission team described in the research interviews – short-term missions, community ministry, church congregations, staff teams and intentional communities. I introduce missional communal living as a human and spiritual reality revealed in shared meals, home life, mutual pastoral care and down-time activities. I consider the co-inherence of *synergia* and *koinonia* in the accounts of mission team life in the New Testament and demonstrate resonance with my own research narratives. I describe a leadership style in mission team life that is characterised by compassion and encouragement.

Chapter 3 explores two more dynamics of mission team life – *diakonia* (serving) and *pneumatika* (spiritual practices). I argue that there is a strong relationship between the sharing of lives in missional living and reaching out to others in deed and word. The many observable practices of hospitable *diakonia* point to the critical role of hospitable leadership. I investigate the spirituality at the centre of mission team life - prayer, worship, Bible study and the patterning of community living in the presence of God – showing how research participants have developed evangelical spirituality or drawn upon aspects of monasticism to shape mission team life.

Chapter 4 reflects on *mathemata* (lessons learned) and *euremata* (surprise discoveries), highlighting ways that the interplay between intentionality and unpredictability in lived experience impacts teams and individuals. Training tools can be employed and values in mentoring, apprenticeship and co-empowerment modelled and experienced, contributing to the personal formation of mission team members and the emergence of leadership. Attending to surprise discoveries leads to improvisation, challenging existing values and changing the shape of local mission and its team life. I give examples of the attentiveness and prophetic imagination that characterises effective leaders of mission team life.

In Chapter 5 I summarise the overall character of mission team life. Such lived experience is relational (an account of selves-in-community), complex (demonstrating interwovenness and organicity), chaordic (shaped by intentionality and unpredictability), adventuresome

(both positive and negative experiences contributing to a meaningful whole) and Spirit-filled (to a greater or lesser extent characterised by the work of the Holy Spirit).

In Chapter 6 I show how an understanding of the dynamics and character of mission team life can refresh the Church's theological imagination and equip its practice of discipleship. I explain how my research addresses debilitating dichotomies - highlighted or implied in recent official reports - through a robust conceptualisation of discipleship informed by reflection on practice. I argue that reflective practitioners whose values in ministry and vocations are formed through mission team living demonstrate an understanding of collaboration, compassion, hospitality, spirituality, co-empowerment and prophetic imagination that energises and sustains the mission teams they facilitate: a shared, transformative journey of discipleship is made real in the life of the Church.

I conclude that mission team life is significant because it transforms lives, resolves stubborn conceptual and practical dichotomies, and points the way forward for the Church. My accounts of mission team life provide the basis for a language of lived experience that is parabolic in character and theologically imaginative. My conceptualisation of relational dynamics enables mission team life to be understood as a fresh paradigm, offering to churches and missions - and the academy - a framework for understanding and living a transformative way of discipleship rich in ministries, vocations and leadership potential.

# Chapter 1

## Researching mission team life

*I had no kind of canvas as a measure,  
When I took part in my first mission team.*

*From chaos and disaster team emerged.*

### Qualitative methods: a rationale

What is the nature and character of mission team life, and what difference does it make to those who participate in it? This was my research question at the outset. To investigate the nature and character of mission team life I chose qualitative research methods. Kvale and Brinkmann advocate that “the nature of the subject matter... should dictate which methods to use” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 305). Mission team life is about human relationships and lived experience and “qualitative research can lead to valid descriptions of the qualitative human world” (p. 300). My own professional practice already finds me in such a world: “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 4-6). I felt comfortable that I would be bringing into play my own experience and craftmanship as a leader of mission team life. I would be utilising an approach with “a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’... methods of data generation which are both flexible and sensitive to local context... methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context” (Mason, 2002, p. 3). At the same time I wanted to address a perceived weakness in practical theological method (a lack of attention to “traditional Christian sources”) highlighted by Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward (2005, p. 7) through a well-informed, confident use of the Bible, Christian doctrine and Church history in my research.

To generate data I chose to interview men and women from a variety of denominational backgrounds who were currently shaping mission team life in local contexts, all with significant leadership experience. Their accounts of mission team life were drawn from inner urban, suburban and rural settings across regions of the UK, especially London, Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry, Sheffield, Peterborough, Chester, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. I included among my interviewees a mission team leader in Germany who was from the UK. My research participants, whose ages ranged from younger to older midlife, were at various stages of work and ministry when I interviewed them: four had been in post for a number of years and were building for the future on carefully laid foundations; three were in a fresh phase of mission team life and were adapting vision from previous contexts; four were engaging with the challenges of new responsibility and were evaluating their initial experiences; two were about to begin a new ministry in another context. All were working creatively with an Evangelical mission and ministry heritage, though none specifically self-identified as Evangelical. These thirteen experienced team leaders were all known to me through previous contact in mission ministry or the development of practice.

One of the aims of my thesis is to reveal the individual life-in-ministry stories of my research participants. One of the ways I do this is through poetic reframing, a method which I describe later in this chapter. I identify individual interviewees at any point in the thesis by using an abbreviation based on the title of the sonnet relating to each interviewee. These poems are listed in alphabetical order by title abbreviation in Appendix 1, which thereby also functions as an index to the thirteen research participants. This way of referencing, though unusual, avoids the need to create a pseudonym for each:

CT	Clergy Team
CTD	Candle, Table, Door
ET	Eden Team
G	Gold in 'em
GS	Good Soil
HB	Harp and Broom
LC	Learning Community
LF	Light of Foot
PO	Poured Out
R	Restoration
S	Seeing
SO	Shaped by Others
SS	Sacred Space

I now describe the demographics of my data sample in more detail.

Six of these experienced practitioners - four men and two women - are parish priests. One of the men narrates formational experiences on short-term mission trips as an evangelist before an extended phase of youth ministry followed by ordination to parishes in the same area (R). A second is pioneering hospitality-based ministry among young professionals where vocations develop as a natural part of mission team life (SS). A third focusses on team building, pastoral care and mentoring in two commuter villages (SO). The fourth reflects on the combinations of gifting and styles of teamwork emerging in another rural setting (CT). Of the two women, one traces their mission team life journey from urban parish involvement while exploring their vocation, through phases of entrepreneurial ministry to their current leadership of a multifaceted inner-city mission team (GS). The other contrasts the suburban ministry of their curacy with the challenges of leading a rural group of parishes (S). The other seven research participants represent network ministries, intentional communities and senior leadership. The two women in this half of the sample (neither of them identifying as Anglican) are shaping and facilitating hospitable outreach, one through households planted in urban neighbourhoods in Britain (ET) and the other in an intentional community in Germany (HB). Of the other five (male) interviewees, two are ordained but not currently in parish posts, one of them (LC) tracing their team life journey from participation in short-term mission weeks to work in a diocesan parish development team; the other (PO) contrasting their earlier parish team life with their more senior role as a cathedral leader. My sample included three further non-Anglican practitioners. From a United Reformed Church perspective the path for one disciple leads from a life-changing short-term mission to ordination and community ministry and then senior leadership in their denomination (LF). The remaining two research participants represent a non-denominational approach: one (G) moves from significant involvement in parachurch youth mission to become a missional congregational leader; the other journeys through phases of development of a missional vision in several contexts to become the convenor of an embryonic new-monastic community (CTD).

## Conducting the research: semi-structured interviews

As I began my research I was keenly aware that my interviewees constituted a peer group. The fact that I knew each participant before conducting the interviews meant that there was a high level of trust. As someone familiar with missionary practices, organisations and language I was able to identify with their concerns, hopes and dreams – this was particularly the case with the short-term mission teams described by three interviewees, which were similar to ones I had participated in myself as a member of the same mission organisation; and as an ordained minister I could bring my understanding to the professional, pastoral and ecclesial settings being described. In terms of positionality within my study I was thus an *outsider* to the particular mission teams being described while at the same time being an *insider* to the sort of team life being narrated. This positionality was advantageous both for conceptualisation and for reflexivity.

Over the course of the project I was aware that I was allowing my own mission-team-life story to lie critically alongside the accounts of life-in-practice of each member of my peer group. As Gillie Bolton puts it, “*Reflexivity* is finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex role in relation to others” (Bolton, 2010, p. 13). I found that “reflexive thinking consists of conversations inside peoples’ heads... reflexivity is a *questioning* exploration of the external world and a *questioning* exploration of the individual’s response to that world” (Moynagh, 2017, pp. 130-1). Activating an appropriate reflexive awareness was at its most intense and concentrated when I was conducting the interviews but remained a feature of my approach throughout the whole research process.

By choosing to use semi-structured interviews to explore the nature and character of lived experience I would be generating knowledge which is necessarily *produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative* and *pragmatic* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 302-4). This understanding of knowledge and its value contrasts with the positivist approach and ‘naïve realist’ epistemology associated with quantitative research methods. I was excited at the prospect of generating value-laden narrative that could shed light on the dynamics of mission team life. The experienced practitioners I would be interviewing held knowledge in their stories. I wondered how their accounts would illuminate truth-in-

experience? Would their compound narratives resonate with biblical narratives on mission team life? “If we look closely, we find that Paul’s letters came out of his experiences. They came out of his own life story” (Sessoms & Brannagan, 2016, p. 40). “Story can... trigger and drive our thinking to understanding, meaning and relevance” (p. 4). “‘Story’ can help us... to articulate a critical-realist epistemology” (Wright, 1992, p. 32); “the critical-realist recognises the role of the imagination... in knowledge” (Avis, 1999, p. 150).

“The research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2). I carried out thirteen interviews of between 30 and 45 minutes each: a pilot interview in March 2016 and twelve further interviews between February and April 2017. Research participants chose the location for the interview: they were mainly conducted in their places of work or homes but also included a room at a theological college where one research participant was on sabbatical. All were enthusiastic about the subject when invited to participate. I judged there were no significant issues of power asymmetry beyond those generally applicable to qualitative interviewing - such as the power of initiation by the interviewer and control of the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 33). There was an agreement that interviewee anonymity would be preserved in the way I reported my research findings.

I asked open-ended questions about my interviewees’ experience of mission team life, the sort of activities they engaged in and the ways they and others spent their time in mission or on mission. I used follow-up questions to gather more detail about the areas they appeared to be most interested in and asked what they most valued about mission team life. As an experienced pastor among mission practitioners and senior leaders I was able to make use of my skills as an informed and empathetic listener to elicit their stories and commentary. After thirteen interviews I had gathered sufficient qualitative data for my purposes.

## **The character of the data: themes, stories and values**

The inter-views generated over 50,000 words of data, about one tenth of which were my own contribution as interviewer. I was delighted at the richness of texture in the transcripts.

Clusters of activities appeared as recurring themes throughout the data, suggesting patterns for missional working and living. Thick descriptions of mission team life occurred in every account, often in the form of longer *stories* over several 'seasons' in the life of a mission team or the journey of discipleship for an individual research participant. A particular strength of the narratives was the high instance of *value-laden* comment alongside descriptions of team practices, conveying both reflexivity and reflection, as the following example shows:

Interviewer: I'm interested in the ways team members might find themselves supporting each other, in sharing life in whatever way they would have chosen to do that.

Interviewee: Yeah, so teams would each develop their own lifecycle of supportive stuff... I think support comes primarily from just from knowing one another... I guess one of the most beautiful examples that I personally experienced of support was one night after a training night and it was the middle of winter and, em, thick snow and ice and I was packing up and was one of the last to leave – there were just a few of us and my, I had a really old car at the time and the windscreen had iced on the inside as well as the outside and, I mean, I stuck all the fans on and the engine on and was literally just waiting for it to defrost but sat in this car park and we always met in one of the churches in one of our areas so was just in the car park at the church on the estate and one of our team members, em yeah, everyone was just kind of packing up and going, leaving and it just ended up the two of us being there and I said, you know, it's fine just leave, you know, it's alright and he was like no we have a rule no one gets left on their own and so he stayed with me and waited until, em, until my car had defrosted and we left together and I think I actually didn't know that was their practice as a team but it's a really beautiful practice actually that no one gets left on their own and I really valued it that night, em, and yeah thought it was a really really beautiful thing actually (ET).

In this example a story triggered by an interview question reveals a practice in mission team life: the account illustrates an aspect of *koinonia* (the sharing of lives) and *diakonia* (serving one another). The story has a *value* embedded in it: “no one gets left on their own.”

Semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity for each research participant to pursue themes that were important to them. The transcripts contained some surprises:

- i) *Gender, marriage and relationships* were not prominent themes. Although most of the research participants were married only two mentioned their spouses in their accounts of mission team life: one in relation to a joint ministry of hospitality and another regarding complementary gifting. If I had framed specific questions on gender, relationship and marriage there may have been more said, but it was not a primary focus in my study. Research participants refer in their accounts to men and women participating in mission team life together: specific references to gender dynamics are not a feature of the interview narratives whether in terms of power or romance. In a ‘work in progress’ presentation I gave at a Chester DProf residential I was asked about the latter by one of my fellow researchers - but ‘CSSM’ (‘Come Single, Soon Married’) was not in evidence in the mission team life in my data.
- ii) By contrast, a prominent theme in all the narratives was *leadership*. I had not asked a specific question on this area but as all my interviewees were leaders of mission teamwork it was perhaps natural for leadership to feature in their stories and reflections. My strong impression from an initial reading of the transcripts was that leadership might be emerging out of a shared discipleship at the heart of mission team life. In Chapters 2-4 I explore aspects of leadership highlighted in my data. In Chapter 6 I demonstrate how the way leadership emerges within mission team life critiques the assumptions underlying formal reports such as *Senior Church Leadership* (Faith and Order Commission, 2016).

- iii) Finally, I was struck by the tone of *adventure* in interviewees' accounts of mission team life, which embraced a great variety of types of mission team and stages of development. The experiences related were generally positive ones. Negative experiences were related with honesty but were not prominent in the data. I return to the adventuresome quality of mission team life in Chapter 5.

I decided to organise my data using cross-sectional categories (Mason, 2002, p. 159), starting with a survey that was more quantitative than qualitative. I had noticed the prevalence of expressions linking team practices with the word 'together': 134 occurrences across the thirteen transcripts. The activities were typically clustered for emphasis, as in the following example:

So, sort of core elements of our life here is firstly community... physically living in a house *together*, but we don't want to be people who just live in a house, we want to be forming something... we want to be a worshipping community that's coming before the Lord *together* and pressing into his heart, his work, his will, so that we're carrying that *together*... going deeper into the same themes *together*... not just worshipping *together* but having fun *together*, celebrating *together*, eating *together* (HB).

I grouped these expressions into four broad categories indicative of possible 'components' in the lived experience I was investigating:

- i) *Working together*, including specific mission activities; mission preparation - planning, being creative; and reflections on 'mission accomplished' - sharing stories, seeing God at work. I recognised a purposeful *synergia* in these team activities.
- ii) *Eating together*, including plenty of references to being around a table for various meals or a coffee. In these examples I recognised a fundamental *koinonia* (fellowship, sharing) and *diakonia* (serving) between team members.

- iii) *Pastoral times, rest and refreshment together*, including playing, having fun, laughing, celebrating, tough times, caring, social activities, days out and retreats together. These expressions suggested a breadth and depth of *koinonia*.
- iv) *Spiritual activities together* like prayer, worship, Bible study and listening to God. Such practices of *pneumatika* (spiritual things) appeared across the sample.
- v) Additionally, I noted expressions with ‘together’ which appeared to convey an *underlying value or process* as well as an observable practice: gathering together, dreaming together, learning together, living together (in a home shared by team members), being together, spending or enjoying time together, being a family or community together, *doing life together*.

I continued to experiment with categorisation and compiling theme-based lists, adding key stories from the data to the developing thematic analysis to thicken the description. I was encountering instances of *synergia* and *koinonia* as I had expected, with hospitable *diakonia* also identifiable as a strong thread running through the evidence. There appeared to be a regular heartbeat of *pneumatika* in mission team life across the sample. Clearly, these four themes were contributing to a patterning of the lived experience of the teams and their members. However, the dynamic relationality appeared to be more complex than thematic analysis on its own could uncover. At this point I wrote a position paper, *The Together of Mission Team Life*, which presented my initial findings: I concluded I had seen the tip of an iceberg and there was a lot more underneath.

## **Interpretive methods: a bricolage approach**

To investigate mission team life in its own terms I felt I would need to vary my method. Commentators point to the usefulness of a *bricolage* approach in practical theology and qualitative research: “The product of the interpretive *bricoleur’s* labour is a complex, quilt-

like bricolage... a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9);

Bricolage is something put together using whatever tools happen to be available, even if the tools were not designed for the tasks at hand... This eclectic form of generating meaning – through a multiplicity of ad hoc methods and conceptual approaches – is a common mode of interview analysis, contrasting with more systematic analytic models and techniques such as categorisation and conversation analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 233).

My instinct for the interdisciplinary and the eclectic told me that there could be ‘tools at hand’ that I had not yet noticed. I needed a variety of lenses through which to *view* the subject in its complexity, then a way of *assembling* the evidence that would reveal the nature and character of mission team life and its constituent themes while at the same time preserving distinctive conversational and narrative moments from the original interviews as far as possible. I wanted to avoid the sort of analysis and reporting where “exciting stories have... been butchered into isolated quotes and atomistic variables” (p. 269).

I worked with my data thematically, reflectively, reflexively and poetically, an interpretive journey with the evidence that moved from analysis to conceptualisation and re-presentation. Methods of theological reflection were integral to this exploratory process.

### **From thematic analysis to theological reflection**

“*Reflection* is learning and developing through examining what we think happened on any occasion... studying data and texts from the wider sphere... looking at whole scenarios from as many angles as possible” (Bolton, 2010, p. 13).

After clustering the activities together into categories I had attached to each category the illustrative stories that my research participants were using to illustrate the practices and assign meaning and value to them. Deeper themes were revealed at this point - the

formation of kinship and habitat, the relationship between co-working and the sharing of lives, training methods, self-discovery, and leadership styles and priorities. I was also becoming aware of debates within the data which highlighted the contrasts between institutional and more organic ways of working, and formal and informal training, as well as reflecting on the shape of pastoral care and the nature of vocation. The richness of the data pointed towards the need for theological reflection: there was a powerful dialectic between theory and practice embedded in the research narratives.

Theological reflection enables the connections between human dilemmas and divine horizons to be explored... At the heart of theological reflection... are questions about the relationship of theory to practice, and how to connect theological discourse about the nature of God to the exercise of faith. (Graham, Walton & Ward, 2005, p. 6).

Of relevance to my project is a method of theological reflection that Graham, Walton and Ward describe as *Writing the Body of Christ* (chap. 4). My research narratives contained not only accounts of corporate activities but also theological reflection upon them: such reflection was happening naturally as an integral part of mission team life. My interviewees were taking this a stage further as they evaluated their experiences and reflected on the longer-term consequences for their lives, vocations and ministries: their stories were value-laden and theory-laden.

Since my research project involved 'writing the Body of Christ' in relation to mission team life I brought the stories and themes in my interview narratives into dialogue with others' thinking as part of my own use of theological reflection as a disciplined method. This was already the pattern on the DProf course with my fellow researchers, and I gave work-in-progress papers on *home and hospitality*, *the chaordic principle*, *the six relational dynamics*, *the Holy Spirit in mission team life* and *poetic re-presentation* as I developed my conceptualisation. As a long-term member of the *Grove Spirituality Series* editorial group I was already a part of theologically reflective conversation in a field that overlapped with my own; and I also tested theories with several expert scholar-practitioners researching the nature of church-in-mission, discipleship, complexity theory, leadership in the Bible and

today, and how stories and poetry work. These conversations were invaluable as I wrestled with the evidence before me, providing critical distance and strengthening triangulation.

### **Conceptualisation: testing theories**

As I reflected theologically on the shape of mission team life I asked questions of the evidence, moving dialectically between data and theory:

#### **Could there be an organic cycle of mission team life?**

I initially developed a model based on phases of growth: *soil* as a preparation stage, *roots and shoots* representing early growth in community, *branches and tendrils* for joint activity, *flowering* for self-discovery, *fruitfulness* representing leadership emergence, the *seed-head* for church-in-mission, and *seeds* for the sending of individuals. The strength of the model was its focus on organic approaches, rather than institutional, programmatic or bureaucratic approaches; but my data did not demonstrate complete accounts of a cycle of this sort, although several interviewees used powerful organic metaphors. I abandoned an organic cycle as a *model* evidenced in lived experience while retaining its *metaphorical* usefulness (Chapter 5).

#### **Are metaphors and symbols significant?**

Those I interviewed sometimes used metaphors when describing themselves or team life: *Good Soil; Gold in 'em* - and for team-communities and their leaders symbols could be highly significant: *Harp and Broom; Candle, Table, Door*. My data indicated an importance assigned to metaphor, symbol and story: mission teams “can construct a sense of corporate identity through the use of a central metaphor, or symbolic practices such as prayer, eating and working together, or by creating a narrative that tells the story of its ongoing life” (Graham et al, 2005, p. 109).

#### **How can we talk of God in mission team life?**

Pete Ward points out the “tension between confidence in speaking of the divine that is habitual in theological discourse, and a wariness about similar kinds of speech when dealing

with empirical data” (Ward, 2017, pp. 183-4): neither the theological voice that we adopt or our interpretation of qualitative evidence are ontologically equivalent to the presence of God in reality. I wanted to understand how my research participants were talking about God in practice. I summarise my findings in Chapter 5 in a section on the Holy Spirit in mission team life.

### **What are the key relational dynamics in mission team life and how are they significant?**

This puzzle - going right back to my original research question - remained the major focus of my theological reflection, based initially on four theme clusters: *synergia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *pneumatika*. There were thick descriptions of relationality in every interview transcript, where descriptions of communal practices also intersected with individual life-stories, suggesting that combining a ‘Writing [of] the Body of Christ’ with a ‘Theology by Heart’ (Graham et al, 2005) would focus conceptualisation in line with my aims and objectives: holding the corporate and the individual together conceptually as far as possible. How did the experience of mission team life-in-community contribute to the life journeys, discipleship and ministries of the individuals who participated in it? I also found myself asking how *many* relational dynamics might be identifiable and useful for describing mission team life, and what combinations of these dynamics could be significant.

### **Self-in-community**

The life-stories in the interview narratives gained fresh intensity when, midway through my research project, my wife Karin died of cancer. When I finally returned to the transcripts after several months I found myself reading them in a deeper way. I had given an address at my wife’s thanksgiving service that I realised afterwards had included an account of her mission team life, and the ‘signature themes’ that made her the unique participant and reflective practitioner that she had been. I found I had a heightened awareness of the unique story of each of my research participants as they had told it to me in the original interview - their experiences, relationships, reflections, values and embedded prophetic messages. I felt I was able to see their signature themes more clearly than before.

The awareness of my interviewees as selves-in-community resonated with my bereavement and a strong sense that I was being held in the same wider community-in-mission that I had

known for so long. It was not an easy time academically: my capacity to conceptualise felt limited, though I also held onto the hope that “stuckness shouldn’t be avoided. It’s the psychic predecessor of all real understanding” (Pirsig, 1974, p. 286). As an exercise in reflexivity I decided to write a more detailed account of my own journey through different seasons of mission team life, recalling my own shaping experiences as I consciously placed myself in the peer group who were my fellow-practitioners and research colleagues: “an acknowledgement of the significance of the self in forming an understanding of the world” (Graham et al, 2005, p. 20). This stage in my theological reflection was about “[discerning] how attention to deep personal feelings can become a source of theological sensitivity that results in faithful, and often adventurous, living” (p. 18). This process helped me recognise how reflexivity was operating in my research participants’ own accounts of experiences that were potentially transformational, and the value of “[turning]-life-into-text” (p. 18). In the intensity of this season writing prose did not come easily, and I chose poetry from the bricolage toolkit as a way of celebrating, re-presenting and evaluating what had originally been in conversational and story form.

### **Poetic reframing**

Poets “express, not just feelings, but crucial ideas in a direct, concentrated form that precedes and makes possible their later articulation by the intellect and their influence on our actions” (Midgley, 2001, pp. 51-52). Practical Theologians are beginning to observe ways in which poetry can give voice to truth-in-experience. Terry Veling addresses a perceived false dichotomy that the practical and the poetic do not sit easily together: “Poetry is not impractical and the practical is not unpoetic” (Veling, 2016, p. 117). Mark Pryce has mapped contours for *Poetry, Practical Theology and Reflective Practice*: poetry integrates past and present, is both personal and public, reshapes the world it describes, is the primary language of imagination (Pryce, 2019, chap. 3). Pryce, as a contributor with others to the anthology *Making Nothing Happen*, sees himself in the tradition of Caedmon, and part of a community of poet-theologians (Pryce, 2014, chap. 3). Malcolm Guite discourses on “the truth-bearing capacity of the poetic imagination” (Guite, 2016, p. 10), while for Mark Oakley poetry is “a form of attention, a literal coming to our senses” (Oakley, 2016, p. xxix). Noting the marked difference between Bonhoeffer's prose and poetic style, Bernd Wannewetsch

confidently asserts the contribution of poetic language to theological reflection:

The poems prove a useful lens through which the concepts can be visualised in sharper contours. This is particularly valid for theological concepts, since poetic language is... suited to express the thought that can hardly be thought, the insight that is only just within reach. Poetic language is capable of capturing the coincidence of opposites, of expressing harmonious tensions as well as demarcating rapture and fracture; it withstands any interpretative unilateralism, enables risk of imagination while at the same time protecting it from being trivialised (Wannenwetsch, 2009, p. 4).

I re-presented the 'shape' of the mission team life of each of my thirteen research participants as an individual poetic construction, choosing the *sonnet* as a form suitable for portraying lived experience. Don Paterson points out that the sonnet is "one of the most characteristic shapes human thought can take" (Paterson, 1999, p. xxvii). Its rhythm, natural to human speech, conveys "successive instances of the present moment" lasting about three seconds per line (p. xxv). "At the heart of its virtues are brevity, clarity, concentration, and a capacity for paradox" (Guite, 2012, pp. xi-xii). By condensing the storied commentary of my research participants I expand the impact of the values and prophetic messages embedded in it: poetic reframing has the capacity to reveal or amplify a transformational insight easily missed in the volume of flow of the original narrative. I incorporate characteristic words and phrases, even whole sentences, from the interview transcripts to preserve tone and meaning.

I produced thirteen drafts and shared the relevant sonnet with each research participant for their reactions. I asked for comments from some in my research network who had published poetry; I then revised the drafts. I developed reflective exercises based on the sonnets and tested them with groups and individuals: the thirteen sonnets in Appendix 1 appear with introductory commentaries written at this time.

### **Six relational dynamics**

The interweaving of the four relational dynamics I initially identified - co-working, the sharing of lives, serving and spiritual practices – remained visible after poetic reframing; but

thrown into much sharper relief than before were *two further themes* also at the heart of mission team life - *apprenticeship* and *personal discovery*. Both highlight the significance of self-in-community. This was an exciting moment in my interpretive journey with the evidence: the reflexivity enhanced through poetic reframing showed that *personal* learning and discovery are fundamental to the experience of mission team life, accompanying at a deep level the more observable communal practices.

In the chapters that follow I present *synergia* and *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *pneumatika*, *mathemata* and *euremata* as three pairs to demonstrate important links and contrasts illuminated by my data. These six relational dynamics are both enacted in mission team life and symbolic of that shared lived experience - yokefellows, a meal table, an open door, spiritual breath, apprenticeships with real tools, epiphanies - contributing to a much-needed renewal of theological imagination. The Greek terms I have used are either found in the New Testament, inviting comparison with contemporary lived experience - *koinonia* (the common life of Acts 2:42), *diakonia* (the ministry of Eph 4:12), *pneumatika* (the spiritual in 1 Cor 14:1) - or, though existing outside the New Testament, help bring New Testament themes into resonance - *synergia* (the co-working of the Pauline *synergoi*), *mathemata* (discipleship), *euremata* (discovery).

I use the sonnets - which hold together themes, stories, reflexivity, reflection and the disclosure of values - to illustrate the transformational effect of these interweaving relational dynamics both in team life and in individual lives. I thus present my evidence for the nature and character of mission team life in the form of both parable and paradigm. The *parabolic* is revealed in these poetic portraits condensed from the original interviews; while the *paradigmatic* is the framing of theological reflection as a *synopsis*: a combined witness to six critical relational dynamics. This twin approach enables the conveying of concepts and values that have the capacity to be prophetic, pointing a way forward for the Church (Chapter 6). The six interlocking relational dynamics provide an *architecture* for mission team life: themes that bind together the whole - but at the same time individual voices can be heard: in the sonnets the raw testimony of interviewees is re-presented in such a way as to preserve the impact of meaning-full emotion and to articulate critical values forged in lived experience.

I have avoided constructing a systemic model for mission team life that could lead to its observable complexity becoming artificially constrained: my data show the life of discipleship and the shape of leadership emerging naturally in context. After presenting relationality as three pairs of transformative dynamics in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, in Chapter 5 I consider the most important of the other threads running through my research narratives and highlight their significance in relation to the overall character of mission team life.

# Chapter 2

## Co-working and the sharing of lives

*The way we go together as a team*

*Can either be a nightmare or a dream.*

*Our spending time together healed my heart.*

### Introduction

*Synergia* and *koinonia* are two of the most observable of the six dynamics. Some teams start as *work-focussed* and, if there is the desire and conditions are favourable, a *life* may develop. Other teams may really be *embryonic communities*, their *synergia* taking shape as they feel their way forward: they are likely to see *synergia* as one strand of *koinonia* - a common life - rather than the only or main purpose. The question as to which dynamic may be more foundational - *synergia* or *koinonia* - is intriguing.

In this chapter I begin by considering the nature of synergy. Since I am investigating the lived experience of *Christian* mission teams I discuss the character of synergy in the New Testament, in the mission teams of Jesus and Paul. I then identify examples of co-working in the range of types of mission team described in the research narratives - teams on short-term missions, teams engaged in various types of community ministry, a whole congregation as a mission team, formal staff teams at different levels, and intentional communities. I note the links between *synergia* and *koinonia* in these facets of mission team life before going on to describe the elements of *koinonia* in detail. I introduce the sharing of lives in mission teams as a human and spiritual reality taking the form of eating together, conversation and storytelling, caring for one another, and times of rest and refreshment. I summarise *koinonia* as having the character of home, family and companionship. Finally, I discuss the leadership qualities of compassion and encouragement that are consonant with *synergia* and *koinonia* in mission team life.

## Synergia: working together

### What sort of synergy?

The Greek noun *sunergia* is defined as “a joint-work, assistance, co-operation” (Liddell & Scott, 2002, p. 675). In the New Testament the apostle Paul works with *sunergoi*, and the parallel with other *sun-* compounds suggests a close relationship: *fellow-partners* (Phil. 1:7); *yoke-fellows* (Phil. 4:3): “eleven “fellow-workers” (*sunergoi*) are greeted or mentioned by name, and others are indicated in the plural” (Glover, 1925, p. 178). John Adair sees a “balanced relationship between Jesus and at least his principal disciples... ‘yoke-fellows’ or partners pulling together in a common cause” (Adair, 2001, p. 117), co-workers in doing good and spiritual harvesting. Paul and his *sunergoi* operate in a similar manner. Michael Moynagh points out that on his first and second missionary journeys Paul had teams of three, expanding to include at least eight others [including Luke in the ‘we’ passages of Acts] for a period on the third. “Members joining or leaving his teams frequently did so in pairs... over 50 people made various contributions” (Moynagh, 2017, p. 72). This is all part of an exploratory *synergia*. Moynagh sees Paul, Barnabas and Mark, at the outset, simply starting with what they had: who they are, what they know, who they know. They build an embryonic mission network through the opportunities presented (p. 66). The path is not predetermined, rather emerging in lived experience. “Paul’s vision of ministry was always collaborative... he has an astonishing capacity to deploy a complex team of delegates from a constantly mobile base” (Alexander, 2006, p. 123).

I use *synergia* to indicate the relational dynamic in mission team life where we see team members co-operating in activities relating to the particular purpose of their mission. Complementary gifting, distinctive contributions, designated roles and collaborative ministry all contribute to the texture of mission team life in its various stages of development. The research narratives reveal ways in which such relationality may be different from a ‘secular’ synergy:

Synergy is a word much favoured in business now as an intensive form of co-operation. It applies in business because it is efficient and energy-saving; it applies in theology because it is gracious and energy-giving. Literally it means the working together of energies (Page, 2000, p. 52).

If the aim and experience of *synergia* in mission team life is a gracious, energy-giving working together then competitive instincts can become replaced by something different. This dynamic both energises and further shapes mission team life. Commentators on the way forward for teamwork in today's complex world sometimes appear to be searching for a 'spiritual relationality' that will do justice to the transformative potential in *synergia*:

Those who have used music metaphors to describe working together... are sensing... the world demands that we be present together and be willing to improvise. We agree on the melody, tempo and key, and then we play. We listen carefully, we communicate constantly, and suddenly there is music, possibilities beyond anything we imagined. The music comes from somewhere else... when the music appears, we can't help but be amazed and grateful (Wheatley, 1999, p. 45).

A *synergia* that is the working together of energies released in relation to spiritual vision and practice can be said to be a manifestation of the Spirit's presence in mission team life. This co-working is characterised by the mutual recognition of gifting and style among team members, which critically depends on the quality of community life and the sort of opportunities available for reflection, pastoral care and training. "For many Christians their *charism* is already visible in embryo form... it is important to become aware of these "embryo" gifts so that they may be practised and used" (Grossmann, 1981, p. 174): working with this metaphor, mission team life can be thought of both as the womb in which an embryo can develop and the family into which the gift is born.

Both Jesus and Paul teach, demonstrate and develop a *life (koinonia)* that co-inheres with the *work (synergia)*. Mission partners-in-work can become companions-in-life. The activities and qualities of participation and fellowship that mark the communal life merge with the

collaboration in purposeful work: there are ‘no splits.’ Ascough and Cotton (2005) assert Paul’s commitment to teamwork, counter to “the dominant ethos within Christian circles in the West” that sees Paul as “a rugged individualist” (p. 87). Others agree on the counter-cultural co-authorship of the Pauline *Epistles*: “It was very rare in the ancient world to “co-send” a letter” (Gooder, 2018, p. 254). Viewed in this light, such New Testament documents become a witness to the relational dynamics of mission team life. “Paul was a consistent and relentless advocate of the working approach we moderns call *teamwork* – deliberate collaboration between people trying to achieve complex ends” (Ascough and Cotton, 2005, p. 89). Ascough and Cotton apply Katzenbach and Smith’s work on “high performance teams” (*The Wisdom of Teams*, 1993) to Paul: “This is the model of collaboration that Paul has in mind as he communicates with his partners. In plain language, Paul challenges them to relate to each other at the deepest human level and display compassion in those relationships” (2005, p. 92).

### **Types of mission team and contexts for co-working**

In their comprehensive survey of approaches to local mission and evangelism in the Church of England Mike Booker and Mark Ireland identify a range of church and parachurch projects and settings (2005). My research participants’ accounts cover a similar variety of co-working contexts along a continuum from ‘crisis evangelism’ (short-term mission weeks) to ‘process mission’ (longer-term church-in-community and discipleship projects), but also reveal important aspects of mission team life in official ministry and staff teams, as well as in intentional communities where the sharing of work-in-life might be viewed as a chosen long-term commitment. Being alert to this broader definition of mission team in my semi-structured interviewing has yielded fuller and richer data.

### **Short-term mission teams**

Some have observed that “the Christian community has, since its earliest days, existed in two forms, both of which are essential for mission,” the *modal* and the *sodal*, the first “a located and embedded community, deeply committed to the place and the people it finds itself amidst,” the second “a semi-autonomous, pioneering community willing to go wherever it is called” (Berry & Mounstephen, 2017, pp. 10-11). Mission history and

contemporary practice provide us with examples of both types of mission community. For example, in *modal* monastic living “the people supported one another, pulled together, prayed for one another, worked out their salvation together, and lived out the Christian life together” (Hunter, 2010, pp. 18-19); while *sodal* community in a contemporary short-term mission team is “a temporary and unique little cell of ministry... for two weeks the other team members are your family and your priority, both practically and spiritually. It is important that you depend on one another and that you love one another” (Morgan, 2010, p. 16).

One research participant started as a member of teams on short-term mission weeks and later, having been leader of the whole organisation, spoke of “the immense value in bringing together a group of people in teams and seeing them go home built up” (LC). As the founder of this pioneering enterprise puts it, “In the Walk of 1000 Men we have sought to recreate the commission of the seventy (Luke 10) by going without money, sleeping on church hall floors and preaching the gospel to the people that we find” (Cozens, 2000, p. 17). A second research participant had this experience in one of these teams:

As we’d been walking from our first base to our second base we stopped at a village along the way for a quick rest and drink... did a little bit of drama in the village square which we hadn’t planned to do... we got into conversation with a young mum who was really struggling financially and emotionally... [later] two of our team members bought some supplies from the shop, went back the four or five miles to the village, was able to give that to her... When we had the celebration service later that year she was one of the people who came and gave her testimony saying it was because of the care of the team that she came to faith and there she was telling about a thousand people about it (LF).

*Synergia* ‘on the hoof’ here involves encounter, listening, conversation, sharing, discernment, helping and giving. Team gifts are seen emerging in combination here, at this time, in this place, with these people, with this outcome. The situation is unrepeatable but

typical: a complex microcosm of mission team life. In the following example a particular talent for mission is unexpectedly discovered:

Some of them came with little experience, expecting to offer nothing and then found that they were able to do astonishing things... a particular man who had come from a Forces background, first mission ever and he was asked to go and do a school assembly, and he talked about his experience in the Falklands, and this school of 1,200 kids were blown away and then he was blown away... he went on to have a role in the Church (LC).

Another novice with an undeveloped gift, on a short-term mission with a different organisation, similarly finds encouragement in an unfamiliar situation: "I hadn't really done much worship at all. I could play the guitar a tiny bit and the people we were staying with were asking 'Please sing a song'... you tend to have much more of a yes spirit when you're in that situation... trying together to just give something in that way" (HB). In short-term mission contexts team members' gifts emerge through being thrown in at the deep end: ministry and mission roles and responsibilities may only be identified later through reflecting with others. This is an organic process: people and their gifts may find themselves transplanted into other short-term or longer-term mission environments, and the 'footprint' of a ministry may become more discernible. This is where *synergia* overlaps with *mathemata*, the intentional training and development of gifting and ministry (Chapter 4).

Some *sodal* mission teams may be together for months rather than days or weeks, allowing for a deeper *koinonia* to emerge, where 'iron sharpens iron.' In the following example an eighteen-year-old, thrown together with three peers, appears to be assigned the 'creativity portfolio.' "That team was four very different characters... got put on a team with a guy who was the complete opposite of me... we clashed... but I remember having that sense of purpose together... we all had passion... I remember *L* would book the room, she'd be the organised one, and then they go "Right *D*, come up with a bit of creativity." I would blurt out my ideas as an extravert and then the team what we'd do is *M* would put a bit more script towards it and *N* would come in with the God bit" (G). This account clearly shows the

*synergia* in a *sodal* cell operating in such a way as to give real opportunities both for the exploration of gifting and for personal growth in discipleship.

### **Community mission teams**

A developing understanding of *community ministry* in recent years has led to fresh ways of identifying the nature and purpose of local mission. “Honest thinking and reflecting are essential to prevent a culture developing in the Church of *unexamined involvement* in community ministry” (Morisy, 2004, p. 23). Paul Keeble believes that *mission-with* “requires close connection with a community, a ‘presence-among’, out of which arises ‘project-praxis’ with and alongside others” (Keeble, 2017, p. 253). It is precisely at this point that an appreciation of some of the nuances of *synergia* in mission team life can be illuminating. Research participants described various aspects of community mission, giving fuller accounts of schools’ involvement and community cafe initiatives, also offering insights into the co-working in other formal and informal local outreach.

Various team formations appear to emerge in schools, reflecting relationships that are possible or desired. As one parish church leader reflects, “I suppose because of my education background I feel like I can offer something... I’m just trying to form a team around *Open The Book*... What I do see is Christians who cross denominational boundaries to support anything that they believe is of worth and so, for instance, we start a *Messy Church* in the school and half my team are Methodists” (S). Here the direction of travel is set in the context of exploratory partnerships between schools and churches: “I guess from their point of view they see that as community involvement... for me I see it as more about sharing the gospel” (S). Another account reveals a rich mission team *synergia* emerging from personal church-school links at a number of levels. The vicar comments:

I think there is a nucleus that is gathering around our children’s worker which includes myself and some of our parents and we’re beginning to be a bit of a team by the way that we pray together for that mission but I think there are other members of that team who don’t realise they are part of what we think of as a team - they’re just getting on with doing God’s work

as a parent or as a volunteer... staff, school governors, local Christians of other church communities (SS).

In a further example a research participant reflects on “how a chaplaincy was born... I knocked on the door of a local secondary school and was virtually grabbed by the scruff of the neck by the head teacher” (R). The *synergia* here began with a conversation and one relationship in one school and then spread to others. The same school chaplain, later a vicar in another urban setting, described their *synergia* with the parish day nursery leader as “her love of children and my love of children that’s at the heart of it, married to God’s love of children... we have a team from different cultures... to see that team operating and working together for the growth and development of children is immense” (R). In these examples there is an openness to a *synergia* based on desired and possible personal relationships, and exploratory partnerships. Each school-church partnership, with its own unique setting, has the potential for a dynamic, complex mission team life - and what may feel at the time like the serendipitous discovery of personal gifting and mission style amongst team members.

Research participants also described forms of *synergia* that emerged during the development of community *cafe projects* at both the planning stage and when the cafés opened as hospitable enterprises. In one account, from two villages in a commuter hinterland, “we have a café team... that’s been interesting because we’ve got people here who are not necessarily Christians on that team... but we have seen growth there... they’ve prayed together... they’ve thought together about how they can fulfil the vision and they’ve come up with extraordinary ideas. That’s been a very organic thing... there’s a great deal that flows from the relationships between the teams and within each team” (SO). This example shows a strong relationship between *synergia* and the other dynamics of mission team life, a life that is felt to be *organic*. There appears to be a confident, holistic *synergia* operating here, with a high premium on relationality. In another example, from a market town, the café volunteers were drawn together from a number of churches, “but the cook was completely outside. She’d actually been someone who came along to the café as a customer” (LF): serendipitous or providential?

In a third account, from an intentional community in a deep rural setting, the narrator described the gifting of the coffee shop team that had emerged from and was synonymous with the praying community in the home base: “We all took on different aspects of the development... the building conversion... funds... internal decor consultant... catering and sourcing... organisational skills... research in employment law... we did it as a team really together” (CTD). A direction of travel that leaves plenty of space for conversation and the recognition of gifts and style can lead to a dynamic mission team life with fulfilling roles and responsibilities.

The story of community ministry in an inner city parish reveals an intentionality that *synergia* will emerge in relation to opportunity and need: “Whether it’s actually the start of a project or not I don’t know except I think God just keeps putting people in our way that we have to do something about and so that starts the project” (GS). In this parish, the starting point for mission is very deliberately in the messiness of lived experience, and the strategy develops through attentiveness to opportunity and the addition of team members. The account describes how an expectation of mission was created with the arrival of a new team of clergy (vicar, pioneer minister and curate) and there had then occurred a transition to one remaining ordained leader who would, it was planned, combine with lay team members:

But they weren’t gelled and there wasn’t a spiritual life really here... what I’m struggling with now I think is defining who the team is... we’ve decided as a team our job is to love people and that’s the only way we can define what we do... I’m trying to have the conversations with them about what role they would see themselves in (GS).

In this account it appears that the team leader has set a direction of travel with much to be discovered on the journey itself: the particular needs to be met, what conversations will take place, how projects will emerge, who the team members will be and what roles and responsibilities will need to be developed. Elements of risk and a dependence on God are prominent throughout the narrative.

## **Congregations as mission teams**

One of the leaders I interviewed described something approaching a 'whole church' *synergia* being practised in a fairly recently planted congregation meeting on school premises. I found myself reflecting on the extent to which such co-working may be designed beforehand and the extent to which it emerges as missional-congregational life develops. As the church leader, with strong motivational gifting, comments, "Everyone's got leadership in them, everyone's got gifting in them, everyone's got gold in them. Our role is to enable them and to equip them to find out the best that God's got for them" (G). There is a forum for the communication of ideas across the church community through representatives of different ministries, and two-thirds of the congregation are reckoned to be serving on a team of some sort. The discovery of personal gifting and a particular 'passion' is encouraged for every congregational mission team member: *synergia* is to be an affair of the heart rather than merely dutiful volunteering. Mundane tasks are seen as spiritual service rather than chores:

When you set out a chair in church you're not setting out a chair, you are putting an opportunity for someone to sit there who's going to encounter the living presence of Jesus. You're creating opportunities for them to be transformed in their life (G).

Thus the church team-community is engaged in a meaningful *synergia* over a whole range of ministries. The careful attention paid to including newcomers and fostering purposeful connectivity across the church reveals a design for nurturing a relational *synergia*.

## **Formal staff teams**

I interviewed members of formal staff teams who were operating at various levels in parish, deanery, diocesan and cathedral teams in Church of England settings, as well as members of teams in other denominational contexts. As ministry teams in mission contexts, such staff teams have the potential for developing a mission team life. However, the examples showed that inherited institutional practices and the pressure of bureaucracy could sometimes be uncomfortably influential, compounding issues of personality and style for office holders,

especially at more senior levels. I found myself wondering if the reality of holding *office* could even be inimical to the emergence of mission *team* life. By analogy: “In the performing arts, the sheer need of others can often prove a shock. Young musical hotshots... though they may know their own part perfectly... have to learn the ego-busting art of listening, turning outward... we need to hear individuals speaking in different voices which sometimes conflict... weaving together these differences is like conducting a rich conversation” (Sennet, 2012, pp. 14-15). My research narratives showed that such a conversation could sometimes be painful and destructive rather than illuminating and enhancing; but there were many more examples of a quality and shape of mission team life that challenged dehumanising structures and ways of working. Even in more traditional settings, where relationality was prioritised there appeared to be a corresponding ‘working together of energies.’

Research participants in formal staff teams provided perceptive accounts of ministry team *synergia*, its joys and frustrations: “Working with a good team is enormously stimulating, deeply rewarding... such obviously complementary gifts... it’s been a very strong team. As well as the team leader, one is a very thoughtful strategist, another bouncy, approachable and a third is known by everybody... brings wisdom and level-headedness” (CT). In this clergy team, *synergia* is focussed on a weekly planning meeting and prayer together, and a way of relating while out and about has emerged naturally: “We’ll be constantly in touch by phone and email, just sort of send each other a message to say we’re thinking of each other” (CT). Their mission team life is both intentional and emergent. For the team leader in the midst of this *synergia* it has been personally enriching: “I wouldn’t swap it for anything and I wouldn’t have wanted to be an independent vicar, rector, in charge of my own parish” (CT). Echoes of this quality of collaboration and sharing can be found in church history and contemporary society: the Genevan Reformation experienced the complementary preaching gifts of Calvin, Farel and Viret (Brownell, 2009, p. 83); and top-flight European football has witnessed a management trio seemingly comprised of eye, brain and heart: “The three of us together make one really good *Bundesliga* manager” (Neveling, 2016, pp. 163-5).

Ministry team *synergia* demonstrates both variety and flexibility. I interviewed one urban parish team leader in the café in their church crypt, who commented on the emerging practice of their staff team: “I think working in an open space like this where people are not sat at the same desk, day in, day out means that people work in different combinations” (SS), while a vicar relating to colleagues in two commuter villages observes: “We’ve discovered a lot about each other over the years... I’ve been shaped by the people I’ve served with” (SO). *Synergia* is a dynamic that can unite energies in complex local settings. As one inner-city parish priest puts it: “Our prayer and conversation sort of all became one sometimes” (GS).

A rural dean describes a moment of discovery that led to fresh *synergia*: “What was critical for us was the retreat last year when we went away and there was this real sense of being called by God to contribute our own charisms into the pot, as it were, of the deanery” (SO). As a result they combined to run regular marriage preparation days: “We invite the deanery to send their couples – it relieves the burdens on parish clergy.” In this deanery a mission team life has emerged and been nurtured; in another deanery, however, the ground has appeared infertile: “I’ve tried to bring the leaders together just for lunch and that’s proving an absolute nightmare” (SO).

A mission and discipleship specialist in a diocesan team is positive about their *synergia*:

One of the great things is working in a mutually supportive team. We have different skills and gifts. We’ve made an effort to analyse those... we’ve also, as we’ve gone along, divided up different tasks between us so that each of us takes the lead on different things... A lot of sharpening of one another goes on in the team... We’ve tried to keep that spiritual dynamic of whenever we meet we always begin with prayer (LC).

By contrast, a cathedral residentiary canon first describes the dawn of an emerging *synergia* and then the despair of hopes dashed through a return to dysfunctional relationships:

In the early years nobody supported anybody... then the blame culture began to drop and we went through a very positive time... trust and confidence, and that was good. Then a new person came... manipulative... what we've experienced in the latter months has been a lot of destructive behaviour (PO).

Another senior church leader, reflecting on their life-journey through a variety of mission scenarios, contrasts what they feel office-holding may have become with the hoped-for spiritual teamwork that can be a healthy and effective model for a local congregation. Their insight is that something essentially administrative cannot easily change into a relational, spiritual, missional team:

To be honest, in some places eldership is as much a long service award... as it is about spiritually discerning a call to leadership... Was there a team? There was a group of people who were working to provide some sort of leadership but it was as much administrative as it was spiritual leadership that they were offering. Trying to reshape that into a spiritual leadership team for the church was very hard work (LF).

Real *synergia* will not be able to emerge from such a foundation. In this case the minister persevered in what they perceived to be an unpromising context: "We spent some time... doing some Bible study... and it did make a difference to some people's lives... I was battling until the end of my ministry there and I'm not sure I ever completely conquered" (LF). As they look back on their journey in mission team life from new recruit in a short-term mission team to senior denominational leader they make this telling observation: "A lot of the time in the institutional church we have to make our plans too far ahead... bogged down in bureaucracy and really not responsive to the way that the Spirit is leading... and being light enough of foot" (LF). Susan Hope agrees: "Travelling without too much ecclesiastical baggage is likely to prove a challenge..." (Hope, 2006, p. 43).

## Intentional communities

Research participants in intentional communities described *synergia* as part of a holistic approach to living and working. It was usually less defined than the *synergia* being sought through the blending of professional posts, being seen to be emerging from the development of community by experimentation. One leader of an intentional community in a rural context based on Celtic spirituality felt that “rather than see the mission as a project, or as a thing to do, it’s more part of the life we are all living together” (CTD). A time away for the purpose of taking stock and reflecting together led to the realisation that “we went as a team and came back as a community... made a transition from it just being vision driven to actually doing life together” (CTD). This then became an intention and an agreed value for the direction of travel, in which complementarity of gifting was firmly embedded: “We got to know each other better ... conscious of the different gifts within the community that God brings into play in different combinations at different times.” A team leader in a hospitality-focussed community with the care of volunteers states “We’re a community together... there’s a schedule of practical work and worship, and within that there’s teaching and personal mentoring” (HB). The relationships that develop in this supportive environment can accelerate the quality of the *modal* synergy ‘at home’ while also providing the foundation for effective *sodal* ‘away teams’:

We always go as a team... we minister together, listening to the Lord together and each bringing a part to the table... previous interns might come with us... we don’t want to just be people who live in a house – we want to be forming something (HB).

In this description ‘team’ and ‘community’ appear to be used synonymously. The co-working in a third example, a networked community in urban settings, was not predetermined or prescriptive, with “some people very focussed on evangelism, other people less so... it was about sharing life and mission” (ET). The *synergia* emerges out of *koinonia*, taking shape in lived experience rather than from any specific programme: “people were bringing their skills and experience from other bits of their lives and the network as a whole was enriched by that” (HB).

*Synergia* is thus seen to be embedded in intentionally experimental teams and community living rather than being defined at the outset by roles and responsibilities. *Synergia*, however observable in activities being undertaken together, is only one part of the life lived, and cannot easily be separated out: within a deepening mission team life it rightly resists dissection. The dynamics of mission team life belong together: exploring the complementarity of working relationships (*synergia*), sharing space, time and resources as human beings (*koinonia*), reaching out to others in loving service (*diakonia*), relating to God as a team (*pneumatika*), and developing an environment rich in opportunities for learning together and personal discovery (*mathemata* and *euremata*). Intentional communities whose development is based on an experiential, holistic approach aim for a wide range of relationality, not relying on a professionalised synergy to produce the life of the team.

## **Koinonia: sharing lives**

Research participants' accounts evidence a team life which is personal and interpersonal. Partners in mission are named with affection - there are portraits of named friend-colleagues living and working together (CTD); valued mission companions whose love and care are critical to an evangelist's restoration (R); fellow youth team members from whom a budding leader remembers learning much (G); and an effective mentor is fondly recalled (LC). Interviewees gave prominence in their personal stories to colleagues who though not named are still spoken of in highly personal terms - descriptions of balancing characters in a clergy team (CT); a valued role-model (SO); a team leader (LF); a compassionate act remembered (ET); a shared journey with colleagues in conversation, prayer and action (GS). Partners, volunteers, employees and other *synergoi* are recorded as part of an unfolding tapestry of *koinonia*, which resonates with the accounts of Pauline mission team life in Luke's *Acts* and the *Epistles*. Those who travel together on a missionary journey (*Acts* 18:18) are also those who form a life-in-community (*1 Cor.* 16:19).

### **Missional community as a human and spiritual reality**

*Koinonia*, the sharing of lives in community, is the 'glue' for mission team life. Its broad range of meaning covers "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship...

participation, sharing” (Arndt & Gingrich, 1979, pp. 438-9). As I write, *The Chosen* (Angel Studios, 2021), a crowdfunded global film initiative in several series, is projecting the shared life of Jesus and his disciples as a richly detailed, slow-moving *koinonia*. “So tightly-knit and caring is this new community that it is more a family than an organisation” (John & Walley, 2015, p. 84). This quality of relationship characterises the lived experience of the embryonic apostolic church (Acts 2:42). As Michael Green points out, “It is interesting that Christians should have so readily adopted this word [koinonia] for their fellowship. It was in common secular use to denote unofficial associations designed to foster some communal activity - dining clubs [and some other] well-known aspects of Roman life... but materially there was a difference,” which Green identifies as “the divine alchemy of *koinonia*, joint participation in the unifying Holy Spirit” (Green, 1970, p. 219). Just as co-working in mission team life should be conceived as a spiritual enterprise, so the sharing of lives in a mutually enriching, outward-facing community can be a demonstration of that same Spirit’s energising and empowering: “a community on the move, as were the first Christians” (Burns, 2010, p. 141). My research participants described a *koinonia* manifesting considerable richness and variety. I have grouped together typical activities that constitute the broad elements of this dynamic of mission team life - *eating together* (and other aspects of life around the table); *caring activities* (indicating the way a team understands and lives out a pastoral dimension); and *rest and refreshment* together. I then explore the strong sense of *companionship and home* that characterises mission team life based on *koinonia*, and the *compassionate, encouraging leadership* that is its hallmark.

### **Eating together**

“Nothing bonds us as human beings like sharing a meal... Around the table we become families, friends and ministry communities... Meals make us human” (O’Loughlin, 2010, p. 103). Local church staff and teams, entrusted with mission in both their own congregations and the wider community, found that eating together both expressed and strengthened their *koinonia*. For some staff teams it was part of the regular rhythm of meeting together, for others more occasional. It could be limited to team members themselves (CT) or be manifestly more “fuzzy-edged” and open to including others (ET). A ministry team might eat as an identifiable group in a café setting (SS) or as part of a wider community meal (GS). The

fellowship and friendship of *koinonia* blends with another mission team life dynamic, *diakonia* (service). One parish with a community made up of three ethnic networks had “meals together as a way of serving the community as well... within the church those networks intermingled very well... we styled ourselves as a foretaste of heaven” (LC).

Mission teams that are home-based may have the opportunity over time to develop a complex *koinonia*, *pneumatika* and *diakonia*, as the following reflection illustrates:

When a community of people eat together there’s something very powerful and you can see it’s very biblical... to share a meal together is to draw together in a way that doesn’t happen otherwise I think... We have our regular things which, for the team that lives in the house is to eat together Monday to Thursday and Sunday at lunchtime... and then on Friday night as a house community along with the church and with guests, we have a Shabbat celebration... we bring the food to share, just to gather together and enjoy fellowship as well as to celebrate the Lord’s provision... it’s just time to fellowship, eat and talk with people that maybe you wouldn’t otherwise be sitting across the table with every day (HB).

This is a full-bodied account of refectory life in an intentional community, in which I was invited to participate at the time I conducted my interview with one of the community leaders. As a dynamic with transformative potential for mission team life *koinonia* relies on an understanding of the character of table-fellowship. Eating together “builds community life like nothing else... really opens people up to one another... lifelong friendships really begin there” (CTD).

By contrast, the emergence of *koinonia* in short-term missions over, say, a fortnight, happens in something of a greenhouse atmosphere. Eating together becomes an occasion for re-grouping and storytelling:

You’re a team of evangelists who would go out on mission without finance, only a couple of quid to give, to use in a pub or whatever... [we] slept as a

team in a church hall... praying together, eating together, sharing the stories, seeing God at work. Wow, that is powerful (R).

'Parachurch' mission teams may settle by agreement alongside local church communities for a longer season, developing fresh contacts as well as strengthening existing ones. Here is an example from an urban context:

We'd have a cooked meal once a month and then three times a month we'd have make your own sandwiches, just an open buffet... that sense of having an inclusive, common table was really essential to what team and church looked like... modelling a relational dynamic within the team (ET).

One embryonic community, *Lindisfarne House*, reported a similar dynamic: "We started to build friendships... prayer and pizza with them on a Sunday night, and then gradually others started to join... we're very much part of the wider Christian community" (CTD). Here, *koinonia* and *diakonia* are inward and outward dynamics of one activity or expression of mission team life.

### **Caring for one another**

"I think support comes primarily from knowing one another" (ET). Mission teams that shared living space, or intentionally created time and space for caring, appeared to develop deeper levels of support than those whose relationships were based primarily on their work: *koinonia* implies a caring for the whole person and the whole team that takes into account much more than productivity. Mission ministries rooted in a pastoral vision were seen to be emerging in Anglican parishes: *koinonia* is practised and experienced in the core team as a demonstration of God's love and care, and is embodied by the mission team as a value for parish life. Supporting a team member was described movingly:

One of my team was going through a very difficult time with their son who was on trial for a serious charge and ended up going to jail for a while and that was a really, really difficult thing because not everybody in the church

could know all the details... we enabled our team space to be a safe space where they could come and not feel they had to give an answer for everything, not feel that we were looking down on them... but actually just journeying with [them]... but for the grace of God go all of us (SO).

In another parish, a deliberate contrast was drawn with a 'worldly' way of operating:

I think that the key to parish ministry is that we are called to be incarnational so we can't just step back and implement strategies that will have an impact on people... If you're managing or leading from a distance and you're not alongside people, you don't have to love them and if you are alongside them, well, you're not going to get very far if you don't love them... I hope that as a team of people within the church community we are much better at loving and looking after one another than perhaps some workplaces that I've been in (GS).

In this mission environment a team member was given some time off for study – “the right thing for us to do in allowing her to grow and look at her beyond an employee... people aren't just people who come in to work and do the work and go” (GS). Mission team life offers a fresh perspective on collegiality in practice, with *koinonia* binding people together:

I think when a member of staff takes genuine interest in somebody else's work area, that's almost as valuable as supporting them in it. That *is* supporting them... to take a genuine interest and want to know what's going on - I think for me that's the sort of glue that creates team (SS).

Mission team life can be a place of healing. As one participant in a short-term team put it: “Living together, spending time together... lots of things it taught me, what church should really be, how it should operate... you are embraced... held” (R). For this mission team member, the healing process continued as they took part in other teams and was an

experience of caring *koinonia*. “The desire to see lives changed is the common thread between mission and pastoral care” (Ruddick, 2020, p. 25).

### **Rest and refreshment together**

Arguably one of the most hidden aspects of mission team life is what happens in downtime. Rest and refreshment were perhaps not seen as desirable ways of spending time in the classic model of mission teams ‘getting a job done,’ but as one participant observed:

Mission has to be attractive, like a Christian lifestyle has to be attractive, and it has to be healthy. You know, it’s wrong to say yes come and be a Christian – we’ll exhaust and burn you out in three years. That’s not really okay... so the rhythms of kind of retreat, or I think probably the key to it is knowing yourself... I did see team members become more restful, more relaxed, less anxious... If you’re a team leader, you’re going through that journey that is going to impact how you work with the team members that you’re with as well... it comes from a realisation that God is at work, that we don’t have to do it all... it’s not all up to me (ET).

This account demonstrates that a healthy rhythm of engagement and disengagement takes shape in the context of God-awareness, people-awareness and self-awareness. As Helen Marshall observes, “In our present experience, we need the disciplines of both solitude and community to deepen our capacity for true and self-giving relationships” (Marshall, 2019, p. 26). A team that understands the value of personal and corporate downtime will be refreshed and resourced: “Once a month we’d go for a day out together... all go off as a team on a bit of a retreat together sometimes... playing together I think really helps” (ET). Giving proper attention to developing this aspect of *koinonia* can also affect the quality and resourcefulness of ‘front-line’ *diakonia*, feeding back into team life in something of a virtuous circle, as this story reveals:

It snowed and the team basically started a snowball fight, which became absolutely huge and got loads of other people from the community in to join

into it and just became this kind of moment really, I think, for the team that was saying, you know, this is what we are, we're here, we're having fun, we're enjoying our community, join us... a very significant time of identity-forming playtime really (ET).

*Koinonia* emerges and takes shape in the ordinary experiences of life. A healthy mission team life will not be removed from such experiences but will instead embrace them and see them as potentially transformative. The importance of laughter was mentioned more than once: "I think that where there is laughter there is a relationship and when laughter stops, there's a problem with the relationship" (SS); "laughing together... there was a restorative process going on" (R). One twentieth-century leader of mission who understood and practised this was Bishop John V. Taylor, for whom "hospitality and laughter in his own home were important in making friends of his own staff." Taylor was a "human being among human beings who all had ordinary human needs for affection and relaxation" who encouraged "evenings when we could let our hair down and just enjoy ourselves" (Wood, 2002, p. 32).

For the mission of a team to be credible, its team life must be humane and health-giving. The inner (resourcing) life and the outer (outreaching) life become blended, are one *Life Together*. Some examples in the research narratives betrayed an emphasis on countering the traditional image of Christian mission teams as somewhat earnest and austere:

We had this notion about particularly challenging blokes to do difficult things... doing the whole horseshoe around Snowdonia or Ben Nevis... or white-water rafting in Nottingham or going onto an old minesweeper in Chichester harbour and messing about in the harbour in kayaks... spending your life together for a weekend doing difficult things, but we also used to regularly go to a park... just, you know, have picnics, play games, run through the woods, whatever it took really (CTD).

Eating together, caring for one another and leisure time are all constituent elements of a healthy mission team's *koinonia*. This lifestyle - and praxis - reveals a foundational value for

mission team life. The critical significance of *koinonia* was acknowledged by all my research participants.

### **Companionship and home**

The research narratives show that *com-panionship* (literally, sharing bread together) is a consistent feature of mission team life: relationships are deepening and friendships are forming, so that companionship is not only a shared activity but a value in lived experience. These bonds, the 'glue' of mission team life, strengthen working relationships so that colleagues can also be called friends. Those I interviewed tried to find the words to describe this ethos:

We try and make it fun. We have a team meeting together once a month.  
We tend to eat food at that so it's a bit more relaxed... more Jesus model...  
live your life together... family is such a value to us... home... friendship (G).

Christian tradition is perhaps more comfortable with picturing Jesus with his friends than Paul with his. We have Leonardo's "*Last Supper*" and many other iconic works depicting Jesus in *koinonia*. Yet F.F. Bruce in *The Pauline Circle* observes that "Paul attracted friends around him as a magnet attracts iron filings" (Bruce, 1985, p. 8). He provides detailed cameos of Ananias, Barnabas, Silas/Silvanus, Timothy, Luke, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Titus, Onesimus, Mark and others. More recently Paul Barnett has reiterated this list, emphasising that "Paul's words to and about his fellow workers reflect his deep and affectionate relationships with them" (Barnett, 2017, p. 142). Paul's mission friends in *koinonia* can be imaginatively portrayed and their stories told - Gooder takes the mention of Phoebe in *Romans* 16:1-2 and creates a context for her ministry and message:

It was a cramped but joyful meal... No one – no matter what unorthodox sitting place they had found for themselves – was left out... After a while, once the urgency of eating had waned, conversation turned to memories of Jesus and his many impromptu feasts (Gooder, 2018, p. 17).

A briefer but similar treatment of the same theme occurs in Ray Anderson's chapter *The Ministry of the Church as a Community in Mission* (Anderson, 1997), while Francine Rivers' *The Scribe* weaves together telling fragments from the life of Silas (Rivers, 2007).

Eating together, catching up and telling stories, caring for one another, relaxing and having fun are all homely activities. A mission team life that is based on an emerging *koinonia* in shared time and space will have the potential to become a *home* for team members who are companions as well as co-workers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who pioneered a particular sort of mission team life at *Finkenvalde*, was clear that "the fellowship of the table has a festive quality. It is a constantly recurring reminder in the midst of our everyday work of God's resting after his work... our life is not only travail and labour, it is also refreshment and joy in the goodness of God" (Bonhoeffer, 2015, p. 50). That close friendships may be formed in such an environment is evidenced by Bonhoeffer's with Bethge (Parsons, 2021, p. 16). Kinship bonds are strengthened and an *oikos* (*house*, whether physical or metaphorical) takes shape. Rowan Williams calls for the use of a 'domestic' meaning of ecology (from *oikos*): "the rationale of a habitat: how in an environment certain factors adjust to one another in order to be enriching and to bring stability that in turn leads to further enriching possibilities" (Williams, 2017). An account of mission team life, I am arguing, is an ecology, 'the rationale of a habitat.' The *oikos* is "where we know we live, return, and where we know we can invite, where there is food, and how we keep the door open" (Williams, in the same lecture). As one of my research participants puts it, and all illustrate by their practice: "Why should church not be like your home environment?" (G). Church and mission overlap naturally in mission team life.

It is better to be bothered about quality rather than quantity: a tiny diamond is far more valuable than a lorryload of stones... we are only concerned with small communities made up of people who know they are the church. It is with these that we are going to set about the work of spreading the gospel (Prior, 1983, p. 21).

A home for companions-in-mission can in turn become home for others who are drawn towards and invited into a mutually sharing *koinonia* which blends naturally with and

mutually coheres in the outreaching service of *diakonia*. I describe the relationship between these two dynamics in more detail in Chapter 3.

### **Compassionate, encouraging leadership**

My research narratives evidence a *synergia* that aims to go the distance and a *koinonia* with the power to deepen a circle of fellowship. The one is not a driving effort without humanity and the other is not a companionship without hard work. Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* speaks of ministries of listening and bearing (2015, chap. 4). Ascough and Cotton are at pains to point out that “if Paul were a leadership coach in today’s turbulent world, his bottom line, his non-negotiable benchmark for evaluating leaders, would be the degree of compassion they display in relationships” (2015, p. 146); Barnett is clear that love is the driving force in Paul’s mission teams: “The seeds of love that Paul planted in his churches he also planted in the lives of his fellow workers. The love Paul showed his key helpers... they reciprocated to him” (Barnett, 2017, p. 126). Paula Gooder’s *Phoebe* is healed over time through compassionate love (Gooder, 2018), and one research participant’s personal story has restoring love as its theme from beginning to end: “It was true for me that when life was particularly difficult and I didn’t think that God could use me... I was being restored, I was being encouraged by being part of that mission team” (R). Other interviewees expressed the importance of compassion almost as a mission statement: “Jesus went out to people... he saw the sick and the lame... I want people doing things because they’ve received the love of Jesus and want to share that too” (S); “We’ve decided as a team our job is to love people and that’s the only way we can define what we do” (GS).

“Most managers make time for encouragement - for the whole team and for individuals” (Carson, 2014, p. 137). Encouragement is closely linked to compassion in the sort of love evidenced in mission team living: “Paul has a classic *encouraging* style in relating to others, always suggesting ways for them to realise their potential and move forward from their current life situations” (Ascough & Cotton, 2005, p. 65). The way *synergia* and *koinonia* develop, and the *depth* of relating in a mission team, may strongly depend on how team leaders are able to encourage others as they draw from personal resources that are only available because of their earlier experiences of mission team living. They vividly recall role

models who demonstrated compassionate love and provided appropriate challenges for personal growth in a *koinonia*-rich environment. “We had a very strong ethos from the team leader... he was warm, he had a quiet sense of humour, you always knew where you stood with him... there was a team spirit” (SO): a recognisably similar compassionate and encouraging team ethos is generated in the teams now in their care. Another expresses the process horticulturally: “I was being planted in soil that was a good growing ground for me” (GS). Research participants identified lasting encouragement as arising from the quality of the ambience and relationality experienced in previous seasons of mission team life:

I was part of a home group through my teen years. That was very, very significant for me. It was a really open place, with a very experimental approach to things... we all chipped in... we used to get sent out... someone would preach, someone would lead, someone would lead worship, someone would tell a testimony (ET).

Here there is clearly a commitment to nurturing a mission team life rich in both *synergia* and *koinonia*, out of which emerge opportunities for meaningful *diakonia*, which I explore in Chapter 3. Being on the end of compassionate, encouraging leadership also strongly indicates the presence of an ethos of apprenticeship and mentoring, which I discuss under *mathemata* in Chapter 4.

## Summary

In this chapter I have set out the relationship between co-working and the sharing of lives: in *Christian* mission team life *synergia* and *koinonia* overlap. The following two sonnets, each condensing the key themes revealed in a research interview, illustrate and summarise the transformative potential of these interweaving relational dynamics.

The sonnet *Clergy Team* uses language drawn from an interview with a team rector whose vision for their colleagues develops the potential for combination. Team life is built on the

contrasting personalities of the clergy, an emerging *synergia* and a healthy understanding and practice of *koinonia* in their parish ministry together:

### **Clergy Team**

Our team: one's level-headed, wise with people;  
Another's very clever - strategist;  
The third's enthusiastic, bouncy, cheerful,  
While my role is to be the catalyst.

We join in prayer and planning once a week;  
We're constantly in touch: 'Are you alright?'  
It's not an over-closeness that we seek,  
But space in life and team - we're not that tight.

The playing to our strengths a conscious plan -  
We know our gifts are wonderfully contrasting;  
This combination's drawing others in,  
The good news of God's love communicating.

The way we go together as a team  
Can either be a nightmare or a dream.

The sonnet *Restoration* uses language drawn from an interview with an evangelist whose account reveals a rich, transformative experience of *synergia* and *koinonia*. Our conversation covered team life in short-term mission trips in the UK and abroad, in youth ministry, in chaplaincy and in an urban parish. The third quatrain of the sonnet touches on this practitioner's own theological reflection on 'the balance of uniqueness and being part' that they have seen mirrored in the approach of St Benedict, the final couplet underlining the essential part played by *koinonia* in a process of personal restoration. Loved, built up and no longer hurting, they in their turn are equipped to contribute to a purposeful *diakonia* in successive mission teams.

### **Restoration**

I did not think God wanted to use me.  
It was a time of tears when life was hard.  
The way ahead I simply could not see.  
I lived my life emotionally on guard.

The praying, eating, laughing, having fun,  
Being held, embraced, encouraged, strengthened, freed -  
There was a restoration going on;  
Team life a place of safety in my need.

Well Benedict for me he understood  
The balance of uniqueness and being part;  
The sharing of our stories - this is good!  
Our spending time together healed my heart.

I came full circle in community.  
Evangelist - God had a plan for me.

# Chapter 3

## Serving and praying together

*Our fuzzy-boundaried, fragile, open home.*

*It's been about the rhythm, sort of dawning;*

*Prayer led to conversation led to prayer.*

### Introduction

In this chapter I examine two more dynamics of mission team life - *diakonia* (serving) and *pneumatika* (spiritual practices). I begin by noting the significant overlap between sharing lives as a mission team and reaching out to others in deed and word. Using examples from my research narratives I explore the nature of the interface between the team and 'outsiders' in mission team life. I illustrate the serving dynamic with examples of the practice of hospitality in relation to the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel. I then show how the development of a holistic *diakonia* depends on hospitable leadership.

I go on to investigate the spirituality at the centre of mission team life - prayer, worship, Bible study and the patterning of community living in the presence of God. I demonstrate how research participants have both developed recognisably Evangelical spiritual practices and drawn upon aspects of new monasticism to shape and deepen mission team life.

### Diakonia: serving together

#### The serving dynamic in mission team life

"Mission is the Church-crossing-frontiers-in-the-form-of-a-servant" (Bosch, 1980, p. 248).

This definition equates well with the broad range of meaning associated with *diakonia* as a corporate, practical, resourcing and outward-facing expression of the Christian faith in deed

and word. In Acts 6:5 a mission team is named and commissioned: their purpose is to serve, also releasing others to serve. The depth and quality of the mission team life in which such *diakonia* is offered, received and commissioned is critical:

*Diakonia* in the community enables the members to experience genuine *koinonia*. Jesus' commands are fulfilled through the caring unity of the disciples... The radical sharing of their possessions among the believers is the clear and concrete expression of both ideal *diakonia* and *koinonia*. Through this sharing, the community could show the people around them that the new age had arrived (Jeong, 2007, p. 33).

Accounts of mission team life reveal that *diakonia*, *synergia* and *koinonia* co-inhere in one another, all three dynamics taking shape together in lived experience. Serving together rather than as individuals shapes synergy; and an 'inner' *diakonia* between mission team members helps to build a supportive *koinonia*, as in this description of a church ministry team serving two parishes:

What you saw was people's different pastoral gifts coming out - so on the team there would be people for whom dropping a meal round would be the way they expressed their love and care. Others it would be a card... others it would be football banter at the beginning of a staff meeting... Teams are holistic in that they have multiple dimensions... things which bring you together and bind you together (SO).

For a youth outreach team their inner *diakonia* was the springboard to an 'outer' *diakonia*, at the interface between mission team members and those they were serving:

I remember having that sense of purpose together, praying together really kind of united us... We used to go out onto the streets, into the community... we had a café at the time... the idea was to go and collect the young people, bring them back there, tell them about Jesus (G).

Research participants described the links they could see between 'inner' and 'outer' *diakonia* in terms of hospitality.

## Hospitality

"The focus of entertaining is impressing others; the focus of true hospitality is serving others" (Chester, 2011, p. 100). "Hospitality is the practice by which the church stands or falls" (Sutherland, 2006, p. 83). Ian Adams chooses the *refectory* as "a symbol of the way of life that... a community seeking to be on the way of the hospitable Jesus might follow... deciding to offer itself as a source of stability, presence and hospitality" (Adams, 2010, p. 24). One research participant, pioneering a new *missional* community, is clear: 'It's about hospitality, including to the stranger, not just to each other' (CTD). Another identifies the foundational importance of hospitality with an 'inner' and 'outer' dynamic relationality:

Hospitality was huge, people sharing food together and I guess modelling a relational dynamic within the team which was replicated with people outside the team... the team was almost like a little microcosm of what community could look like which then people were invited into – it had very fuzzy edges (ET).

*Diakonia* is the open door of the refectory, the hinge between inner team life - expressed in an emerging *koinonia* - and outward hospitality: "We pray, we have breakfast, we work... our work... is our love for people around us... extravagant hospitality... so being able to give of ourselves" (GS): in this urban mission the inner life of team breakfasts expands into "fuzzy-edged" lunchtime hospitality.

Accounts of hospitable community ministry provided plentiful evidence of teams forming, growing and developing through practising and experiencing *diakonia*. As one parish priest put it, without sounding at all surprised: "We've got people there who are not necessarily Christians on the team... and quite naturally they've prayed together even though some wouldn't know one end of a prayer from another" (SO). Another minister was equally confident of the organicity of the enterprise: "Half of the volunteers came from churches

and the other half were just members of the public in the town who saw an opportunity to volunteer and to give something back... it was very much about trying to build relationships and meet need” (LF). There is resonance here with Ann Morisy’s call: “Community ministry requires Christians to be partners with non-Christians” (Morisy, 1997, p. 92).

Meeting with one pioneer of café *diakonia* in the hospitable space that was the church crypt, I asked how they reacted to the inclusive idea of *refectory*: “I love that name... I think there are people who, having found this place, return because it has something different to offer to the plethora of cafés and restaurants in the area” (SS). In this context outer *diakonia* finds particular expression in the relationship between a church staff team member and ‘outsiders’ at work in the ‘sacred’ space: “Our verger in those days was a natural evangelist... sometimes I would find him praying with event organisers” (SS). It is through *diakonia* that the edges can become a new centre: “Boundaries are fascinating places. They are places of change and discovery” (Harle, 2015, p. 19).

Not all would support the development of complex community ministry as an expression of mission and the locus for an authentic *koinonia* and *diakonia*. Tim Chester advocates the fundamental simplicity of Christian hospitality: “Jesus didn’t run projects, establish ministries, create programmes or put on events. He ate meals” (Chester, 2011, p. 94). However, my narrative evidence would suggest that mission team life can embody hospitality with simplicity and clarity of purpose within a richness of texture and complexity. The scale of hospitable enterprise can be informal and individual or planned and organised - even extensive - without necessarily losing the potency of *diakonia*. An awareness of relational dynamics is the key: “Community ministry gives scope for the most unlikely to make a contribution” (Morisy, 1997, p. 37). Mission team life is where that contribution can be made, in the context of heartfelt, imaginative hospitality. “After generations of... responding to a situation by setting up a committee or other structure within the church with a solution to be applied universally” (Page, 2000, p. 84), an authentic *diakonia* is once again being comprehended in mission teams that are “almost like a little microcosm of what community could look like” (ET).

## Proclamation of the Good News

The perhaps misquoted maxim of St Francis to 'preach the good news: use words if you have to' could lead us to think that the only mode of *diakonia* is wordless service. However, "There are two kinds of service: serving tables and the service of the word. Both are service" (Jeong, 2007, p. 32). Mission team life has an intrinsic relationship with the proclamation of the Gospel by word of mouth. Interviewees gave a variety of examples of evangelism in word and deed, with mission team life embodying the Gospel being preached.

Research narratives alluded to spiritual or evangelistic conversation in hospitable environments such as community cafés:

The coffee shop is called *The Open Door* and it's a place where people can choose to come when they decide to come, with who they want to come with... the conversations that go on are fantastic in terms of expressing need or expressing desire towards God in some way or telling a story which has spiritual dimensions to it (CTD).

Teams were visiting in neighbourhoods to listen to those in need and share testimony: "I saw a man of 100 come to faith in a nursing home" (LC). Contexts for more formal presentations included school assemblies, a children's Bible week, a youth camp and business community gatherings, the latter being an example of *church outside the walls*: "I'm increasingly more Franciscan because that was the spirituality of the road as opposed to the spirituality of the cloister" (PO). Examples of proclamation in church services included *Back to Church Sunday* (LF), regular preaching and teaching by ministry teams (SS), evening services led by a youth team (ET) and *seeker-friendly services*: "We started with a theme and worked back to the Bible using a variety of creative arts like bands, rock music, dramas, film sketches" (CTD).

In some examples there was the recognition of an evangelistic gifting in one or more people - a sort of 'arrowhead' *diakonia*: a vicar spending "a lot of my time outside the church working directly to evangelise but inside the church I was basically trying to build up a team"

(LC); a youth team leading evening services where “someone would preach, someone would lead, someone would lead worship, someone would tell a testimony” (ET); and a teacher leading collective worship: “I was very upfront with people about how I’d become a Christian and what that meant” (S). In this last example the ‘team’ was a supportive, prayerful homegroup whose *koinonia* was expressed as *diakonia* through the members of the group in their different callings: “my mission field at the time was very much my teaching career.” The *diakonia* of this ‘arrowhead’ team member consciously included both word - their testimony - and deed - “the importance of social action”.

Finally, word-ministry need not be one-way. The following story from a short-term mission describes an encounter where not only the one evangelised but also the evangelist is blessed:

On the final morning I’d been asked to give my testimony in the church service before we had to rush off to the final debrief at a central location, and there was a wonderfully important ministry appointment for me there as someone caught me at the end of the service saying, ‘you spoke about...’ and referred to what I’d said in my testimony, and it had really resonated with him with various things that were going on in his life and he wanted to be able to talk more about it. We were up against the clock but just those 10, 15 minutes with that man I think *made a spiritual difference both to him and to me* because I was able to join some dots and say my testimony is not only my story but it’s got relevance to other people too (LF).

The relationality of *diakonia* is thus expressed both in deed and in word. This dynamic is the outward face of mission team life, expressing through service the industry and purpose of *synergia* and the warmth of *koinonia*.

### **Hospitable leadership**

Being hospitable is important to my research participants - as leaders and shapers of mission team life they understand the position and value of both guests and hosts:

People will gather around a table... in all my villages it's about gathering around a table and sharing food together or just a coffee together... we're looking at the moment at just having some sort of network of tea party groups, because we've got an older demographic in all the villages really (S).

Contributions to leadership studies and management training seek to build a theory of hospitable leadership. Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey posit four standpoints or viewpoints for a host leader, each giving a different perspective in relation to those receiving hospitality and what needs to be undertaken and accomplished to be an effective host. The host leader *in the spotlight* is "the focus of attention, out front, making things happen;" *with the guests* implies mixing rather than being the centre of attention; *in the gallery* is gaining an overview of the action; and the host *in the kitchen* is "in a more private and intimate space preparing and reflecting" (McKergow & Bailey, 2014, chap. 5). Added to these four portraits are six 'roles of engagement' – *initiator, inviter, space creator, gatekeeper, connector, co-participator*. My interviewees show by their stories and insights that they are familiar with these roles.

Simon Walker wants to shift attention away from leadership attributes to the space between leader and led. For Walker the basic ingredients for hosting are creating a safe space in which people can relax with confidence; facilitating encounters between people in which listening, conversation, laughter and the exchange of ideas and possibilities can occur; and giving the occasion meaning and structure (Walker, 2010, p. 307). After surveying eight possible power strategies in organisations (including, perhaps surprisingly, serving) Walker argues that *the hospitality of the undefended leader* (the leader who is vulnerable but also secure in themselves) holds the key for health and growth: "Undefended leadership is about generous hospitality... The first steps taken by the undefended leader may not be on the metalled road to the training school but on the rough path of personal discipleship" (Walker, 2010, p. 309).

The practice of hospitable *diakonia* in mission team life is significant in two ways. Firstly, it locates hospitality within *koinonia*, where mutual service extends to those who may be

inhabiting the ‘fuzzy edges’ of experimental, embryonic community. Hospitality never risks becoming a contrived business model in such contexts. Secondly, companions naturally engage in *co-hosting*, in contrast to the seemingly individualistic emphasis presented both by Walker - “What makes an undefended leader [in the singular]?” (2010, chap. 1) - and McKergow and Bailey - “This book explores the metaphor of host as leader, and leader as host [again, singular?]” (2014, chap. 1). I am arguing that those who lead *transformative* mission team life both engage in community and stay in community: they are indeed “on the rough path of personal discipleship” (Walker, 2010, p. 309) but their discipleship is personal not because it prioritises individuality but because it prizes relationality. Hospitable leaders lead with others and are shaped by others, and their individual leadership identity is the stronger for it. With such relationality in view my evidence even more strongly supports the call of commentators for space-creating leaders who operate without the need to defend territory as their own. Such leaders are adept at assuming a variety of roles in relation to *diakonia* as they observe, connect and co-participate.

## **Pneumatika: spiritual life**

It might be objected that the lived experience of mission teams must fall prey to a frenetic activism of co-working combinations, exhausting relationships and endless do-gooding; but this need not be the case. My research narratives demonstrate that a powerful spiritual dimension is woven into the texture of mission team life. The ‘harp’ of worship goes with the ‘broom’ of serving in one *Life Together*.

### **The spirituality of mission team life: essential, provisional, eclectic**

*Pneumatika* are “spiritual things” (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 679). In this study I use the term for contextual spiritual practices such as prayer, worship and Bible study, both individual and corporate. Many would argue that the starting point and foundation for a *Christian* mission team life is *pneumatika* - the team spending time in the presence of God. In the words of Susan Hope: “Those who set out on the journey of mission cannot do so without prayer because the journey cannot be undertaken without the Holy Spirit, and the way to access the Spirit and the Spirit’s power is through prayer” (Hope, 2006, p. 61). *Pneumatika* thus

reveal “the dynamic of dependence” (p. 62). “To put it bluntly, you can’t give what you haven’t got. How stupid of us to think that we could ever be effective in evangelism unless it arose from an authentic and lived spirituality” (Cottrell, 2006, p. 3). All my interviewees in their different ways considered the relational dynamic of *pneumatika* - the intentional seeking after God-infusion as a team and as individuals - to be essential.

The ways that spiritual practices develop in local contexts are not predetermined - they emerge as part of a *Life Together*. *Pneumatika* are provisional, the expression of a team life lived before God on pilgrimage, in *tents*: “small worshipping communities that concentrate on practical discipleship by serving their contexts and drawing others into the task. Some may not have a long existence because of changing circumstances, but be fruitful for a period. This transience perhaps resonates with the tents the Israelites inhabited as they moved through Sinai” (Moynagh, 2012, p. 67).

My research narratives contain glimpses of some of the spiritual traditions being drawn upon to shape mission team life. Experimenting with ‘renewable’ traditions in current lived experience and watching for ‘dawns’ in team spiritual life were felt to be an authentic *modus operandi*: spirituality co-inhering in mission, team and life. Strikingly, these accounts also evidence an emergent church-in-mission in which there are no ‘departmental’ splits between spirituality and evangelism.

### **Evangelical spirituality**

The four characteristics of Evangelical spirituality and practice noted by David Bebbington - a belief that lives need to be changed, the expression of the gospel in effort, a particular regard for the Bible, and a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Bebbington, 1989, p. 2) - could all be identified in the interview narratives. In relation to the first of these one church leader looked back to a time of great encouragement as a new Christian whilst also acknowledging a continuing process of “changing, growing, maturing and learning” in their becoming “a different person” (GS). The effort involved in making the Gospel known I have evidenced in the accounts of team *synergia* and *diakonia* above. In mission teams of all types the Bible was regularly used. A high regard for Scripture could be seen in the use of explicit biblical references and a reliance on an understanding of biblical paradigms. Across

the whole sample there were scriptural references and allusions: the importance of Sabbath; incarnation; Jesus sending out the 70 (simple lifestyle); fishing with a team and a net; parables; scattering, watering and reaping; Jesus modelling living lives together; eating together; joy and laughter; telling people God loves them; the Holy Spirit as alongside helper; *Acts 2:42* as a 'golden thread' in sharing life together; complementarity of gifts; *Ephesians 4* 'flat ministry;' 'harp and broom;' (adapted from the harp and bowl in *Revelation 5* as an imaginative ministry description).

The research narratives contained examples of the Bible being used in team life. In short-term mission teams the Bible appeared to be at the heart of *team time* - daily meetings for worship, study, pastoral care and organisation. A *home group* consciously supported its members in their missional living in secular employment: "we studied the Bible together" (S); mission initiatives explicitly aimed to share biblical content: *Open the Book* (S), and a children's Bible week (HB); and local church staff-teams-in-mission used the Bible in regular devotions, sometimes emphatically so:

Any kind of mission team for me is always rooted around studying Scripture in some way. In the team here every Tuesday morning we spend the first 30 or 45 minutes around the Scriptures... We will read it and then we'll talk about it... and then we'll pray into it and that's really important (SO).

This accords well with historic Evangelical practice: Charles Simeon of Cambridge, one of the 'fathers' of hospitable scriptural gatherings in this tradition, had "an open day... when all who choose it can come to take their tea with me. Everyone is at liberty to ask what questions he will and I give to them the best answer I can" (Prime, 2011, p. 71). Other glimpses of mission team life from the same period similarly inspire Evangelical praxis today. *The Clapham Sect*, of which William Wilberforce was a member, and for whom Simeon was a sort of chaplain figure, knew themselves to have a spiritual life based on personal faith which was "seamlessly knitting together political deliberation, worship, friendship" (Tomkins, 2010, p. 113).

A focus on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the fourth characteristic of Evangelical spirituality in Bebbington's quadrilateral, was seen in the *lived-out* ministry of mission teams: the sacrificial death of Christ, central to *pneumatika*, was demonstrated in *diakonia*.

This relationship between worship and sacrificial service as a community is particularly evident in the mission team life of the *Moravians*: “Together we pray, Together we labour, Together we suffer, Together we rejoice” (Schnattschneider & Frank, 2009, p. 177), a life which was also “intensely evangelistic” (Finney, 2004, p. 59) and “expressed in a community lifestyle of worship, servanthood, love feasts, foot-washing ceremonies and a 24-hour prayer chain... unbroken for over a hundred years” (Fountain, 2007, p. 40). One interviewee, describing how their home-based intentional community had adopted the core values – worship, service, community life, accountability and mission – from this eighteenth-century heritage, commented: “We’re moving in the same flow... I look at archives... You can read stuff that you’ve never read before... I think it has a big impact on us” (HB). The mission team life that emerges in the context of this commitment highlights the dynamic value of *pneumatika*:

We want to be a worshipping community that’s coming before the Lord together and pressing into his heart, his word, his will... YWAM [Youth With a Mission, a team in local partnership] lead a worship session on a Wednesday night as part of our ‘house of prayer’ rhythm... The evening worship time is actually called *Stoun Mal*, which means ‘time to be amazed’... When we get a picture of who He is, that in itself transforms us (HB).

Two of the core values, worship and service, have been combined in the *Harp and Broom* short-term internships that are one of the more formal expressions of mission team life in this community: *pneumatika* and *diakonia* co-inhere at the heart of this re-presentation of Moravian mission team life.

### **Drawing from a variety of spiritual traditions**

A striking element of some research narratives was the occurrence of references to previous spiritual traditions with the intention of reliving aspects of these traditions experimentally in mission team life today. John Drane is clear that this is consonant with a biblical spirituality: “When the emerging church looks to ancient times for patterns of organic spirituality and

then remoulds them in the light of new circumstances, this is just the latest phase in a very old story” (Drane, 2008, p. 95).

Some of the traditions of British and Irish churches in the middle of the first millennium inform the life of contemporary intentional communities such as *The Iona Community*, *The Northumbria Community* and *The Community of Aidan and Hilda*. These have acted as interpreters and models of lived experience for others: an exploration of Celtic-style *pneumatika* can be the starting-point for a fresh phase of mission team life in a particular local environment (Iona Community, 2005; Simpson, 1997; Northumbria Community Trust, 2005). Celtic scholar Ian Bradley summarises this interpretive task:

So what was worship like in the days of Patrick, Columba and Aidan? Was it culture-friendly... or counter-cultural? I have come to the conclusion, after considering the evidence that we have, that it was both... We can gain a fairly clear picture... of the pattern of worship... It was centred around the daily and nightly offices which took place at the appointed canonical hours in the simple wooden building that served as the monastic church (Bradley, 2000, pp. 126-7).

This was a spirituality for mission, “a practical spirituality. The Celts took seriously the call to take up the cross and follow Christ. It was a call which involved mission and evangelism, and a life of dedicated holiness” (Culling, 1993, p. 22). “We do not seek to copy Celtic Christians... for their own sake. We draw inspiration from them in order that Christianity may be lived naturally... Celtic spirituality crosses frontiers” (Simpson, 2003, p. 7).

In one intentional community researched (CTD) there is the expectation that a pattern of spiritual life will unfold which draws strength and impetus from a number of mission traditions. The name of its ‘monastic’ centre, *Lindisfarne House*, indicates that a Celtic element is important in the spiritual journey being envisaged, but there are other influences too, all building on a foundation of biblical *pneumatika*:

What developed here is a community that has a kind of prayerful core... a prayer-based community which now has five or six households as a part of that... We have a vision of what we think church should be like that needs

to be fleshed out differently in each community but it's the golden seam which probably starts with *Acts 2:42*, goes through Celtic Christianity, arrives at the Moravians... a regular rhythm of prayer and worship... the presence of God is fundamental to this (CTD).

A parish priest admits to being “a bit of a chameleon... I love Celtic liturgy... Iona... It creates a stillness in the context of a very busy life... I think the language has a rhythm... Equally, I can be quite at home in a sort of full-blown *New Wine* context because sometimes I need to let go” (S). A *hybrid* personal spirituality sustains this leader as they feel their way forward with mission team life in their group of villages.

The *Rule of St Benedict* (Fry, 1981) has also been influential in the shaping of mission team life. One of my interviewees, an evangelist who is also a builder of community, puts it thus: “Well Benedict for me, when you look at his *Rule*... he understood human nature and how community works... the importance of prayer, the importance of reading Scripture, the importance of work and education” (R). Mark Mills-Powell chooses to reflect on “four aspects of the Benedictine way: Community, work (including corporate prayer), *lectio* (reading) and hospitality” (Mills-Powell, 2007, p. 4). A residentiary canon of a cathedral, part of a mission team who regularly draw from Benedictine *pneumatika*, admits that “I’m increasingly more *Franciscan* (Galli, 2002; Brady, 2013) because that was the spirituality of the road as opposed to the spirituality of the cloister” (PO). Reflecting or adapting previous spiritual traditions can be both a corporate experiment and a personal journey.

### **New monasticism**

“Contemporary ‘new monastic’ communities have rediscovered the immense value of daily prayer rhythms and are exploring creative ways of making them work amid the busyness and complexity of 21<sup>st</sup>-century life” (Reed, 2013, p. 99). Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously called for a *new monasticism*. He reflects on *pneumatika* in *The Day With Others*: “Where Christians want to live together under the Word of God... they have common petitions, common thanks, common intercessions to bring to God and they should do so joyfully and confidently” (Bonhoeffer, 2015, pp. 45-46). Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon,

reflecting on Paul's call to the Philippians (2:5-11; 3:20-21), encourage an "adventure of being the church" as *colonies of heaven* (1981, p. 11): "A colony is a beachhead, an outpost, an island of one culture in the middle of another, a place where the values of home are reiterated and passed on to the young, a place where the distinctive language and life-style of the resident aliens are lovingly nurtured and reinforced" (p. 12).

Bradley portrays a contrasting vision of colonies of heaven that appear to be more engaged with their surrounding culture as places of presence and availability (Bradley, 2000, p. 14), monasteries "intensely involved in the affairs of the world and the lives of the people they served as well as being places of withdrawal and sanctuary" (p. 11) - the sort of vision that inspires one research participant to experiment with *new monasticism* in their own urban context:

New monastic-type communities have been going on for quite a while... and I don't think I'd realised that it was possible or could have been happening here. It was a sort of dawning ... the dilemma was needing to talk to people who had a very particular sacramental experience... and needing to talk to other people who were coming into the community that was meeting here with curiosity, interest, questions and all of that... and so it's sort of exploring the sort of monastic community idea ... we pray, we eat, we work, we pray... it's just about doing it and living it out (GS).

Already in this tentative self-appraisal there are clues to the integration of *diakonia*, *pneumatika*, *koinonia* and *synergia* within an embryonic mission team life. "New monasticism is not about a romantic withdrawal to beautiful and privileged places in the countryside, fleeing from the problems of the world, but rather a radical commitment to stay with and re-engage in mission" (Mobsby & Berry, 2014, p. 3). This means that *pneumatika* - personal spiritual disciplines and their corporate expression - are part of a holistic life together in which mission and spirituality co-inhere. Ian Adams, in his guide to monastic rhythms for contemporary living (Adams, 2010) uses the metaphors of 'cave' for personal *pneumatika*, 'refectory' for *koinonia* and *diakonia*, and 'road' for the development of that *diakonia* in the wider world. He reinterprets the traditional monastic rule as a *rhythm of life* and discusses the value of monastic learning practices in spiritual formation.

Viewing mission and spirituality organically and holistically rather than mechanistically and departmentally can help with understanding the relationality within mission team life and its dynamics. As one practitioner of mission team life puts it, “Teams are holistic in that they have multiple dimensions, with things which bring you together and bind you together” (SO). The experience of “doing life together in a missional fashion” (CTD) encouraged another of my pioneers to draw on the thinking of a number of commentators (Donovan, 1982; Adams, 2010; Moynagh, 2012; Lings, 2015), which they presented as part of an extended reflection in the latter part of their interview. Reference is made to the *seven sacred spaces* posited by George Lings (2015) – chapel, cell, chapter, cloister, refectory, scriptorium, garden – adding road/gate/door for “the friar end of monasticism” (CTD). The metaphor is intended to be generative rather than exhaustive:

In any monastic community over the centuries, God has helped them to learn how to live together, how to do life together, and the dimensions of that life are reflected in the architecture, in the spaces, the sacred spaces that are built in those communities... George’s thesis is that in Western Christianity we’ve actually focused on one space which is the chapel. We don’t do it very often, we might not do it very well and we’re saying that is the Church (CTD).

Other research narratives gave hints that this way of understanding modes of sacred space could be a useful indicator of holism and integration: “Every Tuesday we spend time together, we have breakfast together [refectory] and pray [chapel] and do some work [scriptorium/garden]” (SS); “I placed my office [chapter] in the lay staff’s working environment [scriptorium/garden]” (PO); “We’d start the day with prayer and with a short Bible study together [chapel]... there were a number of occasions throughout the day when we would stop and pray in twos and threes [road, cell]” (LF).

The practice of monastic communities over the centuries seems to have been to develop particular modes of life and mission as context varied, improvising on a foundational theme: the “cave-refectory-road” continuum gives plenty of space for creative freedom. In the research narratives the “road” approach to mission team life is amply illustrated in the detailed accounts of short-term missions (LC, LF, R, ET, CT, HB), stories from team life in out-

and-about youth ministry (G, R), and the way team members in some missional communities have relocated to begin a new season of life in a completely new area (ET) - evocative of the *New Friars* that Scott Bessenecker describes (2006). "When the whole community sees itself as a travelling band, it becomes clear that all are learning, all are aspiring-to-become. No one has "arrived"; all are on the journey" (Adams, 2010, p. 36). Mission team life is spiritual, personal and communal. "Rather than see the mission as a project or as a thing we do, it's more part of the life we are living together so, to nick Mike Moynagh's phrase, 'it's being church doing life'" (CTD).

New monastic experiments are thus a search for a Christian holism that integrates the constituent elements of missional lived experience. From the starting point of praying and studying Scripture together, provisional 'tent' communities can explore synergy, practise hospitality and develop identity. The new monastic lens can help *mission* team leaders appreciate the *life*. Missional communities - of whatever tradition - have wisdom to share as they deepen and mature. *Learning* communities, as I shall argue in the next chapter, are critical as mission team life continues to take its shape from the interweaving of its dynamics.

## Summary

In this chapter I have mapped the contours of the serving and spiritual dynamics of mission team life, held together in one lived experience which is both human and spiritual. I conclude the chapter with two more sonnets illustrating the relationality and adventure of mission team living.

The sonnet *Good Soil* uses language drawn from an interview with a parish priest leading a team in an inner-city location. The first quatrain is based on the story of an unexpected encounter with members of an ethnic group at a parish public event, where an unconditional welcome leads to this community making the church their own. Their employment needs become the reason for a weekday work club in the building, and an experimental mission team life takes shape. The last line of the quatrain expresses this hospitality as something 'organic' where people 'taste' God's love and care. 'House of

Bread' (the literal meaning of Bethlehem) picks up the reference to Christmas in the first line, for there is room at the inn. Good food in the 'House' is integral to the day lived together. The second quatrain describes the team leader's experience of an unfolding mission team life: key to this is the interwovenness of prayer and conversation. 'Rhythm' and 'dawning' indicate an attentiveness to the deeper meaning emerging in the practice of mission ministry. This is named as 'monastic' - a daily life enacted and repeated: worship, community, co-working, service.

### **Good Soil**

St Francis' Christmas Market set its stall -  
We want to worship at your church, they said.  
Why yes, said I, there's always room for all:  
Come taste organic life, a House of Bread.

It's been about the rhythm, sort of dawning;  
Prayer led to conversation led to prayer;  
Monastic hospitality and learning -  
We pray, we eat, we work, we pray, we care.

I think it's almost best if you have nothing;  
This haven home some sort of healing brings.  
Our work - our love for people, godly passion -  
It's not a worldly way of doing things.

I'm changing and maturing, this I know.  
My planting in this soil helped me grow.

The sonnet *Sacred Space* uses language drawn from an interview with a church leader at the heart of a big city, who sees the building in their care, with its atmosphere and personnel, as a centre for mission and place of encounter with God. The sonnet is written in the voice of the mission team reaching out to those entering the sacred space: they are hospitality-conscious and God-conscious, putting themselves in the situation of the guest being welcomed: there is something to offer, something to share. The first quatrain is written with the auditorium in mind while the second introduces the cafe in the crypt, a warm, busy, noisy, human environment. Whereas the first quatrain strikes the note of transcendence and personal space, the second focuses on immanence and sociability: two complementary ways of encountering God in mission team life. The third quatrain has liminal space as its

theme, with personal freedom and human welcome in sensitive balance. The hospitable mission team are serving in a consistent but flexible way, looking to God for blessing and aiming to be fruitful co-workers with divine activity. The final couplet summarises a spacious holism appealing to the five senses, with an invitation in the same voice that sounded in the first quatrain.

### **Sacred Space**

Come light a candle, seek your sacred space -  
Our arms are open, let us share your load;  
Come sense the supernatural touch of grace  
And leave the building with a bigger God.

The cryptic cafe speaks a word of warmth,  
The team are here, mixed in, part of the scene;  
We laugh together, drink each other's health -  
The scent of hospitality is keen.

Our prayer: that God will bless these hallowed gates -  
The people coming in and out of here;  
A mission has emerged that resonates -  
Our meeting and our greeting make it clear.

So touch, give ear, in fragrant space be found;  
Come taste and see, enjoy your holy ground.

# Chapter 4

## Learning together and attending to surprises

*Seeing the gold in people, that's the thing.*

*I'll recognise the small things as they happen.*

### Introduction

In this chapter I consider *mathemata* (lessons learned) and *euremata* (surprise discoveries), highlighting ways that the interplay between intentionality and unpredictability in lived experience impacts teams and individuals. I discuss ways in which training tools and rules of life are used to develop mission team life and note the importance of modelling values. I show how a commitment to mentoring and apprenticeship influences personal and team-community formation: where co-empowerment is modelled and experienced it will significantly impact the character of the leadership that emerges.

I go on to show how attending to surprise discoveries in the lived experience of mission teams leads to the sort of improvisation that can change the shape of local mission and its team life. I give examples of the attentiveness, self-awareness and prophetic imagination that characterises effective leaders of mission, discipleship and ecclesial communities.

### Mathemata: intentional learning

My research narratives describe mission teams that are also communities of learning. Learning on the job and reflecting upon the lessons learned is a powerful dynamic, feeding back to shape lived experience. Such learning-communities-in-mission therefore have transformative potential for team members where there is both the environment and the opportunity for lessons to be learned well. The Greek *mathema* is defined as “something

that is learned, knowledge, teaching” (Arndt & Gingrich, 1979, p. 485) so I use the plural *mathemata* for intentional learning, training and apprenticeship as part of mission team life.

### **Training tools and rules of life**

In the previous chapter I showed how mission teams draw upon the Christian tradition for ways of inspiring and ordering spiritual life. These earlier expressions of faith and practice are often utilised in a *pick-and-mix* way: mission teams that are attentive to their own season and context are looking for helpful tools and ‘rules’ rather than a reliving of church history. Provisional *pneumatika* and an experimental *koinonia* support and gives shape to the work and service being done (*synergia* and *diakonia*). Added into this mix is a fifth relational dynamic with the potency to equip both teams and individuals. Tools and rules are the ‘sharp end’ of mission team life, the aim being a workable discipline both for the team as a whole and those participating in it: *mathemata*, ‘lessons learned.’

Tools and rules were being used by my research participants for a variety of purposes. Mission teams under the umbrella of *Through Faith Missions* use a *Spiritual Rule of Life and Holiness* for deepening discipleship:

The *Rule of Life* was basically seven different categories that you could reflect on, that reflected different parts of life... about how can we follow Christ more effectively and in a really committed way... if we’re trying to talk the talk, are we also walking the walk? (LC).

This indicates a training tool for laying the foundations of discipleship in mission team life. Other training appeared to focus on the development of gifting:

teams of ordinands going to visit different parishes and towns, sometimes groups of churches... getting people working to use their gifts and play to their strengths, to communicate the Good News and in a sense be a catalyst in the ongoing mission and life of the local church (CT).

Here short-term missions are a tool for putting theory into practice as well as providing further learning on the job: an intentional ‘greenhouse experience.’ One pioneer of missional church was encouraged to be using “a tool – it’s called *Heart Shapes, Heart Styles*, a very simple kind of questionnaire [that] comes up with a mission statement for your life. Once you know that then you understand what people are passionate about” (G). Another tool being used in a church community was *Natural Church Development*:

It was really affirming but passionate spirituality is the one that we needed to work on... I’ve tried the last six months to spotlight what we are passionate about... I think they are getting it actually... we’ve got new people in church who are there with a different sort of passion (GS).

All these tools are very much in the context of lived experience: without that experience and the reflection upon it there are no ‘lessons learned.’ *The Alpha Course* was mentioned in more than one interview narrative. Its emphasis on discipleship in lived experience and the development of *koinonia* makes it a useful tool for the development of mission team life at the interface with outsiders characterised by *diakonia* (CTD, SS). The ‘tool of lived experience’ was eloquently described by one network facilitator. Their *Formation* training programme for neighbourhood mission teams sought to make full use of the opportunities that came along for mutual learning and support:

I remember one time we were looking at addiction as a subject... we saw the real benefit was when people were bringing their skills and experiences from other bits of their lives and the network as a whole was being enriched by that. For me that was quite significant. Teams would each develop their own lifecycle of supportive stuff... people face challenges like a team member getting married or having a baby or whether it’s encountering something like being robbed in your community... I think support comes primarily just from knowing one another (ET).

Learning-communities-in-mission thus use embodied experience to hand as well as using or adapting tools for training and rules for living originally developed elsewhere. My research

narratives displayed an enthusiasm for learning-on-mission that bubbled over at many points.

### **Modelling values for a whole community**

Research participants placed great emphasis on modelling values for mission team life. Caring and trusting relationships were seen as critical. “It is in these real relationships that we are formed” (Peppiatt, 2012, p. 110). A senior leader in a cathedral team sought to change team ethos and build trust by modelling values, “by being open and transparent... I went across boundaries to show people that actually what you see is what you get... I placed my office in the heart of the lay staff’s working environment... that’s been I think a very holistic and helpful approach” (PO). *Mathemata* are lessons learned through relating honestly in community. Learning together builds and strengthens values, and modelling authentic values is a team responsibility:

If the jobs that you’re fulfilling are your tasks but actually there’s a bigger job that we have to fulfil as a community (say hospitality) then actually all of the people who are the centre of that community have to be thinking all of the time. It has to become part of their DNA. What does that mean for us - to reflect community - when I’m walking across the cathedral and I see someone crying? Do I continue to go out or say ‘Is everything ok?’ It only has to be as simple as that (PO).

Research participants were able to theorise on the basis of many overlapping experiences. Sometimes a *eureka* moment, or at least a recognition of transition, appears to have taken place:

We went to Lindisfarne for a weekend away as part of the *Mission-shaped Ministry* course. We looked at our prayer rhythm, we looked at our vision and we looked at our values while we were away and I sometimes say we went up there as a team and we came back as a community (CTD).

This example shows the combination of a training tool, time set aside for reflecting on team practice and values, and a surprise. The dialectic between constructing a theoretical framework for mission team life and modelling that life in reality is familiar to teams in the *Eden Network*:

The key element everyone shares is an ownership of Eden's core value: making a redemptive home right at the heart of a difficult community... from the base of their home they reach out... Deep in the psyche of each team is faith that through such efforts their neighbourhood will see transformation as God's love thaws peoples' hearts (Wilson, 2005, p. 32).

A core value is highlighted here. Working it out in practice requires attentiveness and the sharing of lives – this is where the learning actually happens. “We’d do training input with them but also loads of just reflection and discussion and activity, and they were significant times actually” (ET). What might a healthy mission team life look like and feel like as team members live out the core value of a *redemptive home*? “If you’re asking someone to blur the boundaries of mission and life and team and church then you have to allow them to be themselves in a way that’s sustainable otherwise you do just get fallout and burnout left, right and centre really” (ET). A *koinonia*-rich environment provides opportunities for immersive experience, communal reflection upon it, and the formation and reinforcement of values: *mathemata* are lessons learned in lived experience.

### **Apprenticeship and mentoring**

If training tools and rules are helpful, and modelling values for a whole community is important, the greatest premium was placed on intentional apprenticeship and mentoring. My interviewees told stories of times of apprenticeship in mission teams which were often full of emotion and a sense of wonder at what had happened since.

The dialectic of apprenticeship and mentoring is one of the jewels of mission team life. Their dynamic relationality and transformative potential are emphasised by a range of commentators aiming to present afresh some hidden dynamics of Christian discipleship:

One had to learn how to live this new lifestyle, had to be shaped and formed... like joining a group where there is an apprenticeship... The “teaching” means not what one downloads in a moment or in a classroom... apprentices have to spend time... to have mastered the training... Once one had absorbed this teaching one had finished one’s own apprenticeship... having mastered the teaching, one was in a position, without reading books or anything else, to act as a mentor in the process of shaping others as apprentice Christians (O’ Loughlin, 2010, pp. 11-13).

As one exponent of mission team life, Alison Morgan, points out:

We live in a “me” world... we tend to see discipleship as an individual thing... For Jesus, discipleship was not an individual process but a community one... discipleship was embedded in relationships; it required them to travel together in community with their Master (Morgan, 2015, pp. 52-53).

*Mathemata* are lessons learned by individuals in community: “To be a disciple is to be a learner. That’s what the word *mathetes* means... it means “whole life apprenticeship”” (Morgan, p. 89). *Mathemata* and *koinonia* are intrinsically linked:

The Gospel records furnish ample evidence that in his discipling of the Twelve the Master attached eminent importance to association, i.e. companionship, the cultivation of close relational ties. On the basis of such with-ness he generated a dynamic process of life-transference which was meant to facilitate them towards effective leadership at the same time (Krallmann, 2002, p. 13).

The *with-ness* of mission team life makes mutual and reciprocal mentoring a real possibility. “Teachers instruct us, mentors share with us... assist in reviewing the experiences of the mentee, prodding and probing” (Cranston, 2014, p. 7); “wanting, hoping, working so that those you mentor will go on to greater things” (Steel, 2011, p. 16). “Mentoring challenges all

involved with new ideas and examples. As a result, everyone finds themselves rethinking ideas they previously believed to be valid” (Abramson, 2008, p. 116). “Mentoring one another is at the heart of apprenticeship... There are so many ways of being apprentices to one another that I am hesitant about being too precise about the practicalities of mentoring” (Peppiatt, pp. 133-4). An emerging mission team life is thus a natural environment for developing apprenticeship and mentoring. The intentionality of *mathemata* is set within the exploratory character of *synergia*, the security of *koinonia* and the missional thrust of *diakonia*. The whole learning enterprise is offered back to God as *pneumatika*, in expectancy of divine resourcing.

Leaders revealed their early experiences of apprenticeship in mission teams as contributing significantly to their discipleship and ministry training. One urban ministry planter uses a horticultural metaphor: “I felt as a new Christian I was being planted in soil, that that was a good growing ground for me” - this leader mentions two people in particular who were mentors in that context - “I can just remember the meetings that we had and just feeling part of a team... it was valuable because it was nurturing” (GS); a skilled pastor and teacher describes their role model with deep respect and affection: “He was very warm, he was amusing... you always knew where you stood with him... we had a very strong ethos from the team leader” (SO); an evangelist remembers the encouragement of a mentor at a time “when life was particularly difficult... a place of safety... a place of teaching... I learnt so much from this pastor” (R). Travelling with, watching and learning from an experienced mission team leader shapes future ministry: an itinerant missionary describes the priceless gift of “getting an insight into what it is like to support the speaker... being their confidant” (LC). One parish priest explained how they had been inspired by their own parents:

I grew up in a home where both my parents were deeply committed to the life of the church and to serving God. They were PCC [Parochial Church Council] members, my father trained as a Reader later in life, my mother preached on the Methodist plan. They just got it that if you’re a Christian you’re under orders (CT).

The leaders I interviewed were drawing on personal resources gained from their experience of being guided through formational stages in ministry. Their apprenticeships with ‘master craftsmen’ in community were critical to their subsequent development. John Finney, commenting on Christian mission teamwork, notes the connection in Jesus’ practice between “the fellowship [koinonia] of disciples and the teaching of a group... walking and talking,” equating the rabbinic pattern of teaching and learning with an apprenticeship model: “The master craftsman instructs a group of newcomers to the trade... demonstrates... says to each in turn, ‘Now you have a go’” (Finney, 2004, p. 149).

Apprenticeship and mentoring, of various kinds along a continuum from formal to informal, express work-in-life, developing *mathemata* in the overlap between *synergia* and *koinonia*. In one home-based, Evangelical-monastic missional community,

Internships are almost like the first step into involvement here... a short-term internship that is called Harp and Broom which is a play on words from the harp and bowl that you find in Revelation, the worship and prayer, so Harp and Broom being worship and service (HB).

In this rationale the aim is to hold worship and service together (itself indicative of an overlapping *pneumatika* and *diakonia*). Apprentices are mentored in community on an internship programme called *Harp and Broom* which includes skills training, learning the values of the mission and “personal mentoring on the things that the Lord is doing in them, and helping them to move forward... I also encourage mutual mentoring.” Living together as a family is foundational, as in the original *Moravian* vision that the current community is representing. Interns, though technically volunteers, are exploring a vocation to serve. “An organisation or a ministry like this needs to make sure it is caring for the people who are working in a way that is healthy and holistic.” The style of mentoring takes into account a need for ‘spiritual parenting’ for those who “may be emotionally having a very hard time... a lot of people haven’t experienced mentoring, they haven’t experienced discipleship, they don’t really feel like they have spiritual fathers and mothers” (HB).

For *mathemata* to be transformational over half a lifetime in individuals and teams there needs to be a seriously focussed engagement between those who have reflected on their experience of mission team life and those who are learning the value of such a life, in contexts where *pneumatika*, *synergia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia* are both foundational elements and emergent practices.

### **Co-empowerment**

One of the great things I think about teams is the interdependence... there's a lot of sharpening of one another that goes on... when you work in a mutually supportive, good team it's just so much better than just working on your own (LC).

Those I interviewed appeared keenly aware of issues to do with power relations in mission teams. As mature reflective practitioners they were able to offer insights from both positive and painful times in their formation as mission team members and their emergence into leadership and professional practice. Learning together creatively in mission team life can be an experience of co-empowerment, where mentoring and apprenticeship are recognised and valued as reciprocal in the relationality of lived experience. Tim Harle, referring to *Benedict's Rule*, asks why 'inverse learning' and 'reverse mentoring' should not be understood as the normal expression and embodiment of healthy power relations in Christian discipleship and leadership (Harle, 2016, pp. 208-9). Power relations, understood both positively and negatively, were of concern to my research participants, being integral to the interwovenness of mission team life dynamics. Stephen Fox discusses *Communities of Practice* and the significance of learning that "takes place in real-time" and "learning-in-working" (Fox, 2000, p. 856), which implies the existence of *mathemata* in the context of *synergia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. Power relationships in the lived experience of New Testament missional communities are helpfully explored by Kathy Ehrensperger in her defence of Pauline co-empowerment. She distinguishes between *power-over*, *power-to* and *power-with*.

*Power-over* in mission team life should be characterised by guiding, parental, educational *mathemata*, and not be dominating or manipulative: "The guidance Paul and the Pauline

circle offer... aims at empowering them to interact with each other in a way that shows similarities with domination-free communication” (Ehrensperger, 2009, p. 178). Such relationality is characterised by a “multidimensional” mutual trust within which the “movement” is “rooted... and with which it is permeated... there is no institution to structure this relationship” (p. 182), in contradistinction to the “competitive dimension” in Graeco-Roman, imperial society (p. 193). Illustrative of this, Gooder’s character Titus counts the cost of giving up the public prestige of the latter to embrace the former (Gooder, 2018, chap. 25). Ascough and Cotton emphasise that relationships of trust (chap. 5), personal transparency (chap. 7) and the celebration of diversity (chap. 13) were foundational for co-empowerment in Pauline mission teamwork and remain so today (Ascough & Cotton, 2005).

Significantly, mission team life is also where the costly dimension of *power-to* can be experienced at the heart of *koinonia* and *diakonia*: a communicative, counter-cultural power that gives shape to a ‘colony of heaven’ in its local context. The *one another* Scriptural examples listed by Ehrensperger (p. 197) - love one another, welcome one another, bear one another’s burdens, encourage one another - lie at the heart of trusting relationships in mission team life. They are the foundation of *power-with* relations in Pauline and contemporary mission team life, where a communicative *koinonia* or ‘inner *diakonia*’ is revealed in a fuzzy-boundaried ‘outer *diakonia*.’ The power-relationality in a healthy mission team thus encompasses *power-over* loving guidance offered and received (*mathemata*), a *power-to* sharing in co-working and community (*synergia* and *koinonia*), and a *power-with* outreaching *diakonia*. This guiding, sharing, outreaching *dynamis* in mission team life is characterised by the Holy Spirit, as I shall argue in Chapter 5.

My research narratives are a synoptic witness to many team activities within a *Life Together* that are disclosive of not only a fundamental *koinonia* but also healthy co-empowerment. Team leaders find themselves in the role of co-teachers enacting “an alternate transcript of power” (Ehrensperger, p. 97) through the way they facilitate and encourage others. As one parish priest exults: “Working with a team where they had such obviously complementary gifts it was an absolute joy to see them using their gifts in different ways and supporting each other” (CT): *mathemata* with guiding *power-over* flowing into *synergia* with ‘one another’ *power-to*. Another ordained minister is thrilled that “where there’s a particular event taking place and a member of staff is heading that up other staff will often try and

support them in that” (SS): here the team leader is “the holder of the long-term vision and dream” (SS) who guards and guides with *power-over* but also enables *power-to* (*synergia* and *koinonia*) that issues in *power-with* (hospitable *diakonia*). In this example *pneumatika* are linked with *mathemata* in the guidance and empowerment received and shared:

When we’re praying for one another we’re open to having pictures from God or verses from Scripture and sharing them. I’m not sure we’ve had enough intentional training around it so occasionally there’s a rather clumsy thing said, but maybe we’re safe enough to cope with the clumsy as well as the discerning (SS).

Yet power relations in mission team life can also be destructive. A leader of a parish, with *power-over*, perceived that “people wanted to work together, they had a sort of common purpose, a common theme” (PO): relationality deepened through the *koinonia* and *diakonia* of hospitality and the ‘one another’ of *power-to*. The same leader, later faced with a very different set of relationships in a far less flexible setting, tries to build trust through openness and transparency in a situation where “nobody supported anybody” (PO), a conscious attempt at “an empowering community... based on trust... welcoming the other, that is, in hospitality in an inhospitable world” (Ehrensperger, p. 196). At this point “a new person came... manipulative... power-crazed” (PO): the implication is that *power-over* is being understood by the newcomer to the team in terms of “an imposition of a dominating pattern which has to be copied” (Ehrensperger, p. 154).

This painful, destructive dissonance highlights the importance of understanding *power-over* in a way that is consonant with the Pauline mission teams: “Throughout the letters, references to an empowering ‘tune’ can be found which indicate that this is one of the main characteristics not only of the power dynamics within the Christ-movement but also of life in Christ” (p. 196). Ehrensperger uses a metaphor from music, as some other commentators have done, to encourage a positive perspective on relationality. She sees *life in Christ* as both foundational for communal values and empowering in lived experience, connecting spirituality and relationality. The power-dynamics of healthy, Spirit-dwelt mission teams take their cue from *pneumatika*, are guided through *mathemata*, and embodied in *synergia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*, a praxis of co-empowerment that may reveal a ‘colony of heaven.’

Teaching and learning the 'tune' in the messiness of mission teamwork is critical for this progression: those who discern, design, model and mentor are best placed to do so if they are fully present to the life of the team-in-context in its stability and unpredictability.

Mission teams need training tools and patterns for living, leaders who model values within community, and holistic, co-empowering apprenticeship and mentoring. The extent to which a mission team life contains *mathemata* will significantly affect its health and effectiveness. Yet life cannot be programmed. The intentional design and steady rhythm of *mathemata* are in an interplay with a sixth dynamic of mission team life, *euremata*. Surprise discoveries can lead to new patterns of missioning, a closer attention to critical values and the reshaping of lives.

## **Euremata: personal discovery**

### **Surprise discoveries**

For mission teams there are significant opportunities for self-discovery, both individually and corporately, in lived experience. I use the term *euremata* to indicate unexpected discoveries and their consequences, in contrast to the sort of intentional training indicated by *mathemata*. The Greek work *eurema* means "that which is found, an unexpected gain... discovery" (Liddell & Scott, 2002, p. 287). The root verb has the sense of coming across something by accident and reflecting on the discovery in a very personal way, appreciating its uniqueness and importance. *Euremata* are things wondered at – situations, encounters, events, combinations. Their impact may be at the time they occur or in the remembering: their full value may only be appreciated with hindsight. Outcomes may be far-reaching, since it is in the nature of surprise to create its own paradigm. "The language of amazement... engages the community in new discernments" (Brueggemann, 2018, p. 67).

There are biblical examples of surprises in the course of mission: Jesus' disciples discovering that "even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17), Paul's team diverted to a new continent through the apparition of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9), and very many

others. It could be argued that the entire history of Christian mission is full of surprises leading to the creation of fresh initiatives that have changed a neighbourhood, a nation or even the world: apparently inconsequential events like a visit to Brighton for personal medical reasons by the Countess of Huntingdon in 1757 that corresponded to a dream about her by one of the local inhabitants (Cook, 2001, p. 175); someone suggesting at an after-breakfast conversation - "they could never remember who" - that William Wilberforce should head up the parliamentary campaign they all agreed needed to happen (Pollock, 1998, p. 15); a missionary to Africa realising that for their context *Christianity* needed to be *rediscovered* (Donovan, 1982); Bonhoeffer's understanding that he was experiencing among America's Black community a dynamic in Gospel worship and preaching of which he knew little (Marsh, 2014, chap. 6).

The way surprise is handled is considered critically important by some commentators on management theory ("Be open to surprises across all levels of scale", Hazy, 2011, p. 527) and literary construction ("The surprise should not be merely unexpected but also revelatory", Tobin, 2018, p. 2). The leaders I interviewed related examples of surprise discovery with excitement and a sense of adventure as they remembered the impact of those moments or indeed whole seasons in the life of their mission teams.

### **Attentiveness and conversation**

An influential report on the nature of mission in lived experience emphasises the priority of being *attentive*: "Attention to the mission context... comes before discerning how the Christian [mission] tradition works within it. Mission precedes the shape of the church that will be the result, when the seed of the gospel roots in the mission culture" (Archbishops' Council, 2009, p. 105): such attentiveness may in time lead to a *fresh expression of church*.

The Greek word *kairos* - "right, proper, favourable time" (Arndt & Gingrich, 1979, p. 395) - has been used for moments or occasions with significance (Blakeley & Howard, 2010, p. 4), in contrast to the *chronos* time that ticks away without obvious meaning. "These *kairos* moments or small epiphanies" (Watkins & Cameron, 2012, p. 75) are the raw material of *euremata*. Attentiveness - the desire to be waiting, watching and ready for the possibility of

something unusual - is a quality inhabiting my interviewees' stories, which contain language strongly suggestive of *kairos* moments in mission team life. One practitioner uses a range of expression to show their importance: *slow and patient, standing back, reflecting, watching, praying, seeing, spotting, discerning, recognising* (S). This *attentiveness* is linked to *conversation*:

A fairly new Christian who's very into embroidery and craft and has a heart for her village approached me and is saying, 'What can we do here that will encourage people along and draw people together and then maybe share about God?' (S).

A prompting has been shared and become a conversation, an open-ended co-attentiveness, a "watching to see whether things develop" (S). Could a mission team come into being from such a small beginning? Graham Cray suggests that discernment is "a fundamentally corporate activity, although also exercised by individuals... At the heart of discernment is the capacity to recognise interconnectedness" (Cray, 2011, pp. 103-4).

The whole tone of this interview narrative indicates a readiness to investigate epiphanic moments as they are given. Being content with provisionality is a necessary value for this pioneer as they wait patiently for a mission team life with fuller relationality to be revealed. There may even be profound wilderness moments: "things that just don't work and learning from the failure of those things" (S).

In the midst of "tending the flock (*koinonia, diakonia*) on the far side of the desert" mission team leaders may, like Moses, find themselves taking a closer look at something following a moment of surprise and realise that the very place they are standing is in some way 'holy ground' (Exodus 3:1-5). "'Seeing' is part of encounter... imaginative seeing can release new shapes from apparently fixed patterns" (Hope, 2006, p. 22): the way we respond to *euremata* has power to influence the future development of mission team life. Learners in life are "open to God's Holy Spirit enabling them to be attentive to their own inner response, and possess a willingness to be changed and hear the call of obedience and

action” (John, Volland & Barden, 2017, p. 25). Attentiveness can be embraced and developed over a lifetime of leadership-learning.

While some *euremata* may be ‘wilderness moments’ or ‘burning bush experiences’ in times of solitude, others occur in the midst of everyday conversation. The monastic provision of a *cloister* “enables you to bump into each other between different spaces – it’s a place of random connectivity, of loitering” (CTD). Patricia Shaw endorses this idea, strongly suggesting that professional training conferences be designed with long drinks and meal breaks. She notes that “Some conversations are anticipated, prepared for... others arise in unlooked for encounters” (Shaw, 2002, p. 161). It is these latter encounters that often provide the environment for *euremata*.

A striking example of a conversation that became epiphanic, influencing future missional action and team life to a marked degree, is narrated by a church leader who is being attentive to everyday encounters. The misunderstandings that form this particular conversation happen against a background of purposeful attentiveness to hospitable *diakonia*, commitment to *pneumatika* and the valuing of conversation between mission team members as a fundamental dimension of their *synergia* and *koinonia*:

The pattern of that is we’d been thinking and talking and praying ‘Is this the right way to go’ and then these people came along to the wrong event. I misunderstood what they wanted but we sorted that out and then from that actually a really significant project has grown (GS).

In this instance the bush may not be burning but there is clearly the possibility of “entertaining angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

Moynagh, appreciative of Shaw’s “complex responsive process theory” (Shaw, 2002), similarly emphasises the importance of conversation. Individuals cannot stand outside the whole and describe it as a given because the very description changes what is described: the general and his commanders are not surveying a landscape ‘out there’ since the territory of exploration is formed by the exploration itself. This allows Shaw and her colleagues to see

organisations as a series of conversations in which individuals seek to make sense of their experiences and discuss ways of acting upon their understandings (Moynagh, 2012, pp. 301-2). This shift modifies the detached and more individualistic ideal of the reflexive professional espoused by Donald Schon (Schon, 1987):

Instead I have been asking what happens when spontaneity, unpredictability and our capacity to be surprised by ourselves are *not* explained away but kept at the very heart of an account of the evolution of sense-of-self-in-the-world (Shaw, 2002, p. 132).

In mission teams, disciples-in-life are becoming leaders-in-the-making through their capacity to live and reflect *within* contexts of evolving *synergia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *pneumatika* and *mathemata*. *Euremata* are epiphanic moments that stimulate fresh thinking and action.

### **Improvisation and experimentation**

Leaders of mission team life reflect on the possible significance of unpredictable events along with other team members. The whole team learns to be attentive as conversation-in-life increases the sense of shared purpose and expands strategic awareness: the adventure of improvisation begins. “The paradox of improvising means acting in two apparently opposite ways: being skilled and experienced in what you are doing, and at the same time acting spontaneously. This is knowing and not-knowing simultaneously” (Friis, 2006, p. 86). Mission teams that have developed a rich relationality are comfortable with such parameters for meaning making. There is an echo in Shaw’s approach:

I have wanted to give much more emphasis to strategic work as the living craft of participating as an intentional fellow sense-maker in conversation after conversation (both public and imagined), encounter after encounter, activity after activity. I want to help us appreciate ourselves as *fellow improvisers in ensemble work* [my italics] (Shaw, 2002, p. 172).

The search to describe the apparent invisibility of improvisation has seen jazz used more than once (perhaps too often?) as a metaphor for the co-creation of meaning (Harle, 2016,

p. 206). In mission team life each 'performance' is unique, whether by the team or an individual within the team, and the continuing development of each player and the 'band' unpredictable. The *synergia* of the ensemble work is capable of development through attentiveness to *euremata* that occur in the *koinonia* and *diakonia* among the players. An improvisation in *life* - being set free for a greater co-creativity - can go beyond the safe expectations of improvisation within one tradition.

*Euremata* act as 'paradigm busters.' Moynagh uses *innovation* for improvisation but, following Shaw (2002), is describing the same essential process and characteristics: "Innovation goes beyond newness because it changes the 'rules of the game'" (2017, p. 8). I am arguing that a deep understanding of the dynamics of mission team life enables a traditional church or mission community *both* to see the benefits of improvising *within* their inherited tradition *and* to appreciate ways that improvising on themes 'outside the box' can connect with fresh implications of the Gospel. This approach to mission team life was seen in the ministry of John V. Taylor, "a great improviser, who knows that everything is provisional and uses what is given to him, assembling disparate pieces and unconnected ideas into something new" (Wood, 2002, p. 32): this is bricolage in lived experience.

My research narratives reveal the significance of improvisation and experimentation in mission team life. Accounts of early mission team experience often contrast with later reflections by the same practitioners, who may find themselves in more institutionalised or professionalised contexts. Improvisations in more provisional settings have made their mark and contributed to their personal formation: values for current mission team life may be strongly influenced by *euremata* experienced much earlier in personal development. There are memories of times where 'I discovered' (S), 'we started' (CTD), 'a sort of creative spark' in people was spotted (CTD), activities happened that 'we hadn't planned to do' (LF), there was 'chipping in' (ET), and other indications of improvisation and innovation.

Narrated instances of improvisation suggest links between *euremata* and the other dynamics of mission team life. A pastoral leader in an intentional community remembers:

We were just looking at the team we had, recognising who had the thing to give at that moment and encouraging them, so it's not always the same person who has to be taking the lead, but in each situation stopping and reflecting (HB).

This has influenced their current understanding of *synergia*: "We always go as a team... go very open-handed... let it shape relationally" (HB). For one ordained minister the startling experience of having an embryonic ministry gift identified as a young person - and being encouraged to use it in community at a formative time in their lives - has enabled them to develop *koinonia*, seeing "people's different pastoral gifts coming out... it's not a question of trying to be somebody else, it's just trying to be together and see God's provision for all" (SO). Another parish priest describes "a catalytic moment" with excitement:

The scenery was changing... people wanted to work together... I wouldn't say this was planned, I don't think we thought about what we were going to do... things happened... the team began... the wider team began to emerge... what we tended to do in the early stages was all about hospitality so it was us building relationships (PO).

The powerful experience of *euremata*, *synergia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia* in combination is value-forming for this leader as they endeavour to shape the life of a cathedral mission team later in their ministry. Values have crystallised: "generosity of spiritual life, sharing together, hospitality" (PO).

The dynamic *pneumatika* in relation to *euremata* is strikingly illustrated in the account of a leader who early on experimented with improvised prayer in mission team life: "I had no idea what I was going to do so I just started going and praying... and then things happened because through prayer we got a better direction" (GS): they recount a whole series of *euremata* in different mission teams, to the extent that improvising with prayer has become a non-negotiable part of their praxis: "The most sustaining thing of any of the teams I've been in is that whatever else is going on we can sit down and pray together" (GS). Finally, in an example illustrating *mathemata*, a leader looks back to their first short-term mission:

I think my first experience explicitly of a mission team was a bit before I went to train for ordination... very much as being a novice... I had no kind of canvas on which to measure what was happening... I saw people encountering Jesus. I saw a man of 100 come to faith in a nursing home – that was very exciting. I couldn't really evaluate the mission very well but I learnt a lot on it (LC).

Years later this 'novice', now an ordained evangelist, becomes the national leader of this particular mission network and is still learning from mission team life. The extensive training programme they oversee is informed by these early *euremata*. Evaluation of improvisation and encounters on short-term missions means they are "continually trying to make the whole thing better" (LC).

James Hazy stresses the link between openness to surprise and focussed experimentation (Hazy, 2011): these examples from my data suggest ways in which personal discoveries - when attended to, acted upon and experimented with - are internalised and remembered in the lives of individual team members, becoming catalytic for developments in mission team life that would not have happened otherwise.

### **Values and vision**

I am arguing that *euremata* - surprise discoveries in the midst of mission team life - can influence every area represented by the other five dynamics, and that a unique shape evolves for each particular lived-experience-in-context. Through improvisation and experimental patterns, team members (including leaders as participant-reflectors) may process and internalise these arresting moments, leading to the formation of values by which the character of each mission team life may be identified: particular *euremata* remain significant in later experience. Perspectives on life may be unconsciously adopted through many interactions and developments. Harle is clear that attitudes and values that have become the hallmark of life in a community or organisation "are the product of relentless consistency" in approach, and that "apparently small incidents" are critical. Values are

emergent properties – “it is difficult to trace a cause-and-effect logic, but the outcome is clear. The values emerge from many small interactions” (Harle, 2011, p. 11).

My research narratives clarify the way different phases of mission team development build on one another. Values formed in lived experience in an earlier phase are reinvested as ‘vision capital’ at the onset of a later phase and further tested. Essential elements of a continuing vision could sometimes be traced back to foundational *euremata*. The storytelling of research participants helped to reveal these connections as meaning-full, and I now trace a series of phases of mission team life revealed in a narrative particularly rich in instances of surprise discovery and reflection upon them (CTD).

The interview begins with an account of a conference about mission, church and teamwork where the research participant, finding space for personal reflection “began to see how it all worked together,” appreciating the critical importance of a *synergia* of different gifts and energies and a *koinonia* of shared lives. Here are foundational *euremata* for three subsequent *seasons* of mission team life as the emerging leader tests what has impacted them as authentic, helpful and even transformational: they notice “a building instinct... incredibly creative stuff... I loved that; it was really helpful to me at the time.” When asked by the leadership of their local church to pioneer a new congregation with an ‘alternative’ style and to build a mission team to lead it, they draw upon these reflections. The style and approach of the new project are characterised by an experimental *synergia* and *koinonia*:

We started with a theme and worked back to the Bible over an hour or so of using a variety of creative arts like bands, rock music, dramas, film sketches... I and one or two others would start imagining the theme and then we’d get some of the creative guys involved so we had two script writers... a band, a team doing children’s work, really good craft-based stuff, catering team, people handling money... a whole variety of people: my role was basically making the most of who they were (CTD).

At this point there are catalytic *euremata* within the developing mission team life: “These folks who really didn’t think they were particularly gifted in this particular area would

suddenly flourish in that area with others alongside them, and obviously we had prayer teams going on.” At this point a personal reflection discloses shock and realisation:

I think I learnt to not try and do everything myself... but I also learnt a very hard lesson because by the end of it I was completely burnt out, not for lack of team so much as we’d set our sights very high (CTD).

The leader’s reflexive skills are essential at this point, and what is now dawning significantly shapes the next phase. When the mission in this format finally comes to an end, a certain amount of ‘vision capital’ is carried forward: in this case, what is later described as ‘doing life together.’ The next phase, in a wider mission area but with a more hidden character, begins at a seemingly relaxed pace: “We started in prayer. We basically just sought God for what he wanted of us and others started to join us... we used to eat a lot together, dream together, play together.” Here we see the dynamics of *pneumatika* and *koinonia* overlapping as an *oikos* is established where little things matter, surprise discoveries can be reflected upon and values formed and reinforced. ‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ *diakonia* develop hand in hand as friendships are established beyond initial households: “any excuse we’d have a party and invite all the friends” (CTD).

The initial conference, together with lessons learned in the first two phases of mission team life - one congregational and the other based on prayer and hospitality in homes - become the foundation for a continuing vision with a high premium on prophetic imagination and co-creativity: “I think the same vision of trying to reach those in rural areas has never died really... we’re doing that now as part of the church that was birthed 21 years ago... seeking to be missionally active in whatever village we live in... 18 or so different villages.” This mature phase begins with *euremata*: “God asked us to move here [to a new village]... we didn’t know anybody here so we came on our own... what’s developed here is what we call a prayer-based community which now has five or six households.” The interview then unfolds the story of how ‘Candle’ came to represent *pneumatika*, ‘Table’ *koinonia* and ‘Door’ *diakonia*. The community both discovers and agrees the development of mission team life through being attentive to emerging patterns. The opening of a high-street coffee shop means a fresh investment in *synergia* - team gifting and roles - as well as attentiveness

to opportunities for evangelism and community-building as new people are included. In this development the main focus for *mathemata* is the mutual modelling of a mission team life in which many lessons are learned and reflected upon.

The final part of the interview is unique in the set of research narratives, being an impromptu extended theological reflection on the nature of the new monasticism being explored, including references to several contemporary models for mission and discipleship (Adams, 2010; Moynagh, 2012; Lings, 2020). The main points are as follows: “Spiritual deepening and discipleship are clearly closely connected”; “The best place on earth to grow as a disciple is in a community on mission with Jesus”; “Rather than see mission as a project or thing we do, it’s more part of the life we are living together”; Vision is about “seeing where God is going and joining in”; “It is about doing community life where people can relearn what it is to be human and accepted and loved and become who they’re supposed to be”; “Right from the start we’ve looked for the opportunity for creativity”; “The congregation model really isn’t working in most places”; “I think teams need to have a premium on imagination... a shared commitment to God imaginatively expressed in the way that community does life together” (CTD).

This account shows that *euremata* are catalytic: learning and re-evaluation take place in the unpredictability and experimentality of lived experience. Epiphanic or *kairos* moments can occur in any phase or formation of mission team life and be influential either immediately or a number of ‘seasons’ later. “It is the task of prophetic imagination and ministry to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in our history with God” (Brueggemann, 2018, pp. 59-60).

## Summary

The interplay between *mathemata* and *euremata* in the life of mission teams reflects a dialectic between solid and liquid, the stable and the experimental in lived experience. There is a correlation here with the sort of sequence narrated in The Acts of the Apostles

where the Holy Spirit is depicted as initiating and the Church is catching up; for example, in the account of Peter and Cornelius and its aftermath in chapters 10, 11 and 15:

The place where we are, at this apparent edge, is where God is doing new things. And those who daily see the new things that God is doing in the world have the obligation toward God and toward the rest of the Christian world to go back to the old centres... taking to them our renewed vision of what God is doing today (Gonzalez, 2001, pp. 179-80).

The interwovenness of *mathemata* and *euremata* in mission team life has profound consequences for the character of an individual's discipleship in community. A framework for apprenticeship where those mentoring demonstrate an openness to the unexpected will mean that there is both a discipline in training and a readiness to incorporate the lessons arising from personal discovery.

The following sonnets illustrate and summarise the transformative interplay between these two dynamics. *Learning Community* uses language drawn from an interview with a diocesan mission development leader for whom participation in short-term mission teams has been a significant experience of apprenticeship. Mission team life is remembered as *synergia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *pneumatika*, *mathemata* and *euremata*:

### **Learning Community**

I had no kind of canvas as a measure,  
When I took part in my first mission team;  
Learning something new a real pleasure,  
Being a novice, people helping me.

We were committed to some common training -  
A Rule reflecting different parts of Life -  
Sharing study, meals, praying, planning,  
Our weaknesses and failings - feeling safe.

Let's make disciples who will make disciples -  
Let's walk together, claiming common ground,  
Identifying leaders, training people -  
A lot of churches just go round and round.

It's tempting for us just to talk the talk.  
With Jesus we must try and walk the walk.

The sonnet *Harp and Broom* uses language drawn from an interview with the pastoral leader of a hospitality-based mission team characterised by disciplined worship (*harp*) and practical service (*broom*). In this community there is an expectancy that meeting with God will be 'a time to be amazed' and that prophetic insight will be shared among team members. Family relationships and an emphasis on the spiritual parenting of volunteers is emphasised.

### **Harp and Broom**

How can I know your calling for me, Lord?  
Or where to go to tread the ancient path?  
To hear for sure your own authentic word?  
To gather with your people round your hearth?

I'll go to Herrnhut, happily there be placed,  
Where nations meet and pray in upper room;  
Prophetic voice, a time to be amazed,  
As willing volunteers wield harp and broom.

We're stewards, brothers, sisters, every one -  
For each a place at table, valued part;  
Each knowing father, mother, daughter, son;  
For me church should be family, one in heart.

A Life Together, listened to and heard -  
For not to live together - how absurd.

# Chapter 5

## Relationality, the chaordic and the Holy Spirit in mission team life

*We need to rediscover what it means*

*To go and make disciples, live in teams.*

*Relearning being human, loving more.*

### Introduction

In Chapter 5 I consider the overall character of mission team life. Such lived experience is relational (an account of selves-in-community), complex (demonstrating interwovenness and organicity), chaordic (shaped by a combination of intentionality and unpredictability), adventuresome (both positive and negative experiences contributing to a meaningful whole) and Spirit-filled (to a greater or lesser extent characterised by the work of the Holy Spirit).

These five characteristics illuminate the holistic setting that forms the typical background to the mission team life described in the research narratives. This holism comes into clearer focus even as the relational dynamics are differentiated: the ontological framework for mission team life is integrative.

### Relational character

The overall character of mission team life is relational. In the previous three chapters I have mapped the contours of six relational dynamics - *synergia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *pneumatika*, *mathemata* and *euremata* - whose overlapping and interweaving produce the shape of a mission team life in context. These dynamics are relational because they concern selves-in-

community: they affect and are affected by the activities, practices and relationships of both individuals and team-communities. The following summary example from my research narratives demonstrates the naturalness within lived experience of all six dynamics of mission team life:

Looking at the team we had and recognising who had the gifting [*synergia*], the thing to give in that moment [*euremata*]; needing to go as a learner and not go as a teacher [*mathemata*]; listening to the Holy Spirit with the team in a situation [*pneumatika*]; physically living in a house together [*koinonia*]; keeping the house going because we're a guest house... different responsibilities with prayer and worship [*diakonia*] (HB).

The six relational dynamics find resonance in Scripture, as I have already demonstrated in relation to the mission teams of Jesus and Paul; and they can be discerned in accounts of mission team life in Christian history. This correlation can logically be extended to part-fictional accounts of mission team life based on lived experience recorded in a journal. For example, it is possible to identify the six relational dynamics and their impact as they are woven together in the storyline of *Call the Midwife* (BBC One, 2021). This TV period drama, set in the 1950s and early 1960s in London's East End (nine series broadcast 2012-20), presents a mission team of midwives - some religious sisters and some not - who are discovering their co-working gifts and learning to accept and love one another as they offer both professional care and hospitality at the interface between mission and neighbourhood. Their *synergia* in vocational practice co-inheres with the *koinonia* of shared existence as a convent community and a *diakonia* of costly service on the road together. The sisters and young trainees eat together, tell each other stories, care about each other's physical, emotional and social needs, and have fun together. The practices of *pneumatika* - worship and study - in the convent community are portrayed as real and empowering. Apprenticeship and mentoring are prominent aspects of *mathemata* while *euremata* - surprise discoveries - occur in every episode. The TV series is based on a midwife's journal of real experiences of mission team life which were transformational for the author: "I started to read the Gospels" (Worth, 2008, p. 319). This account of mission team life in midwifery also demonstrates the absurdity of the Western hierarchical trichotomy that esteems mind

over heart, and then both mind and heart over hand; and my research narratives also reveal a countercultural commitment to the one body with many parts: the eye *needs* the hand (1 Cor 12).

Relationality is a fundamental - even ontological - feature of mission team life; but my research narratives also point to other holistic or integrative characteristics.

## **Complex character**

Mission team life - as lived experience - is complex. The complexity is seen not only in the interweaving of practices but also in the interweaving of life-stories.

In their narrative accounts my research participants quite naturally reach for metaphors as they seek to conceptualise their experience; and metaphor can be a useful tool for understanding the overall character of mission team life. "A study's main points may be more easily understood and remembered when worked into vivid metaphors... A metaphor is richer, more complete than a simple description of the data. Metaphors are data-reducing and pattern-making devices" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 287). Metaphors, while not offering explanations, increase insight into complexity. "The metaphor is not simply a literary ornament or a vehicle of emotive import; it is a means of cognitive mediation" (Brown, 2002, p. 5); metaphors "connect what, in a more linear or analytic approach, may appear disconnected, bringing together... different frames of reference in a way that sparks novel insight" (Slee, 2017). Here I present two extended metaphors to illustrate a key aspect of complexity in mission team life: the interwovenness of *themes* - such as work, worship, serving and caring - with personal and team *stories* over a length of time.

### **Warp and weft**

The interwoven texture of mission team life can be portrayed metaphorically. A weaving loom's warp threads can represent time stretching out: the way the loom is set up provides a framework on which a piece of cloth may be woven over time. The shuttle introduces weft threads of different thickness and colour according to 'season.' There are pauses for the reloading of the shuttle followed by periods of varying intensity of activity, represented by

the speed of the shuttle. The bands going across will grow to make the cloth, corresponding to phases of mission team life. Weft threads may be loaded singly or in complex colour combinations. The resulting 'story' over the length of the cloth could represent either a mission team going through different seasons of life together, or one team member's life over the course of different mission team experiences: a sequence revealing the unique character of a team life or an individual's story. The warp and weft threads woven together form a *con-text* (weaving together): a multicoloured co-creation. Each mission team life is unique in space and time.

The metaphor's usefulness lies in the way it invites reflection on the unevenness and variety of different phases or seasons, and their contribution to the whole. The following account describes a mission team moving into a new season of life together:

We went for a weekend away once... we looked at our prayer rhythm, our vision and our values, and I sometimes say we went up there as a team and we came back as a community... the team itself became a community, or the embryonic heart of one, in that I think just because we got to know each other better, but also because we kind of made a transition from it being just vision driven and we were a project together to we were actually doing life together (CTD).

A second narrative describes the transition of an individual-in-community through a number of seasons of mission team life. Their starting point is a matter-of-fact disclosure of *tabula rasa*:

I went on my first ever mission very much as a novice... I had no kind of canvas on which to measure what was happening... The fact that I was learning was a good thing. I always like new experiences and to have a sense of gaining something as you are going along... There was a conscious team life, that was one of the values I picked up (LC).

This interviewee goes on to describe various levels of leadership responsibility in subsequent missions, their eventual ordination as a local church leader, and finally their part in a diocesan training team.

It could be argued that the creation of a piece of cloth on a loom suggests an image that is too mechanistic, especially since the 'choices' enacted by a weaver's shuttle come from outside the 'frame' on which the lived experience is being shaped. On the other hand, the very existence of a 'mover' outside the frame opens up the possibility of reflection on God's activity in relation to mission team life. The metaphor is present in Psalm 139: "Where God is described as a weaver in scripture, the cloth he is weaving tends to stand for a person's life" (Robinson, 2019, p. 46).

Another biblical metaphor - from horticulture - can take the reflection further.

### **Trellis and vine**

This second metaphor provides for a more organic way of seeing mission team life. The framework, rather than being a loom, is a trellis positioned at an appropriate height and with enough width to provide space and support for a plant's growth. The trellis is the framework for a mission with its own as-yet-undetermined team life. This lived experience unfolds in the way the vine grows over the trellis. It needs to be rooted in suitable soil; seasonal conditions and variables such as warmth and moisture need to be favourable. Shoots as they appear reach toward the trellis, guided as necessary by the hand of a gardener. The shoots find support in the lattice and strengthen each other, intertwining in a complex formation (*com-plexus*, embrace). Nourishment flows from secure rootedness and a favourable environment; flowers and fruit appear in due season. The vine on its bespoke trellis could represent the life of a mission team developing over time, and a particular team member's experience could be viewed as emerging within the complex formation. A horticultural metaphor allows for the unpredictability of emergence: the precise course and extent of the plant's growth cannot be predicted with certainty.

I have already referred to the striking way in which an urban vicar refers to “being planted in soil that was a good growing ground for me” and to an early experience of mission team life that “was nurturing and it helped me grow” (GS). They describe the interweaving of certain team activities - “the prayer led to conversation and the conversation led to prayer” - as “quite organic really” (GS). Another experienced ordained missionary, using overlapping aspects of a biblical horticultural metaphor, advocates that “we take seriously some of the parables: we scatter seed, someone waters it and someone reaps it... My job is I did the watering and you began to see these flowers open up, lay ministries develop, people become ordained” (PO). Here the metaphor is extended in the flow of narration to describe a flowering of ministry and vocation. Of course, this organic world is sometimes *Not Eden* (Walton, 2015): there are bindweed and blight as well as blossoms in lived experience. The same interviewee also describes the way a growing team life is ruined: “all the work that had been done... destroyed” (PO).

One commentator who invokes the power of metaphor (Aisthorpe, 2020, p. 4) calls for an organic approach to church and mission that amounts to a *rewilding*: I find this a useful image for describing the apparently uncontrolled variety and natural growth of mission team life. Another (Lings, 2017) sees limitations in “the horticultural paradigm” (p. 25), preferring “the language of persons” that is intrinsic to “God as community-in-mission” (p. 77). This “interpersonal paradigm” (p. 28) links to the relational character of mission team life I have described.

The texture of mission team life is a con-text of interwovenness at many levels. Using the tool of metaphor from the bricolage toolbox can help with visualising the relationship between practices and life-stories in the complexus of missional living.

## **Chaordic character**

The complexity of mission team life is given further definition through the lens of the chaordic. The term *chaordic* has been used to describe “any self-organising, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organisation, community or system, whether physical, biological

or social, the behaviour of which harmoniously combines characteristics of both chaos and order” (Hock, 1999, p. 30).

### **Combining order and chaos**

The apostle Paul’s approach to mission has been described as chaordic (Ascough & Cotton, 2005, pp. 155-165), and the Church of England has been challenged to explore the chaordic as it reviews its self-understanding of leadership and teamwork (Harle, 2016, p. 206). My own research narratives contain examples of mission team life which appear to combine, or at least hold in tension, aspects of ‘order and chaos.’ In a not untypical urban setting (GS) the elements of *order* could be the vicar as mission team leader, members of the parish with “a very particular sacramental experience” and the “people who are effectively employed by the [community] project and the church and partly funded by the diocese” - while *edge of chaos* could describe the “dawning” of a mission team life: the *chaordic* holds in tension a felt polarity between people with a more traditional mindset and “other people coming into the community with curiosity, interest, questions and all of that, not necessarily on a faith journey” (GS).

Interviewees told stories of the development of community café projects in which the chaordic is revealed. There is a plan and design for the mission but team members may be discovered unexpectedly:

The cook had actually been someone who came along to the cafe as a customer and we were advertising the post through the Job Centre and in the cafe and she said, ‘Oh well I don’t mind – I’ll apply’ and she did and was successful and a good appointment (LF).

In another venture the project, while carefully managed, is “a very organic thing” as team members “come up with extraordinary ideas” (SO). In a third example a chaordic instinct is seen in the way mission team members occupy the cafe area - the building is very solid, the *synergia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia* contrastingly liquid:

What I perhaps didn't see was quite how much our staff team would begin to use this new space... meetings, getting on with doing work, connecting with members of the public... mission has emerged that resonates with having a public space in a worshipping building (SS).

The chaordic is also applicable to mission team *networks*. Two research participants demonstrate an instinct for deepening a mission team life that already combines a recognisable organisational structure across a network with experimentality at the cellular level. Their powers of observation and experience of relationships as network facilitators enable them to grasp the transformative potential of the chaordic. The first account, from a facilitator of short-term mission teams, is suggestive of order opening up to allow freedom:

The *Rule of Life* was broad ranging... I suppose you'd summarise it by saying it was about how can we follow Christ more effectively... technically we could only really insist on people making use of it when they were engaged in mission but we always used to say to people 'we'd encourage you to make this part of your life.' There was always a slight tension in making sure that it didn't become some legalism... if you're following Christ these are just sort of basic ground rules, and I think that sort of purposefulness was quite important to people (LC).

The second, from an urban network facilitator, has the feel of exploring the chaordic from the opposite pole:

We didn't as a network have a kind of 'rule of life' type spirituality... so that meant really that it came down to the local church culture and individual team members... and I think the network contributed to that (ET).

The chaordic is thus glimpsed as combinations of organisational stability and local experimentality. A continuum between 'order' and 'chaos' could be drawn on which to plot the chaordic for each example of mission team life, but this would risk over-simplification through an attempt to quantify aspects of relationality that are best viewed qualitatively.

The sonnet *Eden Team* illustrates the chaordic in the way the mission team spontaneously incorporates a surprise occurrence into an already patterned existence, resulting in the reshaping of a day in team life-in-the-community. The picture is painted of an improvisatory team life rooted in the sharing of lives and 'fuzzy-edged' hospitality:

### **Eden Team**

One night it snowed, and waking up we saw  
Our neighbourhood as it had never been;  
We played in virgin Eden, full of awe,  
And others joined the laughter, snowball, scene.

Our fuzzy-boundaried, fragile, open home,  
The stuff we do together, sharing lives,  
The seasons of our joy and pain, this tome  
A legacy of mission life revives.

This humble goldfish bowl of wide-eyed love,  
This microcosmic plan of patient care,  
Enlightened by the Spirit from above -  
Is beautiful embodiment of prayer.

For church is team and team is church, that's right!  
The elements are shown in snowball fight.

### **Fractal patterns**

An aspect of complexity that sits alongside the chaordic is the observation of *fractals*: repeating patterns discernible at different scales in a system (Harle, 2011, p. 4). The dynamics of mission team life - *synergia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *pneumatika* - develop in relation to each other, interweaving in contextual patterns. Wheatley (1999) observes dynamic features in the patterning of organisational life: the effects of being "willing to improvise" (p. 45) in co-working; the part played by "stories" (p. 161) in conversation and relationships; a wanting to "make a difference" (p. 149) through ways of serving; and a general impression of "shapes in motion" (p. 125) which reminded me of the way spiritual traditions may merge or reappear in new ways, as if kaleidoscopically, through

experimentation. She notes the importance of “iteration” (p. 120) and “surprise” (p. 162) and particularly highlights *fractals*:

Since fractals resist definitive assessment by familiar tools, they require a new approach to observation... What is important in a fractal landscape is ...not quantity but quality. How complex is the system? What are its distinguishing stages? How do its patterns differ from those of other systems? (Wheatley, 1999, p. 124).

Each mission team life described by my research participants has a distinctive pattern and shape, reminding me of examples of mission team life in Christian history. In the life of St Francis and his mission teams we see a foundational attentiveness to prayer, sacraments and the personal message of the Gospel – *pneumatika* – together with a consistent *diakonia* (serving the poor and preaching), developing into a mature *koinonia* (the brothers sharing life in community), and a widening *synergia* (the founding of the Poor Clares and multiplication of teams for different missions). Through emergence over time a Franciscan ‘fractal shape’ remains discernible, one that is both simple and complex. “If those exercising leadership pay attention to small things, we should expect to see repeating patterns, fractals, at different levels in an organisation” (Harle, 2011, p. 18). In the case of the Clapham Sect a wide-ranging *diakonia* focussed in the very public *synergia* of William Wilberforce and several other prominent members is balanced by other more private dynamics - a home-based *koinonia* and disciplined attention to *pneumatika*. The shape and pattern of this mission team life remained remarkably consistent at the time and was replicated across time and space, providing an enduring foundation for Evangelical Anglican mission team life today.

My research narratives typically contain accounts of mission team life emerging over time, adjusting and readjusting to circumstances. A characteristic ‘fractal’ shape is both recognisable *within* a particular mission team life and as a *signature* that distinguishes it from other mission team lives: one size or shape does not fit all! One local church ministry-and-mission team prioritised *koinonia* (a safe space for sharing), *pneumatika* (prayer and Bible study), *diakonia* (serving one another in practical ways) and a *synergia* that recognised

complementary of gifting. This 'signature shape' was recognisably present in the mission team life associated with a church centre development project and, later, its café team in the same local church (SO).

Another research narrative contained a detailed account of a church grown from a transplant where all church members were regarded as part of the mission team (G). The ministry was hospitality-based: a *diakonia* (exercised primarily in the liminal space of a hired school building) replicating the shape of the 'parent' church that was also repeated across functional teams. These displayed a *synergia* characterised by the careful differentiation and distribution of gifting. A purposeful *koinonia* (meals, conversation and fun together) and *pneumatika* that included prayer at every scale of gathering also featured prominently in the fractal shape. The sonnet *Gold in 'em* presents the fractal values that the pioneer leader of this church understands to be patterning the different seasons of mission team life – creativity, hospitality, prayer, unity, gifting, passion, and seeing the gold in people:

### **Gold in 'em**

The team got sent with purpose. I was young.  
At first I struggled, differences were raw.  
In creativity I found my song;  
My weaknesses were covered in the four.

We're sharp on hospitality and prayer;  
We back each other, unity's our way.  
Believing in the giftings that we share -  
Everyone's got gold in 'em, I say!

A tool we've got - Heart Shapes, Heart Styles - explores  
What people feel they're passionate about;  
Don't ask for volunteers, they need a cause -  
A mission for their lives that sends them out.

A life-transforming vision-modelling.  
Seeing the gold in people, that's the thing.

Boulton, Allen and Bowman sound a note of caution on reading too much into the significance of fractal patterns, because "chaos equations are deterministic... it is questionable and somewhat dangerous to assume such equations can apply to dynamic,

complex, and fluctuating conditions in the social and natural world” (Boulton, Allen & Bowman, 2015, p. 96). The organicity and patterning characteristic of mission team life depends on many factors, often hidden at a deeper level than any evidence available from the life-stories in my data: complexity theory is generally more useful metaphorically than ontologically. Nevertheless, the chaordic is a ‘golden thread’ woven through the texture of mission team life. We cannot but be struck by the interplay between stability and chaos in lived experience.

## **Adventuresome character**

In my research narratives I was fascinated to discover mission team members of all shapes and sizes. Some appeared to join a local expression of mission team life as if out of the blue. Taken together, they are quite a crowd - on the journey of servant-discipleship the contemporary ‘travelling band’ takes on board a number of youth and children’s workers and not a few clergy and other ministers, a verger-evangelist who prays with event organisers, ‘a very godly and gracious QC’, a parent support worker, a fairly new Christian offering her embroidery and craft skills as a focus for gathering a new interest group together, ‘tall Paul challenging blokes to do difficult things’, a café customer who turns into a cook, the manager of a cycle centre, ‘an amazingly compassionate village postie’, a county Lord Lieutenant, a secondary school headteacher, a gap year student, two people with a heart for the poor, an Alpha course helper, a man with a forces background who delivered a fabulous school assembly talk, two Eastern Europeans walking into a Christmas market, a lady offering two places around her table to hungry missionaries, a director of music, Carolina the day nursery manager, Jo ‘the person in the church who everybody in the village knows’, a single mum who came to faith, a retired chef, and someone who felt strangely moved to send £5,000 without knowing that this was the exact amount needed for the repair of a leaking church roof. Some are named, many are not. Their *diakonia* may be part of mission planning or their contributions may apparently be serendipitous (or providential).

The relationality and organic complexity - and indeed chaordic character - of mission team life mean that it has an unpredictable, adventuresome quality. This is most obviously the case where short-term missions are set up with only part-planned schedules in unfamiliar areas and with untried combinations of team members; but adventure can also characterise

more settled mission teamwork across a range of settings through different seasons. An understanding of mission team life as adventurous holds together both positive and negative experiences: joys and frustrations are woven together in a richer tapestry than perhaps would be the case with a pre-planned, controlled project. As George Verwer puts it: “Where two or three are gathered together in His Name, sooner or later there will be a mess” (Verwer, 2016, p. 14). Rowan Williams describes Florence Nightingale as “in many ways a phenomenally difficult woman - obstinate, self-righteous, generous, sacrificial, angular, judgemental and compassionate all at once” (Williams, 2019, p. 97) who “ran fast and furiously to achieve her ends, and she didn’t always mind very much whom she elbowed out of the way in the process either” (pp. 99-100). Stephen Tomkins, in his deeply moving account of David Livingstone’s missionary expeditions, also provides plenty of evidence for Verwer’s theory of *Messiology*, commenting that “Livingstone’s excessive autonomy made him think and talk about mission almost entirely in terms of what *he* was doing towards *his* goals” (Tomkins, 2013, p. 59). Drawing on accounts from Livingstone’s own journals and those of his team members, Tomkins concludes that “Throughout his career, Livingstone’s relationships were blighted by the fact that he made a virtue out of non-communication” (p. 60); and yet this series of adventures, though at times palpably lacking a mission *team* life, poignantly illustrates that success can come in surprising ways: “Unnoticed at the time... and generally unnoticed since, [an] important story had been unfolding” (p. 235) – his complex friendship with Sechele, of the Tswana people, led to the birth of an extraordinary African movement with its own idiosyncratic missional life.

Research participants noted a bureaucratic, or worldly, approach and a wrong understanding and use of power as two factors militating against a properly adventurous mission team life. The following two sonnets portray the contrast between the joy of an adventuresome mission team life and the debilitating consequences of these factors:

The sonnet *Light of Foot* uses language drawn from an interview with a regional denominational leader as they reflect on their earlier experiences of mission team life and contrast them with a current reality which seems unable to respond with imagination and creativity. An itinerant short-term mission has been remembered as having flexibility and a relational dynamism. Prayer, community, co-working and training developed together in

situations of improvised hospitality, with a growing consciousness of the immediacy of God in everyday living reinforced by storytelling. The narrator reminds us of Jesus' own mission style, drawing a whole variety of people together on a common journey of faith and life. The third quatrain changes gear abruptly: we are back in an impoverished, bureaucratic, ecclesiastical present where such wholehearted adventure seems palpably lacking. The final couplet encourages the rediscovery of that mission team life which is light of foot.

### **Light of Foot**

We'd start the day with prayer and Bible study,  
To school assembly, coffee morning go;  
Then stop and pray and sing and dilly-dally,  
And end up in the pub with hearts aglow.

I've places round my table, your provision,  
Your story is my testimony too;  
Like-minded, different backgrounds, on a mission -  
As gentle Jesus sent the seventy-two.

I want to do things well, not on a pittance,  
Stop serving rubbish coffee, jumble sale;  
I want to feel vibrations, make a difference,  
Be light enough of foot on hill and dale.

We need to rediscover what it means  
To go and make disciples, live in teams.

The sonnet *Poured Out* uses language drawn from an interview with a cathedral leader as they reflect on their experiences in a previous post and share values for mission team life for the future. The first quatrain depicts an open style of leadership where the aim has been to bring hope to a broken community. There is renewed hospitality and a resulting growth in relationships and fresh sense of purpose. The second quatrain paints a picture of ruin as a new team member arrives. Emotive language reflects the pain felt. The third quatrain continues to reflect on the shock of a return to dysfunctionality in team life, at the same time expressing the desire to gather up the good in the face of destruction and continue to serve. The sonnet concludes with a vision of the adventurous life of a church poured out for others outside the walls, persevering whatever the consequences and believing in growth.

## **Poured out**

From chaos and disaster team emerged:  
'My office door is open - please walk in!'  
I watched with satisfaction, morale surged:  
'What you see is what you get - no spin.'

And then a brand-new person, just arrived -  
Manipulative, power-crazed, annoyed -  
Brought blight on good relationships: I grieved.  
All the work that had been done: destroyed.

I felt the disappointment and the shock.  
Our values should transcend the jobs we do:  
We're here to scatter seed, St Francis-like -  
Be church outside the walls, generously go.

To water, see the flowers open up;  
To be the wine outpoured from Christ's own cup.

## **Spirit-filled character**

### **The Holy Spirit in mission team life?**

If talk about God is “recognised as a human activity intending to bring practical perspectives faithfully into critical and creative interplay with divine horizons” (Graham et al, 2005, p. 8), an account of the shaping nature of human-spiritual experience lived as mission team life needs to be written with reference to the Holy Spirit, who “moves in the long haul, in the crevices of life, in the nooks and crannies of daily details” (Levison, 2013, p. 69). The Spirit-filled character of mission team life accumulates a myriad *kairos* moments along the *chronos* continuum, transforming lived experience into an adventure of discipleship.

The description of *pneumatika* as a set of spiritual practices shaped by improvisation and experimentation raises the question of the reality of divine encounter. Can the presence of God the Holy Spirit be authenticated? How can practical theologians negotiate the problem of talking about God in practice (Cameron, Bhatti et al, 2010)? We gaze through the portal of biblical revelation even as we commit to “a disciplined attention to the lived complexity of believing” (Ward, 2017, p. 184). Our practice is one of wonderment, *theoria*.

This sort of seeing is extensively evidenced in the interview narratives and constitutes the authentic voice of my research participants, each of whom bears testimony to an awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit both in their own lives and in the expressions of mission team life that they have inhabited. Their accounts, filtered through the lenses of their own spiritual and contextual development as persons as well as the normative accounts of pneumatology in the Christian tradition, contribute to a 'pneumatology-from-below' that is both faithful to lived experience and rich in biblical resonance. There is both the expectation and the experience of an encounter with God in mission team life.

### **The Holy Spirit and relational dynamics**

The range and scope of *pneumatika* in the research narratives provides a useful starting point for such a pneumatology. Times of prayer and worship together are seen as a focus for experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are several accounts of listening to God for prophetic words or pictures (1 Cor 12:8). There is the expectation that shared Bible study will be *theopneustos*, God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). Such practices are viewed as essential for the divine guidance of mission team life and a God-empowered lived experience.

A pneumatology-from-below includes the potential presence of the Holy Spirit in the other relational dynamics too. "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all things in all" (1 Cor 12:4-6): *pneumatika*, *synergia* and *diakonia* are connected in life and in the Spirit. The relational dynamics evidenced in the research narratives appear to fit naturally together in a common life with *pneumatika* at its heart. The 'energy flow' through the dynamic of *pneumatika* appears to be one with that in the other dynamics: the Holy Spirit animates the co-working, communal, ministering, learning and personal discovery dimensions of mission team life also. It is obviously not possible to articulate a comprehensive account, but the Holy Spirit's activity through all the relational dynamics is discernible: the parts and the whole are both in view, and the character of the whole can be appreciated through each of the parts.

## **The Holy Spirit in life together**

An account of the Holy Spirit in mission team life can take 'co-' as its starting point: the multi-dimensional shared life of a community-in-mission which is also a community of the Spirit. My initial readings of the research narratives strongly suggested the existence of communities of the Spirit engaged in *life together*. This is significant: "The humanity brought alive by the Holy Spirit is... a humanity we discover together" (Williams, 2011, p. 70); "Only in their togetherness can Christians remain alight with the fire of the Spirit" (Taylor, 1972, p. 133).

Sharing in the Spirit means that together, in community, we are part of a dynamic set of relationships... involved with God and other people at the same time... our continual crying out for the Spirit opens us up to relationships, conversations, commitments, collaborations - and sufferings - that are unimaginable in advance of entering into them; but when we are in them we realise that we are privileged to taste a little the experience of being transformed from glory to glory... we find ourselves part of a new family (Ford, 2011, pp. 46-47).

The Holy Spirit is active in the liminality of mission team life, where *koinonia* and *diakonia* overlap, embracing and empowering both the 'come' mission of welcoming hospitality and 'go' mission in all its forms (Lings, 2020, p. 162). The life together *is* the mission (Marsh, 1988, p. 235), containing within itself all the elements of ministry for carrying out the Church's mandate of worship, edification and outreach (Grenz, 1994, chap. 18). It is a relational life in the Spirit that inhabits *sacred spaces* in lived experience: cell, chapel, chapter, cloister, garden, refectory and scriptorium (Lings, 2020): a God-breathed community where the Spirit "shapes the 'together' of love" (Ford, 2004, p. 63).

## **Chaordic Holy Spirit**

An account of the Holy Spirit shaping mission team life could take the *chaordic* as a starting-point: the Spirit of order and stability is at the same time ever-creative, ever-initiating. The Holy Spirit is in the relationship between intentional learning and surprise discovery in mission team life. Descriptions of apprenticeship and mentoring in the research narratives

imply the *Parakletos* - the Holy Spirit as Alongside Encourager. Stories of personal growth and team development highlight the significance of attentiveness, discernment, improvisation and co-empowerment: these accounts would look very different without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows wherever it pleases: we hear its sound and can sometimes discern a footprint. This is not to say that all is sweetness and light. Mission team life is both Spirit-animated and all too human - there are stories of weakness and failure also. Ascough and Cotton argue for a paradigm in which the Spirit acts invisibly and “within which relationships develop chaordically” (Ascough & Cotton, 2005, p. 161). My research demonstrates that both relationality and the chaordic are characteristic of mission team life: the relational, chaordic Holy Spirit is implicated.

### **Theoria**

“When we try to speak of the Holy Spirit, symbol, image, song, poetry, and prophecy are perhaps more suitable media than concepts and reasoning” (Cantalamesa, 2003, p. 4). I have suggested that the metaphors of weaving and horticulture imply the existence of a weaver or a gardener in relationship to the frame or trellis on which a mission team life is emerging and taking shape, the account of complexity in lived experience pointing to divine initiative and involvement.

Using a more interpersonal paradigm, mission team life could be said to be the *co-creation* of God the Holy Spirit and human beings in community. The six relational dynamics I have identified focus on the practices and processes that constitute the lived experience: in *Christian* mission the *dunamis* beyond and within these dynamics is the Holy Spirit. “The chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church is the Holy Spirit... the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world,” as Bishop John V. Taylor famously put it (Taylor, 1972, p. 3). To this confident assertion we can add the many accounts of a pneumatology-from-below that are contextual, narrative and provisional - accounts of the Holy Spirit animating the co-working, sharing, serving, praying, learning and being surprised together that reveal the meaning-full character of mission team life. Ward’s “call to contemplation and wonder” (Ward, 2017, p. 184) is helpful as, together, we develop a *theoria* of the Spirit in lived experience. Jack Levison is clear about

the existence of “an array of starting points” for the “thoroughgoing pneumatology” that is “yet to be written” (Levison, 2013, pp. 208-9). My research demonstrates that mission team life is one such starting point: the Holy Spirit in its relational dynamics and integrative character. By this I am not making an argument for the Holy Spirit *only* being in Christian mission teams!

The sonnet *Seeing*, based on an interview with a parish priest who leads a group of village churches, aims to capture their sense of waiting - in the presence of the Holy Spirit - to see how the situation will develop. Their role as a *seer* or *watcher* is apparent from the accumulation of expressions which develop seeing and watching - spotting, discerning, recognising. There is a conscious ‘standing back’ in observation, both creating space and then letting that space be indwelt with divine activity. The process is ‘slow’ and ‘patient’ - but never detached, for God sees and feels need. God’s representatives (the mission-team-to-be) will need to see and understand ‘small things.’ There is wonderment, *theoria*, in the fragility of a situation whose outcome is not assured: the process is a difficult one involving experimentation, doubt as well as faith, real effort in serving and connecting people who live in seemingly separate or at best loosely affiliated communities. Those who are the object of this mission of love will be watching too – they ‘know when it’s authentic.’ The sonnet closes with the suggestion that metrics might not be as important as discernment.

### **Seeing**

I'll spend my time in prayer and much reflection,  
Discerning where I need to be right now;  
I'll recognise the small things as they happen,  
Be slow and patient, God will show me how.

I'm standing back and all year long I'm watching  
To somehow build relationships of love;  
Maybe it's God who's actually designing  
A network of tea parties from above?

Jesus saw the sick and lame and loved them.  
He felt their longings, cared about their dreams  
They know when it's authentic, spot it quickly.  
I'll try to find the people and the teams.

But how to measure outcomes, well, who knows?  
I've done a lot of seeing where it goes.

## Summary

In the introduction to my thesis I gave my working definition of mission team life: *a lived experience of missioning together that is given shape and meaning through relationships, practices, processes and values*. In this chapter I have pulled together the most important threads that run through the research narratives. Relationality is a defining fundamental of mission team life that characterises the whole and its constituent practices. Emergence and complexity can be glimpsed in the ways a chaordic life is shaped and patterned. A spirit of adventure sets the tone for journeying together - a journey during which the presence of God the Holy Spirit may be recognised.

# Chapter 6

## Transformative discipleship and credible leadership

*Let's be prophetic in imagination.*

*For church is team and team is church.*

### Introduction

In Chapter 6 I show how an understanding of the dynamics and character of mission team life can refresh the Church's theological imagination and equip its practice of discipleship. I explain how my research addresses debilitating dichotomies - highlighted or implied in recent official reports - through a robust conceptualisation of discipleship informed by reflection on practice. I argue that reflective practitioners whose values in ministry and vocations are formed through mission team living demonstrate an understanding of collaboration, compassion, hospitality, spirituality, co-empowerment and prophetic imagination that energises and sustains the mission teams they facilitate: a shared, transformative journey of discipleship is made real in the life of the Church.

In demonstrating how the characteristic dynamics of mission team life challenge the assumptions underlying documents offered by the Church of England for reflection on practice I engage with literature highlighted in the introductory chapter of my thesis, especially *Kingdom Calling* (Faith and Order Commission, 2020), *Witness* (Faith and Order Commission, 2020) and *Senior Church Leadership* (Faith and Order Commission, 2016), which I reference in the text as KC, W and SCL respectively. I also offer a critical analysis of the design of the *Pilgrim* course (Cottrell et al, 2013) as a way forward for discipleship in the Church.

## **Mission team life: a dynamic, integrated discipleship**

The authors of *Kingdom Calling* believe that in the Church of England's journey towards a fuller discipleship, good theology has failed to capture people's imagination and that what is needed is "healing in how we imagine and understand ourselves" (KC, p. 3). I argue that mission team life is theologically imaginative, avoiding unfruitful speculative assumptions through being grounded in lived experience and conceptualised in practice. Mission team life generates capital for investment in the imaginative theological re-envisioning of the Church: spiritual capital, discipleship capital, ministry capital, vocational capital, leadership capital. Such investment is vital for church-on-the-ground in its various forms "as we fulfil different roles within society, and as two or three meet together in Christ's name as a family or household, and as we gather for the liturgical assembly week by week" (KC, p. 52). The relational, Spirit-filled adventure of mission team life is a vital factor in the creation of the deeper, broader, shared discipleship that is aspired to:

The disciplines of discipleship need to train us for being with Christ and seeking his reign in every part of our lives, and not be associated with retreat to some special zone of devotion. To do this, we need creative wisdom to re-shape the spiritual resources of Christian tradition for our own time. The challenge is to work out how to share in this vital spiritual work together (KC, p. 87).

It is not clear from the above whether the discipleship being referred to is communal as well as individual in character, despite calling for a move from private retreat to public engagement. If such a challenge can only be met *together*, resource-full *team* life needs first to be recognised and then nurtured, for here a practical wisdom is generated in lived experience where the disciplines of discipleship are recognisably integrated and themselves reinvigorated. Such an understanding of mission team life as integrative of elements of the one life of discipleship, spirituality and ministry can address divides in thinking and practice arising from philosophical or academic traditions or from departmental thinking in organisations. Interestingly, the authors of *Kingdom Calling* point out a dichotomy between

spirituality and ethics, which “have tended to become separated domains, in academic study as in institutional life” (KC, p. 87).

A parallel report, *Witness* (Faith and Order Commission, 2020), while presenting helpful accounts of the lived experience of discipleship-in-mission, does not go far enough. The dynamics of mission team life in these case studies are not made explicit, and the tantalising hints of a holistic discipleship - relational, complex, chaotic, adventuresome and Spirit-filled - are left embedded in testimony and reporting. These elements deserve a fuller treatment:

All the stories of witness that we tell in the case studies... are stories that involve people who have been fed by Scripture, shaped by worship and led by the Spirit... they are stories of seeing and hearing before they are stories of doing. In different ways, each of them is a story of people who pay attention to the world around them... they see the work of God, blazing unexpectedly before their path (W, p. 13).

*Pilgrim: A Course for the Christian Journey* (Cottrell et al, 2013) invites participants on a shared discipleship journey modelled on catechesis, learning the faith together in small groups in local contexts. Its emphasis on interwoven strands of discipleship and lifelong learning mirrors the warp and weft metaphor for mission team life that I presented in Chapter 5. While admirably strong in its teaching content, *Pilgrim* has weaknesses in its methodology. The authors confidently assert: “The way in which we begin to learn about the Christian faith will condition and affect the way in which we continue to learn and grow in faith” (p. 35). Despite their belief in the whole-life balance of their material (p. 20) and a passionate advocacy of learning together as experientially meaningful, the course’s over-reliance on the linear, programmatic, non-experiential, even individualistic approach of traditional catechesis means that the potentially expansive relationality of small-group discipleship is unintentionally weakened.

Secondly, *Pilgrim*’s investment in small groups with a broad curriculum may not of itself be enough to deliver transformative discipleship for the Church. “Taking part in a *Pilgrim* group

should lead to change both for the members of the group and for the leaders” (p. 21): “We hope the ‘feel’ of the group will be similar to other adult group learning experiences in contemporary society such as book groups, NCT classes, support groups or AA meetings” (p. 25). This aspiration is followed by the bold hope that through leadership emergence in the groups over the two phases of the course *Pilgrim* will be useful as “a tool not simply for the catechesis of individuals but for the formation of small mission-shaped Christian communities which are the building blocks of the life of the local church” (p. 26). By giving no real indication as to how this complex development might take place, this claim stretches the small-group catechesis model to breaking point. The *Grow* stage leader’s notes (The Archbishops’ Council, 2014), in a short paragraph entitled *mission and practical tasks*, give hints of some dynamics of a mission team life, but without conviction:

If the group goes well, it will begin to form into a community. The bonds of community can be strengthened by undertaking together a common task. This might be organising a community meal. It might be a piece of service to others in the church or neighbourhood, perhaps following up the gifts and calling of one or two members of the group, and perhaps linked to the theme of the course (p. 4).

The rationale for the size and shape of *Pilgrim* and its mode of delivery appears to rely on “a number of studies [not referenced] where only one significant common factor has emerged so far in relation to spiritual and numerical growth in parishes: the frequency of offering nurture groups” (p. 28); yet nurture groups are but one mode - a tool for *mathemata* - in the holistic discipleship that is mission team living. Rather than bolting on an experimental foray into *diakonia* after a period of developing small-group *koinonia* - which aims too low, too late - why not conceive the adventure of discipleship as an immersive, relationally dynamic mission team life that moves through chaotic seasons of action and reflection, generating capacity for improvising beyond as well as within safe traditions?

This has been done before. Evangelist and writer J. John, in his online series of monographs *Heroes of the Faith* (John, 2021) reflects that William Booth’s outstanding insight and contribution was “somehow to bring together the ingredients of help, evangelism, support

and discipleship” in a pattern of “holistic mission” and “an organisation that those in need wanted to belong to” where the lives of those who took part were transformed. My research narratives reveal mission team life as a paradigm within which transformative discipleship takes place: rather than trying to fit important elements of experiential discipleship into the paradigm of a life-long series of courses, mission team life shows clearly where and how a variety of modes of learning become integrated in lived experience: courses fit into life, team and mission.

Martyn Snow synthesises vocation, mission, spiritual disciplines and ministry in his *Anglican Discipleship: Everyday Faith and Everyday Witness* (Snow, 2021):

The language of discipleship offers the possibility of a new conversation about how we hold together individual and community, vocation and mission, institution and movement. The Church of England’s vision for the 2020s includes the language of ‘a community of missionary disciples’... (Snow, 2021, p. 25).

However, a description of mission *teamwork* and its impact on personal discipleship and the integration of discipleship strands is strangely absent. The focus is once again on individuals finding their own way forward in Church and life. Snow makes the interesting point that the word *mathetes* is commonly used in the gospels and Acts, but not by the apostle Paul, who prefers *adelphoi* (pp. 3-4). Snow’s exploration of how we can construct a language of discipleship for today is important: my conceptualisation of a mission *team* life with six relational dynamics synthesises a similar set of discipleship strands. This is the ‘community of missionary disciples’ in all its diversity, organicity, provisionality and intentionality.

The Methodist Church presents *discipleship pathways* as a rationale for discipleship in local churches: “a pathway offers an intentional plan of action that enables progression, transforming our commitment into a practical reality” (Methodist Church in Britain, 2021), the suggested framework for missional discipleship being “invite – connect – form – send.” Eschewing “a one-size-fits-all template” for developing and deepening discipleship, this strategy affirms “a variety of courses and other learning opportunities for our people to

benefit from” (and specifically mentions the catechetical contribution of *Pilgrim*) but with “a change of gear... to planning systematically how to take people from where they are to where they need to be in their discipleship.” The commentary is also careful to acknowledge that the messiness of life precludes simple linear development; and equally helpfully advocates “incorporating action from early on in a discipleship pathway... a small group may function primarily around some or other missional commitment, such as serving in a foodbank.” My research findings - which include examples from ecumenical contexts involving Methodists with their practical missional DNA - addresses this aspiration through the wealth of evidence of transformational discipleship in mission team life and the conceptualisation of a new pathway in practice. *Discipleship pathways* is a helpful concept that needs a fuller account of the way intentional study, practical action and reflection can become integrated in the lived experience of Christian disciples in their local contexts. In Appendix 2 I present an application of the methodology and conceptualisation of my research as the curriculum for a short course for mission team participants, reflective practitioners and leaders, showing how mission team life can be taught as well as practised: thus the project contributes to the triangulation between the life of mission and ministry, academic endeavour and professional practice.

The individual pilgrim on their discipleship pathway can also participate in the adventure of mission team life. I now show how significant experiential elements of Christian discipleship can be re-conceptualised and integrated in practice.

### **Teamwork and community**

For late-modern Western Christians accustomed to pursuing an individual discipleship path mission team life offers a new framework and a new way of seeing things. In Chapter 2 I demonstrated how teamwork and community are held together in mission team life: purposive activity need not, indeed must not, be treated separately from the sharing of lives. I described in detail the types of mission team exemplified in my data - short-term missions, various modes of community ministry, whole congregations as mission teams, formal staff teams at different levels, and intentional missional communities. Teamwork and community are revealed in the relational dynamics of *synergia* and *koinonia* and integrated

in an emergent, complex ecology. My research narratives show that the mutuality characteristic of a healthy mission team life takes shape through such homely activities as eating together, caring for one another, and rest and refreshment, as well as through focussed tasks undertaken as the work of mission. Such practices are experienced as human and spiritual, corporate and personal: the participants in mission team life are being shaped as selves-in-community even as the 'personality' of each unique embodiment of mission team life is emerging in context. The stubborn dichotomies of work versus life and individual versus corporate development are addressed.

### **Ministry and spirituality**

In Chapter 3 I showed how inner *diakonia* - mutual service within a mission team - becomes hospitable outer *diakonia* at the fuzzy-edged interface with outsiders, who may then be drawn into the life of the team. In this way a further dichotomy between community and outreach, fellowship and ministry, church and mission, is resolved. The relationality and organicity of mission team life brings church and mission together, both conceptually and in practice. As the authors of *Kingdom Calling* point out: "Ecclesiology... concerns our self-understanding... is pivotal for shaping our theological imagination" (KC, p. 51). Ray Anderson provides a helpful chapter title in this respect - *The Ministry of the Church as a Community in Mission* (Anderson, 1977, p. 156): the relational dynamics of a community in mission will be the way by which we both imagine and know our ecclesial self-identity as "sign, instrument and foretaste" (KC, p. 52). Understanding the way mission team life works in practice provides valuable clues to help answer the question "What do we say we are, in every context where we are present?" (KC, p. 51): an *embryonic* ecclesiology is discernible in mission team life. Such holistic praxis, moreover, addresses an overemphasis on separating word- and deed-ministries. Mission team life is an ecology, "the rationale of a habitat: how in an environment certain factors adjust to one another in order to be enriching and to bring stability that in turn leads to further enriching possibilities" (Rowan Williams, 2017). Vital elements of lived experience that all too easily fall through the gaps created by an unhelpful rationalisation - the deeds of kindness, encouraging conversation, storytelling and sharing of testimony that are so vital to the building of personal and community identity - belong here.

In the life of the Church understandings of ministry can become conceptually disjointed, stretched as they are between the practice of serving in lived experience and top-down associations with ordination and leadership. *Kingdom Calling* presents a careful discussion of *diakonia*, pointing out that the New Testament's *diakon*- words "described the service of an envoy, commissioned and accountable to perform a task" (KC, p. 44). The authors agree with a reading of Ephesians 4:11-14 in which the work of ministry is the task of all the saints: all Christians share in the one ministry, though some are commissioned for particular ministry - a correlation with the discussion on social and ministerial vocations (KC, p. 47). My own exploration of *diakonia* in mission team life gives examples of a diversity of ways of serving at different levels and on various scales. As well as pointing out the way an inner and outer *diakonia* can operate as team members both serve one another and others in their mission context I highlight examples of improvisation where there is a holding together of ministries of word and deed in one *diakonia*. Team members take on roles as part of an organic life together and grow into ministry within the whole. Such organicity also bridges a perceived divide between ministry and spirituality, which have a history of being categorised separately both in relation to each other and as potential aspects of discipleship. The telling example of *Harp and Broom* illustrates how imaginative conceptualisation in mission team life can overcome false dichotomies in practice, as here with spiritual worship and practical service.

The spiritual practices of mission-teams-in-action - the prayer, worship and Bible study that I categorise as *pneumatika* - form the more observable part of a spirituality which itself coinheres with discipleship, even as the overall character of mission team life as a way of discipleship is Spirit-filled (as I explored in Chapter 5).

### **Training together and personal discovery**

The fifth and sixth relational dynamics - *mathemata* and *euremata* - are similarly elements of an integrative, holistic discipleship that can be experienced as mission team life. I have argued that intentional programmes of training, rules of life, the modelling of values, apprenticeship and mentoring combine with surprise discoveries in a chaordic way to

pattern mission teams as powerful learning - *discipleship* - communities where individual paths of discipleship are also taking shape: mission team life is adventuresome.

But is this a sort of muscular Christianity geared towards frustrated extroverts who struggle with the quiet orderliness of church? The practitioners I interviewed covered a range of personal styles and approaches to life and had embarked on a reflective journey which was both communal and individual. All were wrestling with what sort of discipleship could be most helpful and healthy for themselves and those among whom they were modelling values. Mission team life need not be a driven, unreflective activism: some of the narratives contained brutally honest accounts of how emerging leaders had come to a realisation that *reflection* as well as action was vital for the long haul, that self-awareness is a virtue, and that loving ourselves is as important as missioning to others. Mission team life, when patterned in a humane way, offers the opportunity for *individual* growth in inward and outward disciplines in the context of *communal* growth. The *enacted* resolution of perceived dichotomies between inward and outward, as well as individual and communal, aspects of discipleship is part of the sound basis for exploring vocations and developing leadership that mission team life provides.

The following sonnet illustrates the integration of a variety of aspects of discipleship in lived experience:

### **Shaped by others**

When I was washing up at S.U. camp  
The Lord called me, 'I have a job for you -  
To do the evening talk, hold out my lamp!'  
Was terrified, did not know what to do.

But God the Holy Spirit held my hand.  
They came to me and said, We think your talk  
Was great, it really helped us understand!  
(An infant leader learning how to walk...)

Our space is safe, the circle of our care  
The burden of a heavy spirit lifts;  
We're doing Life Together, Scripture, prayer,  
Discovering each other's different gifts.

I'm learning to be open, though I'm 'chief'-  
We're shaped by others, this is my belief.

Outward, communal elements of discipleship (*synergia, diakonia*) are represented in the camp activities like washing-up. There is an interruption in the form of a call (inward, individual, *euremata*) to participate in a fresh way in the learning community (outward, individual, *mathemata*). In the third quatrain the time frame shifts to a later season of mission team life where apprentice has become mentor: here the discipleship aspects are inward and communal (*koinonia, pneumatika*). The final couplet of the sonnet reveals a link between integrated discipleship and leadership development: the leader, as a participant in the discipleship practices of mission team life, is *shaped by others*.

## **Mission team life: shaping vocations**

The way vocations are shaped within mission team life overlaps with both discipleship formation and leadership development. Not all vocations are to leadership roles - but the stories of callings to a variety of roles in leadership as a result of mission team living are convincingly told by my research participants. Mission team life is an ecological environment in which epiphanic moments of call for individuals can be recognised and seasons of exploration fostered: I am because we are, or *I am becoming* in the context of *all are becoming*. In *Kingdom Calling* we are given a broad definition of vocation:

A vocation is one way in which we may live out our calling as human persons and members of Christ's body... it concerns both the discovery of what has been given to us as well as the exploration of what may unfold before us (KC, p. 25).

The authors of this report see vocation as a personal response to a call, the nature of which places it in one of three distinct categories - relational, social or ministerial (KC, p. 27). My research narratives include examples of each type but often in combination, suggesting that vocations may not develop in such defined categories in lived experience.

## **A relational vocation**

*Kingdom Calling* envisages relational vocations as lifelong (as in the case of marriage or vows to join a religious community), but if discernment of a relational vocation hinges on “mutual agreement to share a common life” (KC, p. 40) the commitment to embark on mission team life for a *season* may also fall into this category. This is most obviously the case for intentional communities-as-mission-teams where the sharing of lives is foundational – but other, perhaps more provisional types of mission teams also show unmistakable signs of relational vocation. The intensity of many of the experiences narrated in the accounts of short-term missions indicates the power of relational vocation for a season: this may initially be as short as a week, but in a cumulative series over years or even decades can become a long-term relational commitment. In one mission enterprise the personal rule of life and holiness that was expected to be followed by all team members in the mission week was also commended for the rest of life too.

Mission teams committed to serious engagement in community ministry - café projects, involvement with schools, youth outreach and other modes - also display an instinct for relational vocation as friendships within the mission team deepen and become more committed over time. Official staff teams in local churches and at more senior levels undoubtedly benefit from a relational commitment: there is a connection between the investment in (and experience of) relational vocation and a healthy mission team life. The six relational dynamics I have posited are the patterning and outworking of a fundamental call and commitment.

## **A shared social vocation**

Out of a perceived sense of imbalance between ministerial and lay callings *Kingdom Calling* advocates enhancing the esteem in which social vocations - callings within society - are held, whether they be roles in employment, public service or volunteering (KC, p. 33). My research goes further by showing that mission team life has the potential to bind together in equality of esteem a wider range of callings: mission teams not infrequently include in

meaningful *synergia* and *diakonia* those who may be formally unemployed and could otherwise remain unclassified in terms of vocation. Moreover, acknowledging the importance of *koinonia* in any presentation of social vocation avoids giving the impression that distinct callings in the public sphere will be pursued with *you in your small corner and I in mine*: does not the tendency to professionalise individual lay callings - paradoxically, even when volunteers are being thought of - lead back to the secularistic individualist paradigm that *Kingdom Calling* is at pains to avoid?

My research narratives offer telling examples of social vocations being pursued in relation to a mission team life: the senior teacher whose professed mission field is their school being at the same time part of a mission-focussed small group in their local church whose team life expresses itself through personal support and intelligent intercession; the village postie, also part of an intentional community, who shows through their prayer-walking a link between their social and relational vocation; and the managers of community cafés who are employed as individuals in terms of their social vocation but also sharing deeply in a developing mission team life with the volunteers who serve alongside them. The vocations of all are being formed in shared lived experience. My own *social* vocation as a teacher of English to internationals as a young adult was encouraged and shaped through being part of a group of Christians drawn together from language schools across a whole city. The mission team life that developed through supporting one another in a variety of roles in both employment and volunteering took on the character of a *relational* vocation – over thirty years later the paid employment in different language schools may have ceased but the supportive relationships have continued into fresh seasons of mission for us all.

### **A shared ministerial vocation**

*Kingdom Calling* is concerned that “the varied range of callings... should not be turned into a hierarchy” (KC, p. 24). The report aims to address this embedded tendency through a turn towards theological imagination. I argue that a healthy mission team life is the right environment for those with ordained and lay ministerial - and other - callings to learn to appreciate each other deeply. The authors of *Kingdom Calling* are clearly anxious about an

unhelpful competitiveness in the Church yet lack the contrary evidence - and so miss the opportunity - to paint a convincing picture for the theological imagination. My investigation of mission team life reveals relational dynamics that are powerfully constructive and healing: when we examine the lived experience of mission *teams* - containing lay and ordained, official and unofficial ministries - we can better appreciate the debilitation which occurs when vocations and professions are judged to belong to *individuals*. Mission team life, though respecting and working with individual official roles, is based primarily on relationships of family and friendship expressed in co-working, the sharing of lives, adventurous hospitality, spiritual encounter, learning skills and values, and being reshaped by wonder: God's people live out their discipleship *and their ministries* not from the official positions they hold but from the love they are committed to.

My research demonstrates that those whose mission-ministerial vocations have come to fruition are able to recall moments or seasons when they experienced a mission team life where there was the opportunity to see God at work, experiment with their gifts in relation to others, be loved through mistakes and encouraged in vocations they perhaps never dared to believe in.

## **Credible leaders for the Church**

When it comes to leadership it is tempting to look for firepower rather than trust in yeast! The proposal to form a talented *cadre* of senior church leaders, in the *Report of the Lord Green Steering Group* (GS 1982, 2014), suggests a leadership intentionally separated from the ground-level experience of the church-in-mission; yet if the Church is to possess a diversity of ministry within a common discipleship of Christ, witnessing credibly in the world - then its leadership needs to take shape within a dynamic, yeast-like mission team life: "often unseen but always increasing" (Gooder, 2020, p. 94). In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 I showed how the six relational dynamics are a matrix for the development of leadership through their formational value and impact. In the following sections I summarise the contribution that each dynamic makes to the character of the leadership of the Church's missional-discipleship life.

## **Collaborative leaders**

The report *Senior Church Leadership* (Faith and Order Commission, 2016) seeks to move the Church into another way of working:

Paul's letters are a rich resource for practical models for teamwork and collaborative ministry, operating in a much more fluid and complex ministry structure than what we once used to regard as the 'norm' of the traditional parish (SCL, p. 81).

This report is especially concerned with the attributes needed for senior leaders so that both they and the Church can flourish. The recognition of the need to be able to operate in a much more fluid and complex ministry structure is to be welcomed, but a competitive instinct, exacerbated by a culture of office-holding, may continue to hinder progress in the long term. When the experience of *synergia* in mission team life is a gracious, energy-giving working together then competitive instincts become replaced by something different. My research narratives provide evidence of a mutual recognition of gifting and style among team members and a depth of relating indicative of genuine life together, in marked contrast to an approach which places trust in the combined firepower of official positions around a table.

## **Compassionate, encouraging leaders**

My research evidence strongly suggests that the encouragement leaders receive during their formation profoundly affects the way they lead when in senior positions later in life. I interviewed parish clergy in recognisably senior positions (such as Team Rector or Rural Dean), a cathedral residentiary canon, a United Reformed Church Moderator and leaders of missional networks and intentional communities. Those who related their earliest experiences within the *koinonia* of a healthy mission team life invariably pointed to the compassionate leadership shaping that life and the personal encouragement they received as individuals. Such a dynamic will not easily be found where there is only a limited investment in mission team life - it is unlikely to be produced by even the most able

chairperson of a mission taskforce or diocesan initiative. Compassionate, encouraging leaders - especially when senior - are those who eat with, care for, rest and even play with their fellow mission team members in a community that is both human (humane?) and spiritual. A homely environment need not be a sign of unprofessionalism. The members of such a team will be more whole as people and able to guide others by drawing from that wholeness and personal resourcing as they are called to positions of senior leadership.

### **Hospitable leaders**

The authors of *Senior Church Leadership* encourage a discerning approach to leadership and life in the Church:

*faithful improvisation upon the traditions of leadership we have inherited... a difficult question... what is needed... are multiple wise experiments in situ, and prayerful scrutiny of the fruit of these experiments over time (SCL, p. 78).*

A contextual mission team life supplies the need for such wise experimentation, yet the leadership standpoint or viewpoint suggested here appears not to have shifted significantly from that of 'generals on the hill' who, rather than being part of that life, are probably engaged in scrutiny from a safe distance. In Chapter 3 I described hospitable mission team life taking place across a range of contexts, and how hospitable mission team leaders are interpreting its significance. The theme of hospitality occurs in *Witness* as part of a call for depth in our relating and the development of shared language, a process requiring attentiveness and sensitivity:

That might sometimes mean that we invite people into encounter and engagement with us. It will also sometimes mean that we accept invitations into encounter and engagement with them. Sometimes it will simply mean a development of the relationship in which we already found ourselves, and it won't be clear who invited whom, or who is guest and who is host (W, p. 16).

Mission team life witnesses to this process happening deep within the team itself as well as on the edges, which is highly significant for the character of its leadership. Emerging leaders who find themselves seated around the table of eating and drinking (rather than tables piled high with committee minutes) will find themselves engaged in storytelling, envisioning and mutual care in which host-guest roles develop naturally and freely. My research participants' self-reflections - being planted in good soil, being shaped by others, being restored - demonstrate personal growth and development. Some form of hospitality, whether planned or "a surprising intervention" (W, p. 16), is invariably the environment in which transformation occurs. Those who find themselves welcomed when a mission team-community is habitually at table together may become caught up in a powerful vision. What they see, touch and feel may influence a generation.

### **Spiritual leaders**

A particularly striking feature of the research narratives is the way leaders and leaders-in-formation engage in prayer, worship and study at the heart of mission team life as those who are on a journey together. In Chapter 3 I detailed the shape of *pneumatika* in mission team life and its interweaving in mission with the serving witness of *diakonia*, the sharing of lives in *koinonia*, a Spirit-inspired *synergia*, the learning community characterised by *mathemata* and the surprising discoveries - *euremata* - that can prompt improvisation and even new paradigms.

Leadership in the Spirit may seem an obvious requisite for senior leadership in the church, yet the struggle to nurture and maintain a healthy spiritual life is clearly a concern (SCL, p. 90). Several of my interviewees were frank in their admission of this struggle - and that they were needing to improvise *outside* "the traditions of leadership [they had] inherited" (SCL, p. 78). Their search for a practical communal spirituality could lead them and their mission teams to a rediscovery of the riches of historic Evangelical practice, or Celtic or other expressions of monastic lived experience, often in an experimental hybridity. Leaders were aware of themselves beginning to be formed in life-giving ways as persons in community: mission team life was a way in which mission and spirituality were being held together, as well as communal and individual journeying in discipleship.

My research participants trailblaze a hybrid spirituality for mission team life. They demonstrate a versatility in the way they move between tradition and innovation. They are equally at home with prayer in historic sacred spaces and prayer on the cusp of a fresh initiative. Their rootedness in the Christ of mission teams holds together companionship around the table with the journey on the road, avoiding the unhelpful dichotomy of gatheredness and sentness as separate modes of existence. Pioneering leaders of mission team life both oversee and participate in a confident spirituality, encouraging others also to “face toward God in gratitude, adoration and delight, and in penitence, lament and petition” (W, p. 14).

### **Leaders of co-empowering learning communities**

In Chapter 4 on *mathemata* I described how leaders of mission teams seek to train others while continuing to learn themselves: lessons learned through the intentional combining of training tools, the patterning of team life into a disciplined whole, modelling values through personal commitment and vulnerability, and developed schemes of apprenticeship and mentoring. The extent to which this growth and development takes place depends on the quality and interwovenness of all six relational dynamics. Mission team living is an arena for training *everyone* in the context of immersive experience. Apprenticeships - long honoured as effective for Anglican curates alongside their training incumbents - enable leaders first to grow and later to teach. My research narratives are full of leadership insight gained through a combination of learning on the job with others and careful personal study and reflection.

The authors of *Kingdom Calling* call for a “diversity without hierarchy” (KC, p. 55). My research participants paint the picture of a team-community life where gifts and ministries of many kinds have been nurtured and commissioned as expressions of self-giving love and humble service. There is power in this sort of mission team life to subvert expectations: I concur that “the church still has the opportunity to live in a radically different kind of way, eschewing worldly arguments for the sake of Christian mutuality” (KC, p. 65).

In my exploration of co-empowerment in Chapter 4 I conveyed the insights of mature reflective practitioners from both positive and painful times during their vocational formation and emergence into leadership. I drew on Ehrensperger's exploration of Pauline co-empowerment and her account of power-over, power-to and power-with: all three are operative in the accounts of mission team life. The authors of *Kingdom Calling* reflect a concern that hierarchy may and does include the use of power-over in ways that are contrary to a healthy exercise of ministry and indeed to the truth of the Gospel. Mission team life gives the sense of adventure, space and security for power-over to be used in a familial, guiding way. The experience of this "radically different kind of way" challenges a reliance on the rights of office and ungodly competition in the pursuit of a church career, whether ordained or lay.

### **Leaders with a prophetic imagination who improvise in life**

The authors of *Kingdom Calling* believe that "proposals for the healing of our theological vision need to be aligned with the diagnosis that is offered as to what is obscuring it" (KC, p. 16). My account of mission team life provides a sound basis for developing a theological vision that can heal the imagination. In Chapter 4 on *euremata* I outlined the stages by which *seeing together* may happen. This process is typically initiated through surprise discoveries in lived experience which, when reflected upon individually and communally, lead to improvisation, value-formation, renewed vision and further seasons of mission and life. Mission team life is a *synoptic* witness in two ways. Fundamentally, it is a seeing together through doing life together: the leaders of mission team life - men and women together - are participant observers, reflective practitioners, prophetic agents. Such synopsis in lived experience powerfully influences the shape of mission, team and life. There is also a seeing together with the whole Christian tradition: mission team life has been re-formed over time from the earliest New Testament practice through a succession of cultural paradigms.

"In the context of church history as a whole... we stand within an ongoing history of improvisation and are called to continue it and... to build on it. We are called to improvise faithfully in our own time..." (SCL, p. 76). Such faithful improvisation "will only emerge from

communities and individuals who are brought by the Spirit, in the company of all the saints, to deeper and deeper knowledge of Christ, and him crucified" (SCL, p. 88). The authors of *Senior Church Leadership* understand that faithful leaders will be improvising *within a tradition*: there must be "an intimate knowledge of the possibilities of scales and harmonies, of rhythms and melodies" (SCL, p. 88); but does *every* improvising community of faith need to have a Bach or a Beethoven at the centre? This report appears to place too much emphasis on prior knowledge, talent and training: my research uncovers *attentiveness* as a critical leadership quality, together with a prophetic *imagination* that is shared and developed within a co-empowering mission team life. Rather than improvising *within a tradition*, emerging leaders will be passionate about improvising *on a theme* - where they experience the freedom to combine melodies from different traditions. In the provisionality of mission team life the risk of an unsuccessful hybrid should not inhibit the scope of our prophetic imagination. The thirteen leaders-in-community I had the privilege of interviewing, who had all made personal discoveries in mission team life, were refreshing in their honesty, active in imagination and faith-full in improvisation. "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness..." (Isaiah 43:19).

### **Leaders with a chaordic instinct**

Finally, the leaders of mission team life have a chaordic instinct: they are at home with both stability and unpredictability. "At the heart of chaordic leadership is the emphasis on minimum specificity of rules" (Ascough & Cotton, 2005, p. 159): my research participants' stories of their own mission team lives reveal the importance of emergent core principles and values which form consistent fractal patterns through successive phases of leadership. Their theological reflection captures these insightful core principles and values - a synoptic witness to the transformative power of mission team life.

These are leaders who, planted in good soil, are also light of foot. They are shaped by others and see gold in others. They create sacred spaces for learning communities. Harp goes with broom, the candle is lit, the table is laid, the door is open. They are poured out and restored. They are seers with teams.

The sonnet *Candle, Table, Door* uses language drawn from an interview with a new monastic community leader who describes the stages of a vision sustained over many years. Their story of personal discovery includes a wealth of theological reflection on the complex relationality of mission team life. The sonnet opens with the primacy of shared prayer and contemplation, a value symbolised by the Candle. This means patiently waiting, allowing corporate imagination to be shaped by a Trinitarian vision, and being expectant of guidance. The second quatrain introduces the Table: convivial eating and drinking, sharing news, and giving and receiving help and personal support. An epiphanic moment - the team becoming community - encourages further development of the 'House', leading naturally to the Door ministry of welcoming in and reaching out to others. A coffee shop on the high street enables the community's inner life to become manifest in hospitality and proclamation, 'relearning being human.' The sonnet ends with a call to prophetic imagination as the foundation for a life together:

### **Candle, Table, Door**

What did he want of us? We learnt to dream -  
In presence of the Father, Son and Spirit;  
We just sought God, together spending time  
In Candle's guiding light. Now how to live it?

We started to build friendships round the Table -  
The team became community one day;  
We ate and prayed; we'd spied a holy gable -  
The Barn - a home in sight! where we would stay.

And next a coffee shop, an open Door  
Where people choose to come, and eat and drink,  
Relearning being human, loving more -  
The welcome in and sending out are linked.

Let's be prophetic in imagination,  
Do Life Together with a shared devotion.

# Conclusion

## Why is mission team life significant?

*The stuff we do together, sharing lives.*

*It's tempting for us just to talk the talk -*

*With Jesus we must try and walk the walk.*

This project was prompted by observations in the course of ministry as a church leader and facilitator of mission teams. I realised that the contribution of mission team life to discipleship and personal transformation is both unrecognised and unresearched, while accounts of mission focus overwhelmingly on strategic considerations and functional effectiveness. Moreover, Scriptural and historical accounts of mission team life are seldom set alongside the contemporary lived experience of mission teams. Current debates in the Church about the nature of discipleship, vocation and ministry are impoverished as a result.

My research objectives were firstly to hear the life-stories of experienced participants in mission team life and learn from their reflections and evaluations. Second, to conceptualise and define the constituent elements of mission team life and map its overall character. Thirdly, to understand how personal and vocational development takes place in the context of mission team life; and finally to articulate ways in which an understanding of mission team life can contribute to thinking on the way forward for discipleship, vocation and ministry. I achieved the aims and objectives of my research.

The lived experience and theological reflection of those I interviewed, representing a wide variety of mission teamwork, is the foundation of my conceptualisation of six relational dynamics of mission team life - co-working, the sharing of lives, serving together, praying together, learning together and attending to surprises. These dynamics take shape within the organic, emergent, complex, chaordic, adventuresome character of mission team living,

enabling personal transformation, vocational discovery and leadership development. My findings, conceptualisation and theological reflection map the contours of mission team life and underline its significance. This significance is threefold: mission team life transforms lives, addresses debilitating dichotomies and points the way forward for the Church.

## **Mission team life transforms lives**

Mission team life is a distinctive *modus operandi* and social reality concerned with the creation of community that is not only purposeful in terms of mission but enabling of human and spiritual flourishing. The impact of mission team life on my research participants has been formational and transformational. From the smallest beginnings, finding themselves in a mission team, making relationships, becoming apprentices, discovering gifting - to taking on roles, sensing a vocation, growing as reflective practitioners, sometimes embarking on formal ministry training, becoming leaders, then experienced shapers and trainers - seasons of mission team life have not only added value but been the very foundation. The implications for personal encouragement, pastoral care and envisioning are profound.

Mission team life is transformational in society because everyone can be involved in it. You do not have to be a qualified professional or even a confident person for your contribution to count. You are loved by God, held in community, learning on the job and part of the adventure with others. You may even find yourself, to your great surprise, shaping the mission team life around you. Such is the potency of this way of discipleship.

The co-working, sharing of lives, serving together, spiritual practices, communal learning and shared responses to unpredictability point beyond discrete practices to a *Life Together* that is both parabolic and paradigmatic for the Church-in-mission. The stories at the heart of mission team life are truth-bearing parables that capture and convey values; and an understanding of the relational dynamics and distinctive character of mission team life enables a paradigm shift - one that resolves dichotomies and points the way forward for the Church today.

## **Mission team life addresses debilitating dichotomies**

The relational dynamics within mission team life address both conceptual and practical dichotomies: between missional functionality and the sharing of lives (*synergia* and *koinonia*), community and outreach (*koinonia* and *diakonia*), ministry and spirituality (*diakonia* and *pneumatika*), and intentionality and surprise discovery (*mathemata* and *euremata*). Mission team life brings theory and practice together. It integrates the inward and outward, personal and corporate aspects of discipleship within lived experience. Not only is discipleship (as ongoing nurture) a continuation of mission: mission (team life) is a way of discipleship. Rather than merely adding discipleship to mission in a linear sequence, discipleship and mission are seen to be a unity. The holistic, integrative qualities of mission team life, which are characteristic of the Holy Spirit, enable the strands of discipleship and the elements of mission to be held together.

## **Mission team life is a fresh paradigm for discipleship**

I have argued that an understanding of the dynamics and character of mission team life is a necessary first step for building confidence to face the challenges that are the concern of courses like *Pilgrim*, the thinking behind discipleship pathways, and reports such as *Kingdom Calling*, *Witness* and *Senior Church Leadership*. An appreciation of the relational dynamics and transformative character of mission team life stimulates the sort of theological imagination needed for the integration of discipleship, mission, ministry, vocation and leadership in one life, as well as pointing the way forward to a healing of the lay-ordained divide. Mission team life is treasure in the field.

In Scripture discipleship is holistic and leadership emerges in the context of mission team life. In this study I have placed my researched accounts of contemporary mission team life alongside biblical reflection on Jesus' and Paul's mission teams. I have argued that both Jesus and Paul teach, demonstrate and develop the sharing of a life that coinheres with the undertaking of purposeful work, demonstrating the Kingdom of God. Mission team discipleship draws on Scriptural resources and makes surprise discoveries along the way.

Companionship in the home and on the road, the commission to become yokefellows in the field, the experience of prayer, effective apprenticeship, the sharing of gifts, compassionate heartfulness in leadership and the inward witness of the Holy Spirit are New Testament gifts that reappear in contemporary mission team life. For those who find themselves immersed in such a life the transformative potential is qualitatively more than the accrual of isolated elements of discipleship without the lived experience. An immersive, biblically resonant way of discipleship is available to us today for the revitalising of the Church: this is what mission team life is all about. It is my contention that the matrix of mission team life is where a credible leadership for the life of the Church and its mission is formed and shaped. My research demonstrates that mission team life produces the collaborative, compassionate, hospitable, spiritually imaginative, co-empowering, reflective practitioners whose chaotic instinct enables them to chart a course and co-create the ecology and praxis that is mission team life.

In this thesis I have argued for the potency of mission team life. My research breaks new ground. Mission team life - the lived experience of missioning together that is given shape and meaning through relationships, practices, processes and values - is a social reality and modus operandi whose transformational potential has been largely unrecognised. Through my research I have addressed this lacuna. My research participants' narratives of mission team living provide the basis for a language of lived experience that is parabolic in character and theologically imaginative. My conceptualisation of the relational dynamics of mission team life is a fresh paradigm, offering to churches, missions and the academy a way of seeing, understanding and living a transformative discipleship rich in spirituality, synergy, community, ministries and leadership potential.

# Appendix 1

## Thirteen sonnets on mission team life

### *Clergy Team*

The sonnet *Clergy Team* uses language drawn from an interview with a team rector whose vision for their colleagues develops the potential for combination. A joyful mission team life accompanies their praxis. The first quatrain describes the contrasting personalities of the clergy in the team, and the catalytic role of a reflective theologian-missioner. In the second quatrain the style of teamwork is described. There is a sense of the importance of really relating, but at the right distance. We get the impression of a mission team with healthy co-working and the capacity for effective service. The third quatrain emphasises the value of imaginative collaboration, which draws others in. The final couplet makes the painful point that mission team life does not always develop in this way: there are 'dream' teams but also 'nightmare' scenarios (CT).

#### **Clergy Team**

Our team: one's level-headed, wise with people;  
Another's very clever - strategist;  
The third's enthusiastic, bouncy, cheerful,  
While my role is to be the catalyst.

We join in prayer and planning once a week;  
We're constantly in touch: 'Are you alright?'  
It's not an over-closeness that we seek,  
But space in life and team - we're not that tight.

The playing to our strengths a conscious plan -  
We know our gifts are wonderfully contrasting;  
This combination's drawing others in,  
The good news of God's love communicating.

The way we go together as a team  
Can either be a nightmare or a dream.

## *Candle, Table, Door*

The sonnet *Candle, Table, Door* uses language drawn from an interview with a 'new monastic' community leader who describes the stages of a vision sustained over many years. Their story of personal discovery includes a wealth of theological reflection on the complex relationality of mission team life. The sonnet opens with the primacy of shared prayer and contemplation, a value symbolised by the Candle. This means patiently waiting, allowing corporate imagination to be shaped by a Trinitarian vision, and being expectant of guidance. The second quatrain introduces the Table: convivial eating and drinking, sharing news, and giving and receiving help and personal support. An epiphanic moment – the team becoming community – encourages further development of the 'House', leading naturally to the Door ministry of welcoming in and reaching out to others. A coffee shop on the high street enables the community's inner life to become manifest in hospitality and proclamation, 'relearning being human.' The sonnet ends with a call to prophetic imagination as the foundation for a *Life Together (CTD)*.

### **Candle, Table, Door**

What did he want of us? We learnt to dream -  
In presence of the Father, Son and Spirit;  
We just sought God, together spending time  
In Candle's guiding light. Now how to live it?

We started to build friendships round the Table -  
The team became community one day;  
We ate and prayed; we'd spied a holy gable -  
The Barn - a home in sight! where we would stay.

And next a coffee shop, an open Door  
Where people choose to come, and eat and drink,  
Relearning being human, loving more -  
The welcome in and sending out are linked.

Let's be prophetic in imagination,  
Do Life Together with a shared devotion.

## *Eden Team*

The sonnet *Eden Team* uses language drawn from an interview with the facilitator of a network of urban missional communities. The interview contained a number of stories, and the first quatrain puts one of them into poetic form, told through the eyes of the mission team. It tells how they found themselves playing together in shared new territory ('virgin Eden' in the snow) where metaphorically the ice had already been broken with the team beginning to make relationships as local residents. Was this an instance of God's grace strengthening mission-team-life-with-others? The second and third quatrains home in on 'fuzzy-boundaried' team life in all its vulnerability: humble missional pastoral care takes place in a 'goldfish bowl' - it has its source in God and is a response of self-offering. The final couplet suggests a correlation: perhaps the elements of an ecclesiology 'from below' can be discerned in a snowball fight where community, co-working, service and play are all rolled together? (ET).

### **Eden Team**

One night it snowed, and waking up we saw  
Our neighbourhood as it had never been;  
We played in virgin Eden, full of awe,  
And others joined the laughter, snowball, scene.

Our fuzzy-boundaried, fragile, open home,  
The stuff we do together, sharing lives,  
The seasons of our joy and pain, this tome  
A legacy of mission life revives.

This humble goldfish bowl of wide-eyed love,  
This microcosmic plan of patient care,  
Enlightened by the Spirit from above -  
Is beautiful embodiment of prayer.

For church is team and team is church, that's right!  
The elements are shown in snowball fight.

## *Gold in 'em*

The sonnet *Gold in 'em* uses language drawn from an interview with a pioneer leader who is mobilising a community-in-mission as part of a new-church network. They realise that previous experience of forming relationships in a youth outreach team has been value-forming: initial shock at a perceived dissonance turned into an opportunity for working together; strengths and weaknesses blended in the crucible of a creative synergy. The second quatrain describes life in the current church community, where every member is envisaged as enlisted in the mission team. Seeking God together and reaching out hospitably enables the mission team to express itself as a body using various combinations of gifts. The third quatrain continues to narrate the message of a church leader who is persuaded that 'passion' is the best raw material. Mission is an affair of the heart seeking a 'cause,' and the life that goes with it is not one for 'volunteers'- who might act out of duty but not be engaged with all that they are. The final couplet summarises the process as the life-transforming modelling of a vision by the whole mission team, both to one another and in prophetic hospitable service. One purpose of such alchemy is 'seeing the gold in people' (G).

### **Gold in 'em**

The team got sent with purpose. I was young.  
At first I struggled, differences were raw.  
In creativity I found my song;  
My weaknesses were covered in the four.

We're sharp on hospitality and prayer;  
We back each other, unity's our way.  
Believing in the giftings that we share -  
Everyone's got gold in 'em, I say!

A tool we've got - Heart Shapes, Heart Styles - explores  
What people feel they're passionate about;  
Don't ask for volunteers, they need a cause -  
A mission for their lives that sends them out.

A life-transforming vision-modelling.  
Seeing the gold in people, that's the thing.

## *Good Soil*

The sonnet *Good Soil* uses language drawn from an interview with a parish priest leading a team in an inner-city location. The first quatrain is based on the story of an unexpected encounter with members of an ethnic group at a parish public event. An unconditional welcome leads to this community making the church their own. Their employment needs become the reason for a weekday work club in the building, and an experimental mission team life takes shape. The last line of the quatrain expresses this hospitality theologically: the parish priest desires something 'organic' where people 'taste' God's love and care. 'House of Bread' (the literal meaning of Bethlehem) picks up the reference to Christmas in the first line, for there is room at the inn. Good food in the 'House' is integral to the day lived together. The second quatrain describes the team leader's experience of an unfolding mission team life: key to this is the interwovenness of prayer and conversation. 'Rhythm' and 'dawning' indicate an attentiveness to the deeper meaning emerging in the practice of mission ministry. This is named as 'monastic' - a daily life enacted and repeated: worship, community, co-working, service. The third quatrain expresses the way the leader's theological reflection is taken in a radical direction: poverty, hospitality, charity and godly passion constitute a lifestyle that is distinct from a 'worldly way.' The final couplet sounds a reflexivity with which the original interview started: that the current mission team leader, once planted and nurtured in the 'good soil' of a mission team life still recollected, is nevertheless 'changing and maturing.' The sonnet ends on a note of gratitude for those early experiences of worship, sharing, working together and the outflow of ministry to others that contribute powerfully to the capacity to be attentive in the midst of current mission team life and leadership (*GS*).

### **Good Soil**

St Francis' Christmas Market set its stall -  
We want to worship at your church, they said.  
Why yes, said I, there's always room for all:  
Come taste organic life, a House of Bread.

It's been about the rhythm, sort of dawning;  
Prayer led to conversation led to prayer;  
Monastic hospitality and learning -  
We pray, we eat, we work, we pray, we care.

I think it's almost best if you have nothing;  
This haven home some sort of healing brings.  
Our work - our love for people, godly passion -  
It's not a worldly way of doing things.

I'm changing and maturing, this I know.  
My planting in this soil helped me grow.

## *Harp and Broom*

The sonnet *Harp and Broom* uses language drawn from an interview with the pastoral leader of an international mission team. This community of volunteers lives in a spacious property in a town in Eastern Europe and welcomes visitors from all over the world. Its ethos and praxis draws from the traditions of the Moravian Brethren who founded a community-in-mission in the town in an earlier century. The first quatrain poses a series of questions about vocation, guidance, truth and belonging that a volunteer or visitor might be asking as they enter the community. The second quatrain dwells on the core values of prayer and worship (*harp*) and practical service (*broom*). Divine encounter is linked with a synergy that further expresses itself in hospitality. The original interview made clear the expectancy that meeting with God would be ‘a time to be amazed’ and that spiritual-prophetic insight would be shared among team members. The ‘upper room’ is in deliberate balance with the broom cupboard as the mission team gets its hands dirty in ministering to guests. The third quatrain has as its theme the participatory and apprenticeship values that were integral to the original Moravian life on which the current community is based: family relationships around a table and an emphasis on the spiritual parenting of volunteers as vocation is nurtured. The final couplet resounds with the kindred spirit of Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* to sum up the character of the mission team life that is being entered into (*HB*).

### **Harp and Broom**

How can I know your calling for me, Lord?  
Or where to go to tread the ancient path?  
To hear for sure your own authentic word?  
To gather with your people round your hearth?

I'll go to Herrnhut, happily there be placed,  
Where nations meet and pray in upper room;  
Prophetic voice, a time to be amazed,  
As willing volunteers wield harp and broom.

We're stewards, brothers, sisters, every one -  
For each a place at table, valued part;  
Each knowing father, mother, daughter, son;  
For me church should be family, one in heart.

A Life Together, listened to and heard -  
For not to live together - how absurd.

## *Learning Community*

The sonnet *Learning Community* uses language drawn from an interview with a mission development leader for whom itinerant mission team experience has led to a sharpening of vision and clear values. The sonnet opens with memories of receiving help as a novice with 'no kind of canvas as a measure.' The satisfaction of 'learning something new' becomes a value for life and ministry. The second quatrain details the principal elements of community and synergy in the itinerant teams. Mission team life grows in relation to a 'Rule' with common training - the devotional orientation provides a stable reference point for the development of team relationships. The third quatrain describes emergent growth in several directions: generative disciple-making, encouraging embryonic leadership gifts and the initiation of local churches into mission teamwork. The final couplet is an aspiration and invitation to 'walk the walk' through encounter with God, meaningful human relationships and an intentionally developed mission team life (*LC*).

### **Learning Community**

I had no kind of canvas as a measure,  
When I took part in my first mission team;  
Learning something new a real pleasure,  
Being a novice, people helping me.

We were committed to some common training -  
A Rule reflecting different parts of Life -  
Sharing study, meals, praying, planning,  
Our weaknesses and failings - feeling safe.

Let's make disciples who will make disciples -  
Let's walk together, claiming common ground,  
Identifying leaders, training people -  
A lot of churches just go round and round.

It's tempting for us just to talk the talk.  
With Jesus we must try and walk the walk.

## *Light of Foot*

The sonnet *Light of Foot* uses language drawn from an interview with a regional denominational leader. They reflect on their earlier experiences of mission team life and contrast them with a current reality which seems unable to respond with imagination and creativity. The first quatrain introduces team life experience on an itinerant short-term mission. This has been remembered as flexible and spontaneous. There is a relational dynamism and purposive spaciousness. Prayer, community, co-working and training develop together, with a growing consciousness of the immediacy of God in everyday living. The second quatrain highlights the part played by storytelling and sharing of hearts. The voice is that of an unnamed host. The narrator reminds us of Jesus' own mission style, drawing a whole variety of people together on a common journey of faith and life. The third quatrain changes gear abruptly: we are back in the ecclesiastical present where such wholehearted adventure seems palpably lacking. Recollecting an innovative cafe outreach where, like a spider at the edge of a web, they could 'feel vibrations' - now they lament 'rubbish coffee,' less personal investment, less feeling. The final couplet encourages the rediscovery of that mission team life which is 'light of foot' (*LF*).

### **Light of Foot**

We'd start the day with prayer and Bible study,  
To school assembly, coffee morning go;  
Then stop and pray and sing and dilly-dally,  
And end up in the pub with hearts aglow.

I've places round my table, your provision,  
Your story is my testimony too;  
Like-minded, different backgrounds, on a mission -  
As gentle Jesus sent the seventy-two.

I want to do things well, not on a pittance,  
Stop serving rubbish coffee, jumble sale;  
I want to feel vibrations, make a difference,  
Be light enough of foot on hill and dale.

We need to rediscover what it means  
To go and make disciples, live in teams.

## *Poured Out*

The sonnet *Poured Out* uses language drawn from an interview with a cathedral leader as they reflect on their experiences in a previous post and share values for mission team life for the future. The first quatrain depicts an open style of leadership where the aim has been to bring hope to a broken community. There is renewed hospitality and a resulting growth in relationships and fresh sense of purpose. The second quatrain paints a picture of ruin as someone new arrives in the team. Emotive language reflects the pain felt. The third quatrain continues to reflect on the shock of a return to dysfunctionality in team life, at the same time expressing the desire to gather up the good in the face of destruction and continue to serve. The sonnet concludes with a vision of the life of the church poured out for others 'outside the walls,' persevering whatever the consequences and believing in growth (*PO*).

### **Poured out**

From chaos and disaster team emerged:  
'My office door is open - please walk in!'  
I watched with satisfaction, morale surged:  
'What you see is what you get - no spin.'

And then a brand-new person, just arrived -  
Manipulative, power-crazed, annoyed -  
Brought blight on good relationships: I grieved.  
All the work that had been done: destroyed.

I felt the disappointment and the shock.  
Our values should transcend the jobs we do:  
We're here to scatter seed, St Francis-like -  
Be church outside the walls, generously go.

To water, see the flowers open up;  
To be the wine outpoured from Christ's own cup.

## *Restoration*

The sonnet *Restoration* uses language drawn from an interview with an evangelist who is reflecting on their spiritual journey in relation to mission team life. Our conversation covered team life in short-term mission trips in the UK and abroad, in youth ministry, in chaplaincy and in an urban parish. The first quatrain describes an experience of desolation in traumatic personal circumstances: a pouring-out of heart in the manner of the Psalmist. The second quatrain contrasts a surprised-by-joy discovery of mission team life. Elements of restoration are carefully listed – this is a safe place for someone who knows their life is a work in progress, and there is a growing awareness of the reality of personal transformation. The third quatrain picks up the interviewee’s theological reflection on self-in-community - ‘the balance of uniqueness and being part’ - that they have seen mirrored in the approach of St Benedict. A commitment to understanding the nature of mission team life has yielded valuable insights in the varied contexts that this evangelist has experienced. The importance of storytelling is highlighted, an expression of the heart-healing reciprocity of true companionship. The final couplet underlines the length of time needed for this process of personal restoration, and the essential part played by community. The wounds of the evangelist have been tended. Loved, built up and no longer hurting, they have in turn contributed to purposeful building-up of lives and community in successive mission teams (*R*).

### **Restoration**

I did not think God wanted to use me.  
It was a time of tears when life was hard.  
The way ahead I simply could not see.  
I lived my life emotionally on guard.

The praying, eating, laughing, having fun,  
Being held, embraced, encouraged, strengthened, freed -  
There was a restoration going on;  
Team life a place of safety in my need.

Well Benedict for me he understood  
The balance of uniqueness and being part;  
The sharing of our stories - this is good!  
Our spending time together healed my heart.

I came full circle in community.  
Evangelist - God had a plan for me.

## Seeing

The sonnet *Seeing* uses language drawn from an interview with a parish priest leading a group of village churches. Our conversation revealed that theirs is perhaps a 'pre-team' context. The sonnet tries to capture their sense of waiting to see how the situation will develop. Their role as a *seer* or *watcher* is apparent from the accumulation of expressions which develop seeing and watching - spotting, discerning, recognising. There is a conscious 'standing back' in observation, both creating space and then letting that space be indwelt with divine activity. The process is 'slow' and 'patient' - but never detached, for God sees and feels need. God's representatives (the mission-team-to-be) will need to see and understand 'small things.' The sonnet tries to capture the fragility of a situation whose outcome is not assured: the process is a difficult one involving experimentation, doubt as well as faith, real effort in serving and connecting people who live in seemingly separate or at best loosely affiliated communities. Those who are the object of this mission of love will be watching too – they 'know when it's authentic.' The sonnet closes with the suggestion that metrics might not be as important as discernment (S).

### Seeing

I'll spend my time in prayer and much reflection,  
Discerning where I need to be right now;  
I'll recognise the small things as they happen,  
Be slow and patient, God will show me how.

I'm standing back and all year long I'm watching  
To somehow build relationships of love;  
Maybe it's God who's actually designing  
A network of tea parties from above?

Jesus saw the sick and lame and loved them.  
He felt their longings, cared about their dreams  
They know when it's authentic, spot it quickly.  
I'll try to find the people and the teams.

But how to measure outcomes, well, who knows?  
I've done a lot of seeing where it goes.

## *Shaped by Others*

The sonnet *Shaped by Others* uses language drawn from an interview with the vicar of adjacent villages near a prosperous city. The first two quatrains tell the story of a foundational experience in a mission team as a young person: being called out of regular team duties to undertake a special assignment beyond their comfort zone. Their support is spiritual and from peers as they overcome inhibitions to complete the task successfully. In the interview this story illustrated the power of mission team life in launching a vocation: the 'infant leader' became an experienced mentor and facilitator of others. The third quatrain presents values that are embodied in the current mission team life of a mature leader who nevertheless is still growing personally: compassionate pastoral care, a communal life, listening to scripture, shared prayer, and the adventure of discovering complementary gifting within the team. This is *Life Together* in an energetic parish context where mission team members are being shaped by each other. The final couplet emphasises that the team leader is also a team member and so participates in and draws strength from the life-dynamics affecting the team as a whole (*SO*).

### **Shaped by others**

When I was washing up at S.U. camp  
The Lord called me, 'I have a job for you -  
To do the evening talk, hold out my lamp!'  
Was terrified, did not know what to do.

But God the Holy Spirit held my hand.  
They came to me and said, We think your talk  
Was great, it really helped us understand!  
(An infant leader learning how to walk...)

Our space is safe, the circle of our care  
The burden of a heavy spirit lifts;  
We're doing Life Together, Scripture, prayer,  
Discovering each other's different gifts.

I'm learning to be open, though I'm 'chief'-  
We're shaped by others, this is my belief.

## *Sacred Space*

The sonnet *Sacred Space* uses language drawn from an interview with a church leader at the heart of a big city, who sees the building in their care, with its atmosphere and personnel, as a centre for mission and place of encounter with God. The sonnet is written in the voice of the mission team reaching out to those entering the sacred space: they are hospitality-conscious and God-conscious, putting themselves in the situation of the guest being welcomed: there is something to offer, something to share. The first quatrain is written with the auditorium in mind while the second introduces the cafe in the crypt, a warm, busy, noisy, human environment. Whereas the first quatrain strikes the note of transcendence and personal space, the second focuses on immanence and sociability: two complementary ways of encountering God in mission team life. The third quatrain has liminal space as its theme, with personal freedom and human welcome in sensitive balance. The hospitable mission team are serving in a consistent but flexible way, looking to God for blessing and aiming to be fruitful co-workers with divine activity. The final couplet summarises a spacious holism appealing to the five senses, with an invitation in the same voice that sounded in the first quatrain (SS).

### **Sacred Space**

Come light a candle, seek your sacred space -  
Our arms are open, let us share your load;  
Come sense the supernatural touch of grace  
And leave the building with a bigger God.

The cryptic cafe speaks a word of warmth,  
The team are here, mixed in, part of the scene;  
We laugh together, drink each other's health -  
The scent of hospitality is keen.

Our prayer: that God will bless these hallowed gates -  
The people coming in and out of here;  
A mission has emerged that resonates -  
Our meeting and our greeting make it clear.

So touch, give ear, in fragrant space be found;  
Come taste and see, enjoy your holy ground.

# Appendix 2

## Teaching mission team life

*To water, see the flowers open up.*

*We're doing Life Together, Scripture, prayer,*

*Discovering each other's different gifts.*

### **Classroom, conversation and immersion**

The practice and principles of mission team life can be introduced to groups and individuals in several ways. In this section I offer an outline for a week-long summer school with formal sessions comprising presentations, interviews, case studies and reflective exercises. A residential setting will also offer a good amount of time for conversation over meals and in down time, as well as opportunities for more formal one-to-one meetings. This course introduces the six relational dynamics of mission team life in relation to vocation, discipleship and leadership: it is therefore suitable for a range of groups and individuals including existing mission teams and missional communities, those currently exploring their vocation and discipleship as individuals, and emerging and mature leaders. Three or four facilitators would deliver the teaching, also making themselves available for one-to-one tutorials or mentoring. The ideas for the individual sessions - which could also be delivered singly as part of a longer course or in small blocks - arise from my own professional practice in teaching, ministry and mission. I tested some of the themes as part of the Mission Formation module I designed for the Lincoln School of Theology and have been developing them in more recent Chester DProf peer presentations and lecture courses in local churches. To engage with mission team life deeply it is important for learners to be exploring opportunities for immersive experience in combination with classroom learning: course facilitators will need be conversant with both.

A possible arrangement of sessions for a summer school appears below on page 172.

### **Presentations**

The course introductory session (M1) gives a brief account of the research prompts, design and subsequent journey, followed by breakout groups on the possible nature of discipleship. The session concludes with brief definitions of the six relational dynamics. The

dynamics are presented in more detail in pairs over three sessions (Tu 2, W2, Th1), surveying the same terrain as my thesis Chapters 2-4. Breakout groups help course participants share their own resonances, experiences and insights. Additional case studies can be introduced for more extended discussion in classroom time or in the form of background reading. Sonnets are used to highlight the interweaving of the relational dynamics.

### **Interviews with practitioners**

My research data was derived from qualitative interviewing so two sessions (Tu 3, Th2) take the form of interviews with leaders of mission team life who are skilled reflective practitioners (including the possibility of interviewing one or more of my research participants). This approach can greatly increase the learning impact: each of my original interviews contained the possibility of narration of meaning-full incidents, the exploration of relational dynamics in team and community life, reflections on a personal journey through a sequence of mission teams, and the disclosure of values in shared working, living, serving, worshipping, training and discovery.

### **Case studies**

Mission team life case studies can be biblical, mission-historical or contemporary. The course sequences an examination of mission team life in Scripture with a focus on the Pauline Circle in The Acts and Epistles (M3), followed by three mission-historical examples (W3, Th3, F1): the seasons of mission team life experienced by Francis and Clare and their contemporaries and the ways they improvised; an enquiry into the lived experience of the Clapham Sect and its impact on William Wilberforce's life; and an account of Bonhoeffer's discoveries in-life and their impact on his understanding of Life Together. Contemporary case studies fit naturally as part of interviews with practitioners and can also be in the form of filmed or written accounts illustrating the main teaching points in the presentations.

### **Reflective exercises**

I have discovered that one of the most important entry points to an understanding of the shape of mission team life, and its transformative potential, is resonance: "deep calls to deep" (Psalm 42:7). Session M2 is an invitation to observe and identify with the six relational dynamics and their impact as they are woven together in the storyline of the BBC TV period drama *Call the Midwife*. Showing a sequence from one of the episodes can serve as a powerful illustration of the interweaving of the six relational dynamics of mission team life, aiding both empathetic engagement and conceptual grasp.

In a second reflective exercise (Tu1) course participants are invited to recall a mission team they have been a part of using the following questions, which are based on those I used in my qualitative interviewing. A free-writing exercise in a period of silence is helpful.

Remember the occasion or season and picture the context or situation.

What was the life you were living as a team?

What work were you doing together, what mission activities?

What things were you learning yourself as a disciple, about your following Jesus, your gifts or contribution?

What leadership was emerging in you – did you have a role that was taking shape?

What did you learn about the DNA of the church (as you perceived and saw it) in that mission environment?

Were there any new seeds being sown in terms of God's purposes, anything that might be the beginning of something new in terms of mission extending beyond?

Through reflecting in this way some have found themselves able to recall significant but half-forgotten life experiences. Some accounts of mission team life may have had no discernible shape before this exercise, perhaps not recognised at all as examples of mission, team or life. Times of joy, pain or growth not voiced before can be shared in the safe space of a group of three or four as a shared listening exercise.

Session W1 uses the sonnets as a starting point for reflexivity and reflection. I have tested this approach at Chester DProf peer residentials and with local church groups and individuals. Course participants are asked to select one or two sonnets from four or five examples. They may find themselves identifying with an experience recounted or a value encapsulated. A free writing exercise can help to process resonances, followed by time in small groups for sharing responses. A discussion on metaphors and their usefulness could form part of this session.

### **Vocational discovery**

The final two sessions aim to provide a hinge out of the summer school into continuing reflection on what is being learned. A panel (F2) including an experienced guest reflect on the relationship between discipleship, vocation and leadership. A plenary (F3) gives guidance on how to set up an immersive experience as a next step to engaging with mission team life. Immersive experiences can take several forms. If course participants are already embarking on formal training in theology, ministry and mission a local church experience placement could be set up with a specific emphasis on joining in mission team life of various kinds. Volunteering as an apprentice team member in an existing local mission project can be valuable for developing discipleship and vocation in relation to others. A mission week or fortnight may be the right opportunity for 'greenhouse' learning as life is shared with other team members in a more intense experience, with opportunities for testing known or unknown embryonic gifts in ministry; and a gap year that has been carefully set up can deepen such learning still further. My research narratives contain accounts of all these ways of taking part in mission teams: immersive experiences that are often formational and even transformational.

Whether adult learners are participating as mission teams spending time together in a location away from their context, or as individuals looking to focus their own discipleship or

explore a vocation, an opportunity for one-to-one time is likely to be highly valued. If a week-long summer school has two formal learning sessions each morning and one in the afternoon there could be time in the later afternoon and evening periods for a single session with each course participant.

This flexible course offers a balance of ways of presenting material and a variety of approaches to gaining or developing an understanding of mission team life. It is offered as the fruit of qualitative research and conceptual development as a practical contribution to current debates in the Church on the nature of discipleship, vocation, ministry, leadership and teams. It is also framed to stimulate fresh thinking on the essential underlying links between spirituality and mission. It is my hope and prayer that both practitioners and theorists will see in mission team life a window for the theological imagination and a door to walk through into a deeper Life Together.

A possible arrangement of sessions for a summer school appears below.

Mission Team Life: course outline and draft timetable

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Mon	<b>Introduction</b> a) Research journey b) <i>What is discipleship?</i> (discussion in groups) c) The 6 dynamics: definitions	<b>Reflection</b> Reflecting on the character of mission team life through watching part of an episode of <i>Call the Midwife</i>	<b>Mission team life in Scripture</b> <i>Jesus' mission team and Paul's co-workers:</i> identifying relational dynamics
Tues	<b>Reflection</b> <i>Think of a mission team...</i> Course participants recall their own formative experiences of mission team life	<b>Presentation</b> <i>Synergia and koinonia</i> Individual and community, work and gifting, home. Sonnets: <i>Restoration</i> <i>Clergy Team</i> <i>Gold in 'em</i>	<b>Interview</b> A practitioner shares their story: <i>The 6 dynamics</i>
Wed	<b>Reflection</b> <i>Start with a sonnet...</i> Empathetic responses and reflection in groups  <i>How do metaphors help to communicate lived experience?</i>	<b>Presentation</b> <i>Diakonia and pneumatika</i> Hospitality, word and deed, spirituality and new monasticism. Sonnets: <i>Good Soil</i> <i>Sacred Space</i> <i>Candle, Table, Door</i>	<b>Historical case study</b> <i>Francis and Clare:</i> Mission, monastery and team life (including scenes from the film <i>Clare and Francis</i> and my own Assisi pilgrimage reflections)
Thur	<b>Presentation</b> <i>Mathemata and euremata</i> Apprenticeship and mentoring, attentiveness, improvisation. Sonnets: <i>Learning Community</i> <i>Harp and Broom</i> <i>Seeing</i>	<b>Interview</b> A practitioner shares their story: <i>The Holy Spirit in mission team life</i>	<b>Historical case study</b> <i>William Wilberforce and The Clapham Sect</i> (including scenes from the film <i>Amazing Grace</i> )
Fri	<b>Historical case study</b> <i>Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Life Together:</i> Eureka moments, poetry and relational dynamics (including reflections from my own Bonhoeffer pilgrimage to Germany)	<b>Panel</b> (course facilitators and at least one guest) <i>Mission team life, discipleship, vocation and leadership</i>	<b>Plenary</b> <i>Immersive experiences</i> (mission weeks, volunteering, training placements, gap years) - top tips - discussion - final questions
Evenings: one-to-one sessions, social activities, informal conversation			

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