

“BIGGER & CLOSER NOT SMALLER & FURTHER AWAY” – A NEW
PERSPECTIVE ON HOW TO “BE CHURCH”: A LOCAL CASE STUDY
EXPLORING INCARNATIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY.

by
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“The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst [with] us” (John 1:14).¹ It’s an unprepossessing little word, but this is the word that lies at the heart of Christmas and at the heart of the Christian faith. The word is *with*.²

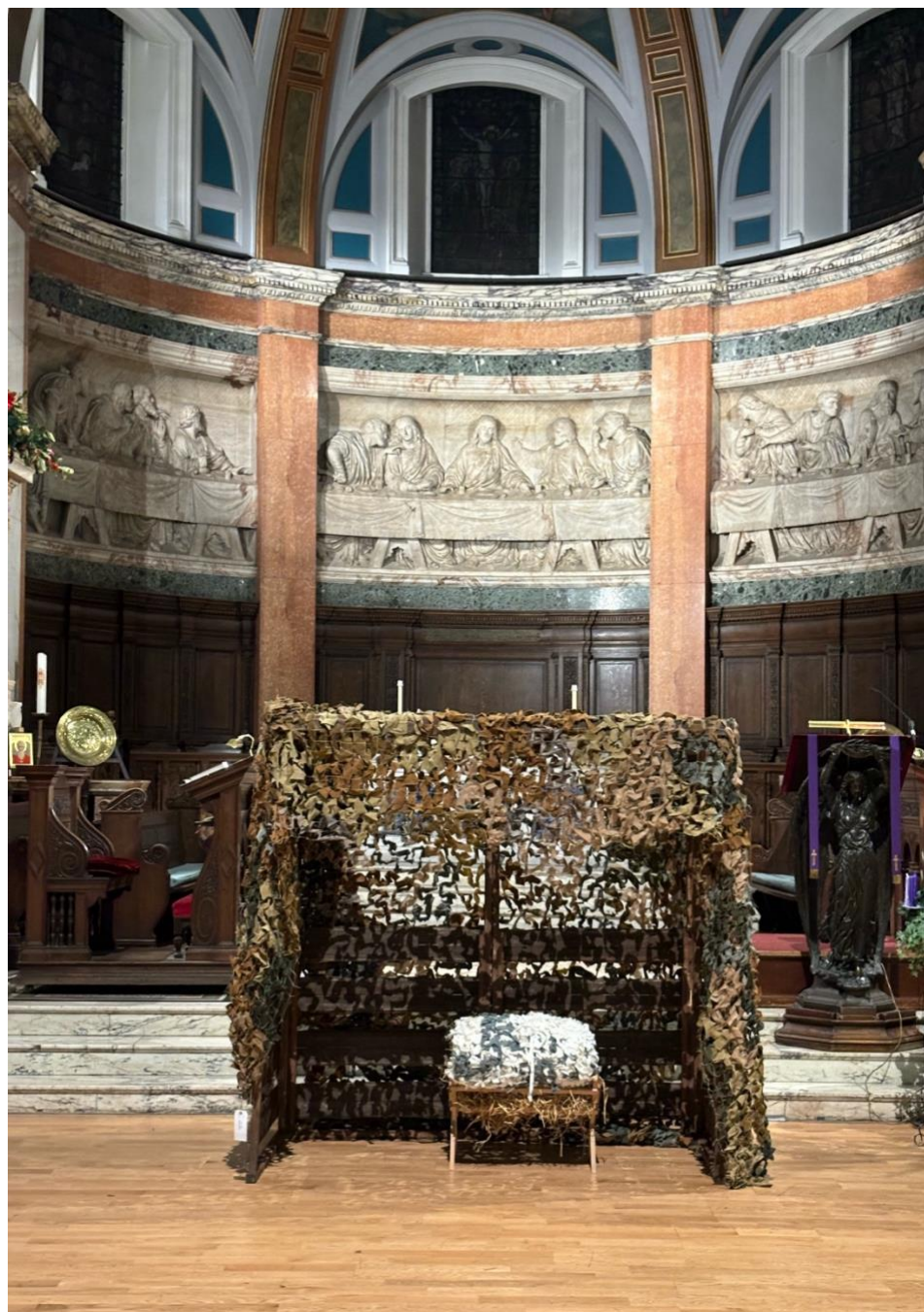


Figure 1: *The Camouflage Crib in the Parish Church of St Cuthbert, Christmas Eve, 2023.*

¹ All Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.

² Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: “being with” God*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), 3.

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PREFACE

All answers to the questionnaires were confidential; the real names of research participants are withheld by mutual agreement. Other names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

This research project and thesis was completed with the encouragement, guidance and support of many people. My profound thanks go to the members of the St Cuthbert's Working Group who agreed to be research participants for this project, and to the members of the partner charities who participated in creating the tableaux which formed part of the Advent sermon series. Their commitment and faithfulness are humbling and inspiring. To my good friend David who encouraged and inspired me throughout the writing of this project. My thanks are also due to all at St Cuthbert's, Church of Scotland, Edinburgh for their interest, encouragement and prayerful support – it is an honour and privilege to be their Minister.

My readers: Professor Angela Dienhart Hancock of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PTS) and Rev Dr Liam Jerrold Fraser of the University of Edinburgh helpfully guided and encouraged me in this final project. The Director of the Worship Program at PTS, Rev Kendra Buckwalter Smith whose online weekly Lenten Compline Services sustained me during the writing up phase. I am grateful for the financial assistance provided by the Hope Trust, the University of Edinburgh, the Church of Scotland Study Leave Scheme and the St Cuthbert's Kirk Session. My thanks also to the following

institutions who kindly gave me permission to reproduce the illustrations; The National Gallery of Scotland, The National Gallery, London and the Lightroom Gallery, London.

My journey of “being with” others began with my late parents, Donald (1935-2011) and Jane (1935-2023), who brought me up in a loving and caring home and always found room to welcome in the stranger who knocked on our door each Christmas.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE CONTEXT

1.1. Introduction

Can an Advent sermon series which highlights the congregation's present missional activity lead to a greater appreciation of an incarnational ecclesiology?

My aim in this research project is to find out to what extent the St Cuthbert's Working³ (who are preparing the church for a Union with the neighbouring Parish of Greyfriars Kirk) already embraces the incarnational theology of Church, as "being with" others as a potential means of best addressing the Church of Scotland's new Marks of Mission. I aim to achieve this through the delivery of an Advent sermon series which will form the main part of my research intervention.

I am interested in answering this question for a number of reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, my thesis is that a shared appreciation of what it means to be Church "with others" as opposed to being "for others" will help the Working Group better appreciate how I think we are already engaging, in a local context, with the Church of Scotland's new Marks of Mission and, in turn, enable the Group to articulate this theologically in the ongoing discussions with our neighbouring parish as we prepare for a Union with them. One of my key concerns is that they should recognise the extent to which St Cuthbert's already is practising "being with" and use that as a springboard to explore future potential in the delivery of mission. This would be in sharp contrast to the

³ The Working Group consists of elected members of the Kirk Session.

current situation where the Working Group appear overawed by Greyfriars' vision and mission activity.⁴

The second reason for my interest in this question is that, as the teaching elder of St Cuthbert's, I have grown to embrace the incarnational theology of Sam Wells and the ecclesiology of the HeartEdge Movement which I have sought to apply practically in my own ministry but which, to date, I have not been able to fully share. One reason for this is that I only fully experienced Wells' practical theology first hand during lockdown when I worked in person alongside our charity partner, whilst my engagement with my congregation at that time, evolved on-line and was not ideally suited to "being with" others. This saw me working in isolation from my congregation and, as such, I did not take them on this journey with me. By the time the pandemic was over, my new learning, style and method of ministry that had developed in lockdown then encountered the traditionalist mindset of the average parishioner which, I would suggest, is not always open to change or seeing things from a different or new perspective. Many, after lockdown, understandably just wanted things to return to as they were even though the Convener of the Assembly Trustees had said that life in the Church would never quite be the same again.⁵ It was vital for me to discover an empathy that would acknowledge this sense of loss and ensure I worked out how to take others with me. The Parish Profile that had called me to St Cuthbert's not only encouraged the taking of risks and doing things in a new way but also balancing the perspective of the traditionalists alongside the modernists.

⁴ By being embedded within the congregation, I have observed this sense of being overawed and it is explored later in this chapter.

⁵ John Chalmers, "Time for change," *Life and Work*, November 2017, 23.

My interest in this question extends beyond the geographical boundaries of my own parish and into the context of the wider Church of Scotland where all presbyteries have been challenged to prioritise the new Marks of Mission in their future planing. Recently I have been involved in national discussions around the ecumenical delivery of mission in the local context, and I hope that, in due course, the fruits of my research and the results of this project might prove helpful in this regard.⁶

Behind this question I am working with the hypothesis that if I can share my experiences of specifically working with Steps to Hope, our covenanted charity partner, throughout lockdown, which for me, was motivated by the incarnational theology of the HeartEdge movement and Sam Wells' vision for the church to "be with" rather than "be for" others (which culminated in the removal of the historic pews in St Cuthbert's) then, through a process of shared learning and reflection (delivered as part of a sermon series in Advent), the St Cuthbert's Working Group might be more able to articulate and appreciate its perspective on how we might better engage with the Church of Scotland's new Marks of Mission and so be better prepared to enter into a Union with our neighbouring Parish.

My experience of ministry suggests that the best sharing and learning can be done through worship, as it is something that is distinctive to the religious community. The preaching of the Word is vital to traditional Reformed ecclesiology, whilst the imaginative delivery of the Word, through dynamic homiletical engagement, can keep it

⁶ I am currently a member of the Church of Scotland's Ecumenical Relations Committee.

modern and relevant. Thus, preaching perhaps offers the medium to balance the expectations of the traditionalist along with the hopes of the modernist. If I was able to release some of the control that a minister historically seems to have acquired in the sermon process⁷, then I might see our combined approach to mission and outreach through the perspective of the Working Group, which includes many of the traditionalist voices on the Session, and they would hopefully see it through my new found perspective of “being with.”

I hoped to release some of my control over the sermon intervention process by involving the charity volunteers we have the privilege of working with in the mission and outreach at St Cuthbert’s, in the delivery of the sermons, not by using words, but by creating images and tableaux. This participatory engagement would attempt to embrace what Peter Neilson (former Associate Minister at St Cuthbert’s) had identified was required in preaching, namely, the need to invent “a new language” and “way to communicate.”⁸ Neilson drew on the work of Leonard Sweet, who in his book *Post-modern Pilgrims*⁹:

Pleads for the communication of an ‘ancient future faith’ That is rooted in scripture but translated into culture, not so much through well prepared sermons, but through offering a total experience. He invites us to become participatory communities where storytelling offers ‘fascination, explanation and integration’. In our ‘visualholic culture’, He speaks of the power of metaphor to bring transformation through capturing the imagination.¹⁰

⁷ The preaching dynamic sees the minister placed on high in a pulpit, removed from the congregation, and as the Minister of Word and Sacrament can, if not careful, fall into the trap of turning the Word made flesh just back into his/her own words again.

⁸ Peter Neilson, *Church on the move* (Edinburgh: Scottish Christian Press, 2005), 60.

⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Post-modern Pilgrims – First Century Passion for 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ Neilson, *On the move*, 62

In this chapter I will be outlining the background to the context, both national and local, in which this Paper is written, including a precise definition of the situation to be discussed. I will also outline the history of how this topic arose within my own ministry at St Cuthbert's since I was ordained and inducted to the Parish in 2017. This will also include why I selected this topic for study. Key to this project is the new prioritisation of mission in the life and work of the Church of Scotland and this chapter will introduce the new Five Marks of Mission and in the next chapter explain how they were reflected upon by the Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland. It is my contention that St Cuthbert's is already engaging in this new way of "being Church" through mission and I hope to discover if this is a shared perspective through the delivery of the sermon series.

Setting in Context

The primary question of this paper finds its contextual origins both nationally and locally dating back to 2017. This was the year in which, nationally, the Church of Scotland acknowledged it needed to see things differently and started to prioritise mission; when locally The Parish Church of St Cuthbert, in seeking to call a new minister wrote a Parish Profile acknowledging that its mission and outreach needed to be done differently by "taking risks with new ideas".¹¹ It was also the year in which I was ordained and inducted to my first charge and started a different way of life and the year in which our charity partner Steps to Hope was founded and started to make a difference in the lives of the homeless and drug addicted folk it sought to serve in Edinburgh.

¹¹ "The Parish Profile of St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh, 2017," accessed April 4, 2024, <https://api2.churchdesk.com/files/9ef52685-60ad-499d-8b11-643b6e41972e/view>

The national and local contexts will now be outlined, locating them within the working hypothesis of this paper so that, in the next chapter, they might be understood from a theological and biblical perspective and share an applied missional narrative. Meanwhile, these two contexts which include the life and work of St Cuthbert's, my ministry and those of our covenanted charity partners, link into why I chose this topic for study for, as will be seen, they all are related to prioritising the mission of the Church.

1.2. National Context

Overview

This research paper is written in the context of the Church of Scotland being in the process of implementing a Radical Action Plan¹² aiming to, “reduce the number of presbyteries across the country, support local congregations in their ministry and mission and encourage new expressions of Church.”¹³

Within the context of the Church nationally, an understanding had been emerging since 2017 that much of the infrastructure and *modus operandi* of the Church appeared to be no longer to be fit for purpose and that a new engagement and understanding of what it meant to be missional lay at the heart of a successful future for the Church. Things needed to be done differently and this required seeing things from a new perspective, as outlined in five new Marks of Mission which will be introduced at the end of this chapter.

¹² “The Council of Assembly, Radical Action Plan, 2019,” accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/58399/Report_of_the_Council_of_Assembly_2019_including_Radical_Action_Plan.pdf

¹³ Ibid., 3.4.2.

In turn, decisions agreed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland have locally brought St Cuthbert's to the point where it is unexpectedly, and with lack of any prior planing and preparation, working towards a Union with its neighbouring parish.

Background

The background to the adoption of the Radical Action Plan goes back to 2017, when in February of that year, the Reverend Dr Doug Gay, Principal of Trinity College Glasgow, delivered the annual Chalmers Lectures in St Giles Cathedral, The High Kirk of Edinburgh. He delivered a rallying call for reform, noting that the Church of Scotland was the fastest declining denomination in the United Kingdom, and that reform needed to take place against a backdrop of falling membership and secularisation. The lectures drew on Gay's book "Reforming the Kirk, the future of the Church of Scotland."¹⁴

The Principal Clerk at the time, the Very Reverend Dr John Chalmers, former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, who introduced Doug Gay, noted that, "Urgent change is needed in almost every part of our church life. ... The ministry of the local church needs a new reformation."¹⁵

Three months later, at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 2017, the Kirk was given an insight into how theologically this change might be rooted when the Reverend Dr Sam Wells took part in a session called "Catalysing Kingdom

¹⁴ Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk: The Future of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Chalmers, "Time for change," 23.

Communities - what does it mean to be faith communities that welcome and include in today's world?" In this he outlined his incarnational theology of "being with" as opposed to "being for" others.¹⁶

The following month, I was ordained and inducted to my first charge as minister of the Parish Church of St Cuthbert and visited Sam Wells at St Martin-in-the-Fields in London, to explore with him how he was implementing his vision of "being Church" through the HeartEdge Movement which he had recently set up.¹⁷ As a result, and encouraged by the challenge to seek new ways of doing mission in the Parish Profile, I sought to adopt his vision of incarnational ministry and implement it in my parish in Edinburgh. I knew of St Martin's and its specific outreach to the homeless from the 1980s when I was an undergraduate in London and had often worshipped there.

In February 2019, Sam Wells was invited back to Edinburgh to give the Chalmers Lectures at Greyfriars Kirk ^{where} he delivered a series entitled, "A future, that's bigger than the past"¹⁸ in which he shared his vision of HeartEdge. Then, in May 2019, at the General Assembly, the Radical Action Plan that drew on components of both Doug Gay's and Sam Wells' Chalmers Lectures was adopted. Inspired by both of these lecture series, and as a recent convert to the HeartEdge Movement, I signed up St Cuthbert's along with

¹⁶ "Catalysing Kingdom Communities," Public Presentation at the General Assembly, 2017, accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/40277/Sam_Wells_Catalysing_Kingdom_Communities.pdf

¹⁷ HeartEdge Website, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.heartedge.org>

¹⁸ "The 2019 Chalmers Lectures," accessed April 4, 2024, <https://stream1.churchofscotland.org.uk/chalmers-lecture>

our ecumenical partner and neighbour, St John's Episcopal Church, to host the 2nd National HeartEdge Conference in October of the same year.

Within six months, in March 2020, the Church, along with the nation, went into lockdown whilst, in June, I enrolled on the Doctor of Ministry Course. Two months later, the Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland presented a proposal paper detailing how five new Marks of Mission should become the driving force and new benchmark to support a successful implementation of the Radical Action Plan. These new Marks of Mission were adopted by an online General Assembly in October 2020, with presbyteries then tasked to implement the Plan at their own level with mission being at the forefront of all their considerations. In December 2021, after a year of online meetings and local discussions, the Presbytery of Edinburgh presented its draft Radical Plan which was adopted in November 2022. Within the Presbytery plan, St Cuthbert's was told to work towards a Union with its neighbouring parish of Greyfriars Kirk. All of this took place against the backdrop of some sobering statistics which have driven the need for the Church to prioritise mission and which are worth drawing attention to before moving on to set the paper within the local context.

The need for a "new reformation" in the local Church, and in the national Church, as identified by John Chalmers at the start of this chapter, was not just in terms of its structures. By 2017, the focus was now more critically to be centred around its mission, with Doug Gay noting that the Church of Scotland had lost the equivalent of an average-sized congregation each week for the previous ten years.¹⁹ In addition, the whole concept of membership and what it means to be a member was, by 2017, now under question. The

¹⁹ Gay, *Reforming the Kirk*, 13.

number of baptisms (infant and adult), the traditional point of membership into the Church, which was 22,039 in 1985, had fallen to 4,384 in 2015. Steve Aisthorpe's²⁰ study of the decline in traditional church attendance and the growth of "churchless faith" has shown that there are a significant number of people who are leaving the Church of Scotland and yet retain faith. Whilst Peter Brierly,²¹ reflecting on the Church Census of 2016, has highlighted the lack of attendance and active commitment of those members who have remained. So, not only was the Church not growing, but its nominal membership is also on the whole not particularly active. In response, at a national level, new ways of doing mission had been identified as the priority to address the challenges facing the Church whilst the same had also been prioritised at the local level in the St Cuthbert's Parish Profile to which we now turn.

1.3. Local Context

Just as 2017 proved to be decisive year in the national context, so too it proved to be the same in the local context. St Cuthbert's drew up a Parish Profile and, in June of that year, I was ordained and inducted as their minister. The Parish Profile highlighted the need to do things differently (as had the Chalmers Lecture series) and particularly to take forward the missional activity within the parish. As noted, the incarnational theology of Sam Wells had proved influential at the national level (resulting ultimately in the

²⁰ Steve Aisthorpe, *The Invisible Church: Learning from the Experiences of Churchless Christians* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2016).

²¹ Peter Brierly, *Growth Amidst Decline: What the 2016 Scottish Church Census reveals* (Tonbridge: ADBC Publishing, 2016), accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/scottish-church-census>

adoption of five new Marks of Mission) and it would soon start to be influential at the local level; as the outreach team at St Cuthbert's explored it through the work of the HeartEdge movement and began to adopt an incarnational ecclesiology of "being with" others as opposed to the more traditional way of "being Church" that was "for others."

Mission had always been at the heart of St Cuthbert's outreach with the Parish Profile sharing the following vision:

Our core vision in St Cuthbert's is living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the heart of our city as God's people in the West End of Edinburgh; sharing God's love, offering a home to friend and stranger alike, and providing a hub to discern the Vision of God and so equip the people of God for the mission of God.²²

Mission featured not just in the core vision of St Cuthbert's but also when describing the statistical make-up of the parish. The figures in the Parish Profile reflected those to be found in the Church of Scotland's Statics for Mission,²³ noting that:

St Cuthbert's currently serves a parish of around 3000 people. The population structure is weighted heavily to the student and young adult age group, which comprise 82% of the population compared to 47% for the city. St Cuthbert's is located at the West End of Princes Street Gardens in the city centre, which also includes one of the U.K.'s largest financial centres, with retail, hospitality and nightlife venues. Many thousands of people pass and are aware of our presence each day. This means that **St Cuthbert's has a very distinctive outreach mission to fulfil.**²⁴

²² "The Parish Profile," 3. This aim to "equip the people of God for the mission of God" (Missio Dei) will be explored in Chapter 2.

²³ To view the detailed 'Statistics for Mission' for St Cuthbert's at the most recent Census (2011) visit <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/stats-for-mission>

²⁴ "The Parish Profile," 1. (My emphasis).

This distinctive outreach mission had a proud history at St Cuthbert's, featuring as it had done through an early association with the "Church Without Walls"²⁵ concept which the Profile noted, "is still a guide to our thinking towards developing our mission at St Cuthbert's."²⁶ Peter Neilson who developed the concept, when he was the Associate Minister at St Cuthbert's envisaged "A Church Without Walls" as being, "a metaphor of movement, travelling light, connecting to our community, and removing the obstacles of unnecessary divisions within and between our churches."²⁷ In describing St Cuthbert's in 2004 he observed, "Here is a church that lives like an island in the river that flows past its doors, but seldom enters it."²⁸ He noted that:

The assumed model of church is the 'suction model', drawing people through our doors to join us where we are. The challenge was to develop a 'slipstream model', sharing in the mission of God in the community and daring to believe that a different kind of church would form in the slipstream of that movement of grace and self-giving. In the imagery of the gospels, the Church is simply people with Jesus at the centre, travelling where Jesus takes them. The Church is a movement meeting people where they are in response to the two words of Jesus, 'Follow me'. That simple dynamic lies at the heart of the liberating metaphor of a "church without walls."²⁹

²⁵ "A Church Without Walls" was a project initially developed by Reverend Peter Neilson, who was sponsored by St Cuthbert's whilst Associate Minister there, 1997-2001. In turn Peter chaired the Special Commission on Review and Reform which presented its report to the General Assembly in 2001. This report, accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/11787/CWW_REPORT_for_website_2Nov2012.pdf is still referred to in "The Radical Plan," (2019). I studied with Peter reading for a Master of Theology in Ministry in 1997, during which he was thinking through his ideas. I saw it as my task to take forward his ideas of "A Church Without Walls" by exploring it through the HeartEdge Movement when I became minister in 2017.

²⁶ "The Parish Profile," 3.

²⁷ Neilson, *On the move*, 61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

Embracing the incarnational ecclesiology of Wells seemed a natural way of developing this missional concept and taking up the reins thirteen years after Peter Neilson had started to think “out of the box.” Recognising the challenge in 2017, the Profile stated that: “We are a gathered congregation of 300 members with an older age profile, but with a solid number of volunteers, which we need to expand, but who are dedicated in so many ways to running the church. There is an ongoing need to encourage those with any form of link with our church to come and be part of our fellowship.”³⁰

It was this, “need to encourage those with any link with our church to come and be part of our fellowship” that suggested to me that the congregation was looking to go beyond the traditional style of mission that did things “for others” and now wanted to find a new way of mission that would result in the congregation “being with” others; all part of one extended St Cuthbert’s family. These different approaches to mission and the theology behind them will be explored in Chapter 2. Meanwhile, the Parish Profile noted that, with regards to a new minister:

The new minister of St Cuthbert’s needs to be someone whose qualities will include an openness of mind, and engaging and empowering nature, allowing his/her congregation and those around it to take risks, with new ideas, and a willingness to work with colleagues in the other city centre churches with a passion for outreach and a respected preaching ability, which will recognise the traditionalist as well as the modernist.³¹

I was drawn to the encouragement to *take risks*, to come in with *new ideas*... with a *passion for outreach and preaching*, specifically being encouraged to develop the “Church Without Walls” concept. On reflection, I perhaps only saw the words that

³⁰ “The Parish Profile,” 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

attracted and excited me and should have been more alert to the need to be the minister of both the traditionalist as well as the modernist and to empower both.

Initially, I forged ahead and, on reflection was making unilateral decisions, without engaging the Session in the process and displaying arrogance in the process. I secured on loan a renowned international piece of artwork by the video artist, Bill Viola³² as part of the Edinburgh International Art Festival in 2018. This resulted in queues forming up outside the church to see the installation. I was in fact doing what I thought would be good “for others” leading from the front as my previous roles in the army and in education had required of me. Whilst this style of leadership might quickly deliver results, a dynamic soon emerged whereby the Session as a whole, quite rightly, wanted to feel more part of the decision-making process whilst my eagerness and passion to get things done and produce results was potentially pushing them aside. It was important that I now cultivated a sense of ownership in others, and I hoped that, perhaps rather belatedly, the Advent sermon series (my main research intervention) might help achieve this.

Meanwhile, back in March 2020, the onset of the pandemic and going into lockdown overtook all future strategic planning and two quite different narratives started to emerge – one for me and one for the congregation. I was to find myself putting into practice an ecclesiology of “being with” others whilst the congregation experienced the opposite by being placed into lockdown.

³² Bill Viola, *Three Women*, 2008. See the review accessed April 4, 2024, <https://artlyst.com/reviews/bill-viola-quiet-contemplative-video-installation-st-cuthberts-church-edinburgh/>

Lockdown Experience

My mindset, and style of leadership, which had previously focussed on doing things “for others” would be totally changed during lockdown, when the ministers of the Church were told to stay in their manses, and their places of worship were to remain closed. Never had the Church been further away from the people of the Parish. Our charity partner, Steps to Hope, got permission from the City Council for St Cuthbert’s to remain open to serve the homeless community in Edinburgh’s West End and I found that, by becoming a volunteer with the charity, I could open up the church as the charity’s key holder every Sunday,³³ so that the volunteers could prepare the meals in the kitchen, which we would then serve outside to our guests.

For 18 months I was able to develop an in-person Chaplaincy to both the volunteers and our homeless guests which saw me very much “being with” them as opposed to “being for” them. This new understanding of mission and change of mindset was something I was keen to share with the congregation. St Cuthbert’s had become the new Sunday home to over 150 people and remains so today. The Charity had kept the church building open during lockdown, and I now wanted to make sure that those who had experienced St Cuthbert’s in-person during lockdown felt that it was as much their home going forward as it was that of the traditional members who had been forced to worship online from home. To achieve this, it was agreed by the Kirk Session that the historic pews in the main sanctuary would be removed so that our homeless guests could

³³ See Appendix 5 – The Second Sunday in Advent.

be served in the same space that the congregation worshipped in, as opposed to the church hall that they had been using before lockdown.

Within the Reformed tradition, pews were introduced into church's sacred spaces after the Reformation so that the emphasis would become on the preached word listened to in a classroom setting within the sanctuary. Pews created a sense of control and order in which everyone knew their place. The worshippers sat in separate ranks, with a tradition of patronage whereby those with influence and money often had the best pews.³⁴ It is important to acknowledge that removing the pews and returning the nave to how it was pre-Reformation, was also a way of controlling the space and it was important that both the traditionalists and the modernists still felt at home in their sacred setting. This historical legacy, along with others, has perhaps developed over the years into a mindset of the church "being for" others and will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2 along with the theology behind the incarnational ecclesiology of "being with."

I personally hoped that this new space, created to facilitate our outreach, would be a tangible expression of "being with" rather than a token gesture where we were just "being for" our guests but never really engaging with them face to face. Everyone would now share the same shared sanctuary. What I see as being a theology of tokenism will be explored in Chapter 2.

Coming out of lockdown, having reconfigured the Sanctuary, the St Cuthbert's church building, as encouraged by the General Assembly, was in a good place to prioritise exploring new ways of doing mission. What was lacking was a route map for doing so that gave everyone equal ownership over the process. To address this I hoped

³⁴ See footnote 47.

that, by sharing the incarnational theology of “being with” others in the Advent sermon series, we might collectively see the need to move on from the way of “being Church” that is “for others” whilst acknowledging that this has served St Cuthbert’s well in the past. This traditional ecclesiology might understandably be framed as: “we are here for you as ourselves; we are to worship God and to tell God’s story, and we’d love to have you join us. We can’t be everything to everyone, but we can do this for you.”

The membership of St Cuthbert’s that emerged out of lockdown was a shadow of itself compared to the one that had been portrayed in the 2017 Parish Profile. Not only were the members fewer in number, but their confidence in being the Mother Kirk of Edinburgh, sitting on the oldest Christian site in the city, had been challenged through a Presbytery Plan, which proposed St Cuthbert’s enter into a Union for the first time in its history. The already, small-in-number-Young Church did not regroup, and the, on the whole, elderly congregation was understandably keen to go back to doing as much as possible in person. This meant that their successful engagement with technology during the pandemic, which had kept them together through on-line celebrations of Communion, Bible studies, coffee mornings and Session meetings, was now mostly, to be put aside, reverting to traditional ways of meeting and conducting business.

A sense of how the Session members cherished their traditions was evident in how it had always prided itself on carrying out its duties to perfection; none more so than in the set of orders that the Session Clerk would send out to the Duty elders prior to Communion which ensured that no serving elder ever put a foot out of place. The good folk loved how they had served in the past and it was only recently that women elders did not have to wear hats when on duty and the men, their Morning Coats, complete with

white tie and tails. There was a particular pride and delight in sharing the beauty of the sacred sanctuary with the many visitors who would pass through the festival city of Edinburgh. These visitors had been few and far between during the pandemic, and the dedicated team of volunteer guides, who had gone into suspended animation, had not been able to tell their stories about the church that they held dear and loved. These stories specifically included that of Ruth³⁵ told in the beautiful stain glass window in the nave and whose approach to pastoral outreach is explored in Chapter 2. Also, the story of David as told, high up in the gallery, in the glorious Tiffany Window, one of only a few in the United Kingdom. Nothing spoke more eloquently of the dedicated congregation than the singing of ‘Ye Gates lift up your heads on high’³⁶ as the elements were processed in at each Quarterly Communion, something that I was bowled over by when I first had the privilege of celebrating Communion at St Cuthbert’s; the sense of collective effervescence was tangible (effervescence and awe will be explored in Chapter 2).

The congregation appeared to emerge out of lockdown shell-shocked, hurting and uncertain of the future and I wished to tell them that, whilst they had not been able to regularly attend church for nearly 2 years, it was because of their prayers and support during lockdown that we had managed to keep our ministry to the homeless going, operating out of the church. Ways of carrying out our mission and outreach had changed during lockdown, and we had evolved in practice from the traditional way of “being for” people to now “being with” those we sought to serve. The challenge was now to help the traditional members of the congregation feel that they were part of this developing story

³⁵ A theological appreciation of Ruth will be reflected upon in the context of mission in Chapter 2.

³⁶ Hymn 19 in *Church Hymnary 4*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005).

and that they had not been left behind. My hope was that I could do this through the Advent sermon series and that the Working Group in particular might then take this way of “being with” others forward into the new Union.

A precise definition of the situation that this paper engages with

Having described the national and local contexts of this paper, I will now outline a precise definition of the situation that this paper engages with. As mentioned, St. Cuthbert’s finds itself, as result of the Presbytery Mission Plan, preparing for a Union with Greyfriars Kirk with whom it has had very little previous engagement. My research is intended to help the Working Group navigate these challenging times by focussing on the Church’s new Marks of Mission and how at St Cuthbert’s we are now already engaging with them. This chapter will conclude by detailing these new Marks of Mission before, in Chapter 2, examining the theology of mission from a Biblical and Reformed perspective, whilst also suggesting a theology that might help St Cuthbert’s practically engage with this new prioritisation on mission.

The Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery Plan, that was agreed and adopted in November 2021, stated that St Cuthbert’s would work towards going into a Union with the neighbouring parish of Greyfriars Kirk.³⁷ Both Kirk Sessions elected elders to join a new Working Group that would start the discussions which would hopefully lead towards

³⁷ Edinburgh Presbytery Plan Consultation Document, 2022-2025, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/5f1afa7e2fbfe/content/pages/documents/edinburgh-presbytery-consultation-document.pdf>

achieving a successful Union. At the heart of these discussions was the need to write a new Mission Narrative that both congregations would have ownership of.

Greyfriars has developed a highly successful outreach programme centred around the Grassmarket Community Project³⁸ and, more recently, a community hub on the edge of their parish boundary. One has become a charity and the other a trust in their own right, coming under the umbrella of Greyfriars Kirk. Our neighbours have also been at the forefront of pioneering the HeartEdge Movement in Scotland and, as such, are well versed in the incarnational theology of Sam Wells which has, as noted, at its roots, an ecclesiology that sees the church “being with” rather than “being for” others. At the first meeting of the joint Sessions, held at the start of November 2023, it became apparent to me that the folk of Greyfriars were able to articulate this new way of “being Church” with a great sense of purpose and confidence. Theologically, they were very articulate in sharing their own mission narrative. Meanwhile, the folk of St Cuthbert’s drew on their experience of traditional expressions of “being Church”. In essence, Greyfriars talked the theological language of “being with” whilst St Cuthbert’s reverted to a traditionalist mindset of “being for”. One Session seemed light and nimble, full of focus and direction, whilst the other now seemed weighed down by what was perhaps the excess baggage of its past and was keenly working out how to envisage a new route map going forward.

Towards the end of November 2023, I became aware and concerned that the new Mission Narrative that is being produced by the joint Working Group would not reflect all the mission and outreach that is going on at St Cuthbert’s because the Kirk Session did

³⁸ The Grassmarket Community Project, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://grassmarket.org/>

not feel they had ownership of what had developed within the outreach ministry during lockdown.

I feared that the voice of St Cuthbert's would soon be lost and become words in a history book, rather than having flesh put on the bones of the work that is currently being undertaken in the parish. This sense of being the "underdog" in the Union was further highlighted at the St Cuthbert's November Session Meeting, when the Session Clerk and Working Group team leader of Greyfriars gave a presentation. The St Cuthbert's Session were left wondering if they were going into Union with a church or a social enterprise represented by all the different Trusts that it had established in its community outreach.

I hoped to address this fear and recover the lost voice of St Cuthbert's through the delivery of the Advent sermon series. These four main interventions would try to motivate others to see that we were already well ahead in addressing some of the new Marks of Mission, whilst specifically resourcing the Working Group as it went forward. I hoped that both the traditionalists and the modernists would see that a sermon series, delivered as part of an act of worship, was not a threatening means of communicating new ideas and ways of "being Church", but rather offered a safe, familiar and supportive space for all to explore the way forward whilst also recognising all were of equal worth and loved by God. I hoped that everyone would have equal ownership of the Word of God and that all views and responses would be acknowledged and respected. Uniquely, I think the worship setting makes this type of research intervention possible as will be explored in Chapter 3.

For me, as well as addressing the fear of St Cuthbert's losing its voice going into a Union, there was also a pastoral imperative to share (through the delivery of the Advent

sermon series) the beauty of our sacred sanctuary with those who would often not feel welcome or that they did not belong in this opulent space. Pastoral imperatives often drive the need to challenge tradition and convention, as for instance Calvin discovered when introducing the singing of Psalms in Geneva.³⁹ I very much saw this intervention as being a means of “being Church” “with others,” challenging the traditional outlook that often unintentionally saw church as patronisingly “being for” others.

Having our worship and outreach now “all under one roof,” made possible by the removal of the pews, seemed to me to demonstrate that we would be sharing everything we had and held dear so that we could better carry out our mission and outreach alongside those we seek to serve. I was keen to find out whether the St Cuthbert’s Working Group shared this sense of “being with,” or perhaps whether the mindset was still one of a church being traditionally “for” others.

As well as a pastoral imperative for delivering my research intervention as part of a sermon series in our sanctuary, there was also a strategic focus to the decision which was driven by the Radical Action Plan for change in the Church of Scotland which wanted all buildings to be fit for purpose. With a vast surplus of buildings, the General Trustees have set about disposing of a third its buildings in Scotland.⁴⁰ Individual congregations have had to put a case to Presbytery to say why their building is vital to the

³⁹ For an understanding of Calvin’s pastoral imperative for change, I will be referencing Barbara Douglas, ‘*Why should I sing the Psalms?*’ In *Reforming Worship: English Reformed Principles and Practices*, ed. J. Templeton “et al.” (Eugene, Oregon: Stock Publishers, 2012).

⁴⁰ See “Report of General Trustees of the Church of Scotland to General Assembly, 2019,” accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/58400/General_Trustees_-_Well_equipped_spaces_in_the_right_places.pdf

future and fit for purpose in delivering the mission and outreach of the Church; proving that they are, “a well-equipped space in the right place.”⁴¹ This emphasis on buildings ran in tandem with the Church of Scotland adopting the Five New Marks of Mission, with mission to be the Church’s primary focus. Buildings and mission were now specifically linked in the strategic vision for the Church of Scotland and also in the evolving vision of St Cuthbert’s.

Statement of Purpose

With so much upheaval, uncertainty and change in the Church at the moment, specifically within the context of St Cuthbert’s which, as noted, has been told to start preparing for a Union with its neighbouring parish, I feel a responsibility to root our change at parish level within a theology that is both biblically - grounded yet also practically - achievable. I believe that the incarnational theology of Sam Wells, if adapted to be sympathetic to the local context of St Cuthbert’s, in acknowledging its past whilst challenging it to take risks going forward, is well suited to this task of making St Cuthbert’s, as a whole, fit for purpose. However, I also recognise that others see things differently and that their voice going forwards needs to be heard and reflected upon and their feedback on the sermon series will be vital in shaping the future viability of St Cuthbert’s.

Anything new requires taking stock and finding a shared common ground, or identifying shared common ground that already exists, that will allow everyone to move

⁴¹ Ibid., Appendix 1.

forward with confidence. The purpose of this research project is to find out and better articulate what our shared perspective is at St Cuthbert's and, if we find we don't have one, then to suggest one that might serve us all well. It may well be a perspective that has room for both "being with" and 'being for.' In essence I am doing this project because I think it strikes at the heart of where the Church of Scotland finds itself in this defining moment in its history.

Before moving onto Chapter 2 which, amongst other theologies, will explore the theology of mission within the Reformed Church at both a contemporary and historical level, it is important to highlight the new Marks of Mission which are a key component of my research intervention to be delivered through the Advent sermon series. The research intervention itself will be the focus of Chapter 3.

1.4. Marks of Mission

At the heart of this Paper lie the new Marks of Mission which have a direct impact on the afore-mentioned contexts. Mission has become the primary focus for the Church of Scotland going forward and everything we do must be measured against the new Marks. As previously noted, the General Assembly adopted these new Marks in 2020. In the next chapter, a report from the Theological Forum will reflect upon the theology behind them whilst, at this stage, it is worth noting how they are presented by the Church:

The General Assembly of October 2020 endorsed the Five Marks of Mission, agreeing that, for the Church to be fit for purpose in the 21st Century, these Five Marks must be evidenced at local, regional and national levels. Originally

developed by the Anglican Communion in the 1980s as a way to define Christian mission they are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The Assembly Trustees noted that they will be interpreted and expressed differently across the Church and said that church members may also use an alternative definition of the Five Marks of Mission created by the Anglican Board of Mission in Australia in 2013:

1. Witness to Christ's saving, forgiving, reconciling love for all people
2. Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith
3. Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy
4. Challenge violence, injustice and depression, and work for peace and reconciliation
5. Protect, care for and renew life on our planet

Whichever way of expressing these essential ideas is preferred by the local, regional or national Church, the call to Christ's people to do and to be something in the image of Christ, and serve within the world, remains clear."⁴²

Doing mission in the *image* and *service* of Christ stand out as key goals and I see this as falling within the sense of the *imago Dei* and *missio Dei* both of which are vital to my research intervention.

⁴² "The Church of Scotland, Our Faith – the Five Marks of Mission, 2021," accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-faith>

I have chosen to use the Five Marks of Mission as the focus of my topic because it is something that is new for the Church of Scotland and has also become the main priority for future planning at all levels going forward. As such it, is something that is also new for both of the congregations coming together in the Union. I have decided to use the Australian alternative definition for the very fact that they seem light and unburdened by a sense of historical mission and also because it is one of the few instances where something that has been adopted by the General Assembly, to be implemented by Presbytery, also allows for a choice as to how to proceed at the parish level. The ability to choose how to proceed is a refreshing move away from the Church of Scotland tradition of sometimes controlling things at all levels. With this freedom to choose, I have also focused on the two Mark which I believe St Cuthbert's is best placed to deliver on by working with others.

1.5. Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the primary question for my research and thesis, namely, "Can a sermon series on "being with" which highlights the congregation's present missional activity lead to a greater appreciation of an incarnational ecclesiology?" I have provided an overview of the contexts for this project both national and local and have explained how the new Five Marks of Mission came to be adopted by the Church of Scotland.

In Chapter 2, I will locate the topic within the tradition of Reformed Theology and ground it within key Biblical and pastoral settings. Specifically, I will provide an overview of the history and theology of mission in the Church of Scotland, drawing on

the work of Lesslie Newbigin and that of my colleague Liam Jerrold Fraser⁴³ and, in particular, the Biblical and theological mindset of Church “being for” others as opposed to it “being with” others, as developed in the incarnational theology of Sam Wells. I will then proceed to outline how mission and outreach at St Cuthbert’s is currently understood as it prepares to go into a Union, and how it will be reflected upon through my main intervention of an Advent sermon series, delivered using participatory research methods, in support of my project and as a means of addressing my primary question.

In Chapter 3, I will present a description of my research question including details of my research design and study participants. I will also include a description of the actual implementation process. This will detail how the Advent Sermon Series took shape prior to delivery, noting the adjustments that had to be made to the design. I will also look at how a Questionnaire that was sent out as part of the research intervention, both prior to and the after the Sermon Series, was disseminated, collated and then coded. I will then develop and explore the themes which emerged from the data generated by my intervention.

In Chapter 4, I will be discussing the main themes I identified in my data and determining how my research question was answered, and what was revealed about my topic and my ministry context during the research process. I will reflect upon the core question of this paper and evaluate the overall success, or otherwise, of the project, with a particular reference to the theology outlined in Chapter 2, analysing how this theology was applied in practice and shared with the Working Group at St Cuthbert’s. I will also reflect on my own leadership in relation to the project, and whether a sermon series was

⁴³ Liam Jerrold Fraser, *Mission in Contemporary Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2021).

the most effective way to accomplish a shared understanding of the current missional activity in the Church.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

In Chapter 1 it was noted that, in all of the contexts in which this paper is set, the main priority had become the engagement with the new Five Marks of Mission as adopted by the Church of Scotland. In this chapter, I will locate my project within the tradition of Reformed Theology as developed during my coursework and ground it within key Biblical and pastoral issues. Specifically, I will look at the Five Marks of Mission as reflected upon by the Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland.⁴⁴

I will explore the problem of how to differentiate between a traditional approach to mission which perhaps sees the church as “being for” others, as opposed to a new perspective on mission that sees the church as “being with” others. I will particularly note the deep cultural and contextual factors that have historically reinforced “being for” patterns within the Reformed Church. This will include looking at mission through the historical lens of Lesslie Newbigin and the contemporary lens of Liam Jerrold Fraser, drawing on the coursework in “Reformed Ecclesiology and Ecumenism.”⁴⁵ Both of these theologians, by getting up close and immersing themselves in the local communities they sought to serve, were able to see the bigger picture. By practically “being with” others,

⁴⁴ “Church of Scotland Theological Forum Five Marks of Mission Finalised Report,” accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/69749/Church-of-Scotland-Theological-Forum-Five-Marks-of-Mission.pdf

⁴⁵ Edwin Chr. Van Driel, “Reformed Ecclesiology and Ecumenism” (lecture, New College, Edinburgh, June, 2022).

they broke free from the traditional mindset of doing mission “for others” and were able to develop fresh expressions of how to be Church.⁴⁶

Liam Fraser was a member of The Theological Forum when it presented, as instructed by the General Assembly, its reflections on the Marks of Mission which encouraged engaging with the Marks at the local level. I will suggest, as noted in Chapter 1, that a means of doing this in St Cuthbert’s is by embracing the missional aims of the HeartEdge Movement rooted in Sam Wells’ incarnational theology of “being with” others. I will then look at how pastoral need changed the mindset of two people (John Calvin in Geneva and Ruth in the Bible) who both saw the bigger picture at the local level and did things differently, challenging the normative expectations of their day in order to “be with” those they sought to reach out to and serve. All these examples will be drawn upon in my research intervention to help facilitate the members of the Working Group at St Cuthbert’s to see mission from a “being with” perspective.

With the focus of the theology clearly on mission, the incarnational and practical theology of Sam Wells helped answer the primary question of my project by informing a series of Advent sermons which acted as my main intervention following participatory research principles. This research was used to analyse to what extent a sermon series can change or deepen the views of the Working Group with regards to how it views mission and outreach in St Cuthbert’s.

⁴⁶ Newbigin by breaking out of the traditional “Colonial Compound” mindset, and Fraser, by recently setting up a pioneering ministry to the Edinburgh University Community.

2.1. Influencing Hearts and Minds

As the ability to see Church as “being with” as opposed to be “being for” others requires, I think, a subtle change of mindset, it is important to understand how “being for” others has perhaps become the default traditionalist mindset in the Reformed Church from Calvin through to the present day, and, as such might still be seen in the life of a traditional congregation such as mine. Karl Barth highlighted how easy it is to fall into traditionalist mindset and how this can impact on the ability to effectively engage in mission:

Are Christians self-satisfied? Is it enough for them to possess and cultivate their Christian piety in the specific form in which it is theirs in a specific time and place, passing it on to their own families and countries as though it were a kind of inheritance? Are they best left alone with it in the company of their kind? If so, there is no mission, or mission only in the form of an innocuous subsidiary activity accepted because it is a duty.⁴⁷

This “inheritance” that Barth alludes to is made up of many deep cultural and contextual factors (which I believe have historically reinforced patterns of “being for”), and to which I will now turn.

I will look at the evolution of a traditionalist “being for” mindset from three theological perspectives: the installation of pews after the Reformation (as noted in Chapter 1, installed partly to control the worshippers’ participation and experience); the access to the Communion table;⁴⁸ and gestures in the life of the Church, particularly focussed around welcome. These gestures, if only carried out through a sense of “duty”

⁴⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III/4. ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 505.

⁴⁸ Letty Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993).

as Barth fears, can be viewed as tokenism⁴⁹ without any real missional engagement and, at a local church level, can result in us doing things for people, but not always with them.

2.2. Expressing Values through Sacred Space

As noted in Chapter 1, creating a new open space in the St Cuthbert's sanctuary to serve the twice weekly meal for our homeless guests was in response to a pastoral need to share our sacred space with others. In many ways, it represented a return to the past and how engagement with Church used to be. Prior to the Reformation, worshippers enjoyed the freedom that an empty Nave afforded, to engage with the Service as they saw fit. Children would run around, and late comers seamlessly joined in. The Reformation changed this, by influencing the worship experience by imposing a means whereby the congregation were encouraged to show due deference and reverence to the Word delivered from the pulpit from where the minister ruled and watched over his flock. Liam Fraser observes that, "Ministers *rule* over their congregations by the Word of God, a rule which is the preserve of those who are called, trained and appointed to do so."⁵⁰ This was partly achieved by installing pews which, in turn, are now mostly empty as future generations want the ability to explore their spirituality and not necessarily to have it preached "at them" as was evidenced in the national contextual statistics in Chapter 1. Meanwhile:

With the abolition of the Mass the sermon became the key focus of reformed worship. But congregations, who until the reformation, had been allowed to roam at will whilst the priest carried out the Mass in Latin, were now expected to play a

⁴⁹ This theme was explored during the Course DM461: Ulrich Schmiedel, "Being Church in a Volatile Political Climate," (New College, January 2022).

⁵⁰ Fraser, *Mission*, 28.

part and that part was listening to the Minister. Control was required to create a reverential response and the layout of the church, particularly in the nave, where pews were eventually introduced, would facilitate the ability to enforce control.⁵¹

Assigning seats served as a means by which the Minister and the Consistory, such as witnessed in Calvin's Geneva, could more easily monitor church attendance, as well as to encourage a more receptive congregation. The congregation became penned in to prevent movement, and with hard wooden backs, the pews would prevent slouching and falling asleep, "Formal pews served to constrain the congregation during the sermon."⁵²

Meanwhile Spicer noted that, "Fines were imposed for non-attendance and children were discouraged from attending, with additional fines for mothers who brought very young children to church."⁵³ The congregation was not a flock brought in to feast on fertile pasture whilst the shepherd watched over them with his crook. They had now become a flock that was fenced in so that the beadle could control and poke them with his stick. When Communion replaced the Mass in the Church of Scotland, the Lord's Supper risked becoming a joyless sacrament and the sanctuary a barren classroom.

2.3. The Sacraments and "being with"

The roots of this change in emphasis on the administration of the sacrament were sown in Calvin's Geneva as the newly Reformed Church was established. Whilst a sense of mystery had been maintained in the Latin liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, and

⁵¹ Andrew Spicer, "'Accommodating of Thame Selfis to Heir the Worde': Preaching Pews and Reformed Worship in Scotland, 1560-1638" in *History* Volume 88, Issue 291 (July 2003): 414.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 421.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

with the priestly performance around it, this was stripped away in Geneva, “Those receiving Communion were subjected to scrutiny by the Consistory before they were able to approach the Lord’s Table. It was the Consistory who carefully examined those who were deemed to be not suitable and told them not to partake.”⁵⁴ There was a real concern about not communing “unworthily” as a reaction to particularly the abuse of indulgences prior to the Reformation and also drawing on the teaching by the apostle Paul (1 Cor 11:17-34) whereby worshippers were encouraged to memorialise Christ’s sacrifice and reflect the love and unity among members of the body of the church. In Corinth, the church was participating in Communion “in an unworthy manner” (v. 27). Their public worship meetings were doing more harm than good (v.17).

The Consistory went to great efforts to ensure that Geneva did not become the new Corinth and, “the week before the Supper was to be held, this “disciplinary” body met more frequently than usual.”⁵⁵ The Consistory argued this control was necessary to ensure that, “the institution of our Lord” was observed “with reverence.”⁵⁶ Understandably, there was a real need in establishing the Reformed Church to be seen to be doing things well. Sadly, this due reverence has been interpreted over the years to allow control in both administration of and, access to, the Lord’s Table.

Standing within the Reformed tradition, the Church of Scotland owes much of its foundational theology and ecclesiology to John Calvin (1509-1564) and the Protestant church in Geneva, and more particularly to its introduction to Scotland by John Knox

⁵⁴ Elsie McKee, ed. *Sunday Worship in Calvin’s Geneva in John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 104.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

(1513-1572). This need for control and order as seen in Geneva was quickly adopted by the new Reformed Church in Scotland. With the rejection of Roman Catholicism and the establishment of the Church of Scotland, Knox and his colleagues were given the task of producing a system of order and discipline for the new church.

The *First Book of Discipline*⁵⁷ was published towards the end of 1560, and the Presbyterian form of governance can be traced to this document which was largely based on the Genevan model of ecclesial offices. A *Second Book of Discipline* was adopted in 1578, and this largely laid down the system of Presbyterian governance as understood and practised in the Church of Scotland since that time, where elders (like the Consistory in Geneva) were from the outset to be responsible, “for the establishing of good order, and execution of discipline.”⁵⁸

Meanwhile, in contrast, Calvin emphasised how Communion should not only be celebrated as often as possible (because “the Lord’s supper is food and medicine for poor sick souls that the faithful should want as often as possible,”) ⁵⁹ but also be regarded with a pastoral sensitivity as “the supper is the bond of love that should incite the members of Christ’s Body to all acts of love for their neighbours.”⁶⁰ Thus, through firstly an act of worship and receiving Communion, Calvin sees this as directly leading to acts of love for ones neighbour; in essence worship directly leading to mission. For Calvin, the Consistory’s over-emphasis on discipline forgot, first and foremost, as Paul wrote, that

⁵⁷ *The First Book of Discipline*, 1560.

⁵⁸ *The Second Book of Discipline*, 1578.

⁵⁹ McKee, *Sunday Worship*, 104.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

God “does not command us to examine others, but each is to examine himself”.⁶¹ (1 Cor 11:2). Calvin pointed for the need to respond to the sacrament with joy, “Jesus is the food of our souls... His blood is our spiritual drink to comfort us and make us rejoice; in short, we have in him complete perfection of life.”⁶²

This tension in Geneva between, on the one hand, Calvin seeing the importance of the pastoral sensitivity within Communion so that, “He may live in us and we in Him” (John 6:51) and, on the other hand, the importance placed by the Consistory of approaching the sacrament with due reverence enforced by control, is still evident today. Letty Russell, in her chapter ‘Kitchen Table Solidarity’⁶³ also highlights how the sacraments were understood by the Reformers as instituted and administered according to the teaching of the Scriptures. They made sure, that the preparation for the sacraments included instruction in their Biblical meaning and practiced “fencing of the table” by allowing only members in good standing to receive the elements of bread and wine.⁶⁴ She also notes that the “right administration of Communion has become not a commitment to justice, and doing what is right, but a commitment to the “right” religious institution.”⁶⁵ This results in the Table itself being fenced with regards to who can administer the sacrament.

The legacy of this control and fencing is still evident in how people are welcomed into a sacred space today. Those of a traditionalist mindset can find it challenging to share

⁶¹ Ibid., 110.

⁶² Ibid., 112.

⁶³ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 138.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 142.

their sacred spaces. The prioritisation of good practice and procedure can often extend to conduct and anyone who does not conform can be made to feel unwelcome and uncomfortable, as is often evident when a young child cries out during worship or a homeless guest moves too close to the front. This cold reception is in sharp contrast to how the “eucharist is interpreted through the words of 1 Cor. 11:23- 25 as a sacramental meal which, by visible signs, communicates to us God’s love in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁶ The welcome is for all and God’s love cannot be ring-fenced for only a few, denying “its offer of abundance, and its meaning for those who are struggling for life.”⁶⁷ For Russell, in responding to Christ’s invitation to come to the table, “we are also asked if we have been serving our neighbour with our whole heart, mind and self.”⁶⁸ This complements Calvin’s belief that receiving Communion comes with a responsibility to serve others, just as we have been served by Christ and, in line with Luke 4: 18-19, to bring good news to the poor. In both of these examples there lies an implied sense of the presence of mission.

By reconfiguring the St Cuthbert’s sanctuary by removing the pews, I think there is a sense that we are in the business of “removing the fences so that all may bring their gifts to the table.”⁶⁹ The kitchen table, Christ’s table and the others are, for Russell “all metaphors for the one table of God, the eschatological table of New Creation, where there is justice and peace, and there are no longer any tears, hunger, or thirst (Isa. 25:6-10).”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 148.

The tables we set up each Sunday in the sanctuary, to serve our homeless guests are, I believe, part of Russell's vision to see things differently and have a bigger and closer engagement with what it means to do mission in a new way. This is reflected upon in the research intervention during the Advent 2 service,⁷¹ which also explored another theological area, namely that of gesture theology which can become tokenism, and which can also be seen to have influenced "being for" patterns within the Reformed Church.

2.4. Control of Service

In the course DM461: "being Church in a Volatile Political Climate," Ulrich Schmiedel explored how control can be subtly imposed in the Church, particularly by how we engage with gestures which, in the political sphere, can often be insincere and lacking any substance and depth. He focused on a handshake offered by a German Bishop to refugees arriving in Munich train station.⁷² This gesture was one of sincere outreach, going out into an unfamiliar space, and welcoming the refugee guests to the city. For many of them this would have been their first encounter in a new land. Others perhaps saw it as a calculated photo opportunity. The way we are perceived by others and, how we like to be perceived ourselves, often influences how we act and what motivates us. To "be with" others in new places is often harder than "being for" them in our familiar settings that we have traditionally had control over. Historically the Church has been keen to control its spaces and in so doing perhaps has missed out on opportunities that are

⁷¹ See Appendix 5.

⁷² Ulrich Schmiedel, "What's in a handshake? Multi-Faith Practice as a Starting Point for Christian Migration Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* Vol. 35(3), 561-583 (2022): 561.

presented to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit which is not confined to any one space or time.

Paul Tillich prioritised discerning the presence of the Spirit in new spaces: “the Spirit is the presence of what concerns us ultimately, the ground of our being and meaning.”⁷³ He was keen that the church should surrender its prejudices and confessional convictions and be: “transformed against our own theology.”⁷⁴ To do so would be to suggest engaging with “a God above the God” who we are comfortable with or who we thought we knew. Tillich was suggesting that, not only did the Church sometimes wish to control both its internal and external spaces, but also its understanding of God and, by definition, the work of the Spirit, preventing the Spirit from, “blowing wherever it pleases” (John 3:8). If we are to engage with new spaces today as part of the prioritising of mission, without the excess baggage of a historical theological mindset that sees us doing things “for others” as opposed to “with others,” I believe we need to start taking risks just as the Bishop did in the Munich train station.

To understand and respect spaces in a new way requires perhaps the ability to see them as liminal spaces; as Peter Neilson noted, to be able to move into them by “travelling light” and removing the obstacles of unnecessary divisions.”⁷⁵ If the Church only engages with new spaces by imagining how it might influence and control

⁷³ Paul Tillich, *Writings in the philosophy of culture*, ed. Carl Heinz Ratschow (Berkeley, CA: De Gruyère, 1987), 350.

⁷⁴ Ulrich Schmiedel, “Being Church in a Volatile Political Climate” (online lecture, New College, Edinburgh, January, 2022).

⁷⁵ Neilson, *Church on the move*, 62.

them, as historically colonial mission has done, then well-meaning gestures in mission and outreach are likely to be seen as self-serving tokenism.

Dorothee Solle argues that new types of engagement are vital for the Church to be Church, as there is no room for neutrality. In her book, *Memoir of a Radical Christian*, reflecting on the sense of sanctuary and hope that the Church can offer those in need, she notes: “to take in strangers and give them protection is warranted for the people of Israel in the reminder that *you were strangers in Egypt*, the memory of injustice suffered does not have to lead to fencing ourselves in and defending our property.”⁷⁶ In other words, she identifies that we share a common humanity where we are all vulnerable at some point in our lives, none more so perhaps than in the Christ Child, when God came to us in total vulnerability and needed us to welcome Him in and offer sanctuary.⁷⁷

Solle would argue that such spaces need to be filled with more than the gesture of a handshake, which should only be the first step to doing more. She quotes Teresa of Avila in saying “God has no hands except for our hands”⁷⁸ and His hands through Christ went far beyond a handshake. As a key advocate of the Counter Reformation Teresa saw the need to do things differently and to find new ways of expressing ones faith in an active, demonstrable way, rather than only just through spiritual prayer. In other words she highlighted the need for her mysticism to have an outlet in tangible mission and service. There is a need for our spiritual, worshipping selves to have an outlet to share our

⁷⁶ Dorothy Solle, *Against the Wind: Memoir of a Radical Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 139.

⁷⁷ The theme of the Incarnation will be specifically reflected upon in the Advent 4 sermon, see Appendix 7.

⁷⁸ Solle, *Against*, 139.

devotion with others and this can perhaps be best understood through a sense of God's Grace encompassing all of our life both in the sacred and secular settings. In reflecting on a Reformed understanding of divine /human agency, Karl Barth argued that divine providence in no way rules out creaturely agency (our hands doing God's work), though it does locate such human freedom and action within the economy of grace:

“the perfection of God's, giving himself to man, in the person of Jesus Christ consists in the fact that far from merely playing with Man, far from merely moving or using him, far from dealing with him as an object, this self giving set man up as a subject, and awakens him to genuine individuality, and autonomy, frees him, makes him a king, so that, in his rule, the Kingly, rule of God, himself, attains form and revelation.”⁷⁹

By being part of the economy of God's grace our actions, as Christians in mission and outreach, are distinctively sacred as opposed to being secular acts of good work. Neilson sees this as the *missio Dei*, “where Church is formed in the slipstream of God's grace.”⁸⁰

A well-intentioned gesture can quickly become tokenism (nothing more than the equivalent of a political sound bite) if it is not sustained and followed up by further action. The autonomy of man, (set up as a subject to reveal the Kingly rule, of God himself), becomes self serving for man's own purposes and delight, if it is not rooted in the further service of God's people. Thus, the welcome handshake at the church door is not the end of one's duty that day; it is rather the start of a new relationship in Christ whereby we need to see Christ anew from the perspective of the stranger who has just crossed our threshold and who waits for our hands to do God's mission in her/his service. I always remind the “Welcoming Elders” each Sunday of the verse in Hebrews: “Do not

⁷⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics the Doctrine of God, volume two, part two: the election of God, the command of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 17.

⁸⁰ Neilson, *On the move*, 72.

forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels, without knowing it.” (Heb. 13:2)

Siobhan Garrigan⁸¹ discovered that the welcome people received on entering both Catholic and Protestant churches in Northern Ireland, traditionally accompanied by a handshake, had little to do with the sharing of the peace and was, in fact, a gesture camouflaging a hidden agenda. It could be described as just “going through the motions” (a helpful definition of tokenism), something that kneeling at the altar rail or genuflecting has similarly become for many. She notes that the gesture of welcoming has become a means of obfuscation, “surrounded by indifference and ambivalence,”⁸² which are often the first signs of a habit turning into a token gesture.

As Garrigan notes, “interrogating the newcomer is one of the main ways in which sectarian relations are reinforced, as it allows the church to separate insiders from outsiders” whilst ignoring the newcomer says: “there is no category of “guest”so, you are either an insider or an outsider.”⁸³ Schmiedel notes that, “according to Garrigan both gestures – interrogating and ignoring – tell the newcomers that they do not belong in this environment.”⁸⁴ Garrigan elaborates on the redundancy of this welcome by highlighting “the gestural habits that shape the worship of the congregation.”⁸⁵ A habit can potentially develop into just going through the motions which in turn, if one is not

⁸¹ Siobhan Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process: Worship, Politics, and the End of Sectarianism* (London: Equinox, 2010).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁴ Schmiedel, “Handshake,” 575.

⁸⁵ Garrigan, *Real Peace*, 72.

careful, can become tokenism. The challenge I think is to keep the good habits that sustain and support the worshipping community fresh, and to express them in new ways, so that they can in turn sustain and support future generations of worshippers, visitors and those we seek to serve in His name. My research intervention aimed to achieve this by taking the good habit of the sermon and delivering it in a participatory way that would keep it fresh and new.

Garrigan notes that some gestures have become bad habits, particularly the sharing of the peace. I believe that how we habitually do mission and outreach at St Cuthbert's, often draws on the traditionalist mindset which can potentially mean that our giving and gifting becomes tokenism, particularly witnessed at the Harvest Festival Service and the Christmas Gift Service when what we gift is done anonymously and, as a consequence, we have no interaction with those who we are giving the gift to. We have traditionally done things "for others" out of love and service, but over the years this way of "being Church" "for others" has understandably become part of how we historically carried out mission and outreach for the good of others as we, not them, saw it.

Historically, the token associated with paying for indulgences at the outset of the Reformation was the catalyst for radical change. Radical intervention by the Reformers was required to create new gestures within new spaces. To be new and radical requires returning to the theological spectrum of engagement and the incarnational drive to "be with" others in a new way and that starts with the way we welcome strangers into our midst. For the theological gesture of welcome not just to become tokenism and immersed in the political and public agendas, for Luke Bretherton, "to truly welcome another is to welcome one who is like nobody else affording them the attention and respect that

communicates recognition of their uniqueness.”⁸⁶ To see the uniqueness of others, just as those in attendance at the Manger saw the uniqueness of God made new in the Christ Child, we must be prepared to surrender all our prejudices and, starting at a shared level, be able to see things anew. The integrity required to do this is in total contrast to the tokenism highlighted by Garrigan. To be “able to see things anew” we must start seeing mission from the perspective of “being with” not “being for” and now turn to the work of Lesslie Newbigin to see how this might be achieved.

2.5. Discovering a new Mindset for Mission

Having noted some of the deep cultural and contextual factors that have historically reinforced “being for” patterns within the Reformed Church I will now look at how two Scottish Reformed theologians, both with practical experience of engaging in mission at the local level, developed new and fresh perspectives on how to do mission. The bulk of this draws on the historical work of Lesslie Newbigin whilst drawing parallels with the work of Liam Fraser who takes a look at contemporary mission in Scotland.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Luke Bretherton, *Christian Humanism, redivivus* (London: T&T Clark Handbook of Political Theology, 2019), 383.

⁸⁷ I was drawn to reflect on types of mission and incorporate this into my research because the work I did with our partner charity Steps to Hope during the pandemic (as described in Chapter 1) coincided with the intensive course in Edinburgh which included DM441: “Reformed Ecclesiology and Ecumenism.” This course highlighted how Lesslie Newbigin identified new ways of doing mission in South India when, as a Church of Scotland minister, he served in that country and then again when he returned to Birmingham in England. Liam Fraser was a guest speaker on DM441. He had previously been a Pioneer Minister in Edinburgh Presbytery serving the university community. This course greatly resonated with me and spurred me on to propose the removal of the pews in my church so that we might be more fully with our homeless guests and able to serve them in the main worshipping sanctuary.

Having successfully pioneered new ways of doing mission in South India, which moved away from the traditional colonial style of engaging with people at a distance, Newbigin, on returning to the United Kingdom and a new city centre ministry in a secular and multi-cultural Birmingham,⁸⁸ identified three effective markers of Christian witness in the inner-city:

- that of being a sign pointing people to something that is beyond their present horizon;
- being an instrument amongst many that God can use for his work of healing, liberating and blessing; and,
- being a first fruit and a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom that God intends for all of us.

Interestingly, these three markers seem incredibly relevant and new even today and, as such, they do not need to be reinvented; rather, what I think needs to be done is to develop a new means of expressing and engaging with them. Newbigin had trail-blazed new ways of doing mission by seeing things from the perspective of those he sought to serve. Today these new approaches are sometimes referred to as being “Fresh Expressions” of Church as detailed by Liam Fraser.⁸⁹

I often think that a new language of service and mission will not necessarily come from the Church but, rather, secular society or indeed from other world faiths⁹⁰ and

⁸⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989). Also, Newbigin, “evangelism in the city,” *Reformed Review* 41.1, (1987).

⁸⁹ Fraser, *Mission*, xiii, xvi, 138, 155-77, 206, 226.

⁹⁰ During DM 451: “Reformed Theology and Religious Pluralism” taught by Dr Joshua Ralston, June 2022, I was asked to put together and co-lead an interfaith service for the Headmasters’ Conference in

it is a matter of identifying common ground and common practice, drawing on the expertise of others, and then working in partnership with others. Newbigin suggests that, as a church grows, it doesn't need to set down new markers by building new buildings as this will surely, as it has done historically, just precipitate the start of decline. Instead, we need to be creative in making our current spaces fit for purpose. My research intervention and the Advent sermon series aimed to show how our sanctuary was being used creatively in our missional outreach.

Newbigin also points out that people will “not listen to the preaching unless they can see it being put into practice”⁹¹ there is a real push towards service as opposed to plans on paper and just words. This observation would directly influence my choice of intervention and how preaching that can share the image of God must directly lead to the mission of God. The Word and action must go hand in hand. His three markers or pointers for effective witness are actions as opposed to being just words, (James 1:22). This necessity to act is again incarnational and only actions will revitalise mission, not more words. “The Word became flesh to live amongst us” (John 1: 14); God became bigger and closer not smaller and further away.

In setting the scene for missionary outreach, Newbigin's starting point is one in which historically, “christendom is taken for granted” the whole population “conceived of as the corpus Christianum” and this “profoundly affected the structure of their

Edinburgh and the experience of doing so helped to shape this Paper, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.hmc.org.uk/>

⁹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Preaching Christ Today* (Birmingham: Overdale College, 1979) accessed April 4, 2024, <https://newbiginresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/79pct.pdf>

thinking.”⁹² There is no other mindset or world view to take into account; Christianity is at the heart of everything. There are still vestiges of this outlook in the traditionalist Church mind today.

Within Newbigin’s experience in Southern India, he noted that this outlook had resulted in a ‘Colonial’ approach to mission and outreach which was accompanied by a Colonial language of the Church, evident in such words as *compound* in the following description: “The colony of the corpus Christianum had been clearly marked off as a totally distinct cultural community from the society roundabout it. The line of demarcation was very prominently represented by the high wall of a mission compound.”⁹³ This sense of ‘Mission and Control’ is reflected upon by Liam Fraser⁹⁴ who points to a Reformed theology of ministry as being, “largely the preserve of ministers operating in a Church whose centrality to the life of Scotland meant that, in many respects, it was the state.”⁹⁵ The mindset of the National Church speaking on behalf of the Nation from within its walls is only slowly starting to change and many would say that the Church has left it too late to know how to speak in any other way.

For Newbigin in India, the Church, “had outgrown the mission compound and its members were sharing in a wider and wider variety of occupations with their non-Christian neighbours.”⁹⁶ Sometimes, one approach in Scotland today is to still see the

⁹² Newbigin, *Pluralist Society*, 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁴ Fraser, *Mission*, 27.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Newbigin, *Pluralist Society*, 12.

church building as being the compound and only engaging with people if they are prepared to enter it on the terms of those who already occupy it. The competitive nature experienced within neighbouring parishes, and their inability to countenance the sharing of personnel or resources, only further intensifies the compound/siege mentality as both see each other as being a threat to their own survival.

Newbigin identifies that, whilst there is a basic human need for community, the Church shouldn't take control of this need by defining the corpus Christianum on its own terms but, rather, it should seek new ways of thinking and "being with" others, which allows for all people to be "truly at home."⁹⁷ If the Church only sees itself as "being for" others as opposed to "being with" others, then it runs the huge risk of imposing its values on others without them having any ownership of how these values are perceived. "being for" could be seen as the "battering ram approach of imposing mission and outreach," whilst "being with" would encourage "a sense of gently leaning in so that all are invited in."⁹⁸

Having looked at examples of how specifically Newbigin managed to do things differently and break away from traditional ways of doing mission by engaging wholeheartedly at the local level, it is now worth looking at the reflection on the Marks of Mission which was conducted by the Church of Scotland's Theological Forum (of which Liam Fraser is now the Convener) and which also encouraged looking at ways of doing mission differently at the local level.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁸ Edwin Chr. Van Driel, "Reformed Ecclesiology and Ecumenism" (lecture, New College, Edinburgh, June, 2022).

2.6. Reflections of the Theological Forum

As detailed in Chapter 1, the General Assembly adopted five new Marks of Mission to be the driving force for change behind the Church's Radical Action Plan. I previously noted how the Reverend Doug Gay, in his Chalmers Lectures series, had been instrumental in highlighting how important change was for the Church and, due to the subsequent high prioritisation of the new Marks of Mission by the General Assembly, Doug Gay asked that the Church's Theological Forum might reflect on the Five Marks of Mission.

The Finalised Report of the Theological Forum that was presented on 20 August 2020, concluded as follows:

In conclusion, we affirm the Five Marks of Mission as a helpful vision statement for Christian mission, and a useful definition of mission to guide the Church of Scotland today. The Five Marks hang together: each conveys something essential to God's mission in the world as we discern it. In every context, including the current circumstances of constrained resources in the Church of Scotland, it is necessary to direct resources at different levels of the Church into different aspects of work. The Five Marks may be helpful in offering a broad, generous theological vision to frame pragmatic decisions over priorities, but the Five Marks themselves do not do the work of prioritisation. That requires a practical wisdom, with an awareness of specific local, regional and national contexts. Such decision-making will also recognise the missional lives and work of members, ministers, churches and presbyteries alongside central Forums, and the possibility of sharing responsibility for aspects of mission through ecumenical partnerships.⁹⁹

Key to this conclusion is the fact that the Marks of Mission need to be adapted and engaged with, taking into account the specific local setting in which each church finds

⁹⁹“Church of Scotland Theological Forum Five Marks of Mission Finalised Report,” accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/69749/Church-of-Scotland-Theological-Forum-Five-Marks-of-Mission.pdf

itself. The local church needs to prioritise what they can do best, and this will be done by having an awareness of sharing responsibility for mission through ecumenical partnerships. In addition, as previously detailed in Chapter 1, the Five Marks recommendation also allowed for congregations to use the Australian version of the Marks if they were felt to be better suited to the local context. In other words, local parishes were being encouraged to see and do things from their own perspective and were being given permission to have a change of mindset from the traditionalist way of thinking that waited to be told how things were to be done.

In my intervention which focuses on the Marks of Mission, I have embraced this flexibility that has been offered by the General Assembly to choose the marks best suited to our context. As well as using the Australian version, (my reasons for doing so are explained in Chapter 3) I have prioritised two of the marks which I think we are best able to engage with at St Cuthbert's. I have also taken on board the suggestion of the Theological Forum that we can probably best deliver on our mission if we do it in partnership with others. In our case, that is both through ecumenical partnership and in partnership with the charities who operate out of our church building.¹⁰⁰

Both in the Marks agreed by the General Assembly, and in the Reflection of the Theological Forum, there is a move away from central control within the Church, telling the parish church that it must deliver on everything and how to achieve it. Refreshingly, the local church is encouraged to concentrate on the things that it can do best and also is encouraged to do this working with local partners. Key to this is the local church

¹⁰⁰ See Advent 2 and 4 in the Appendices.

understanding its own Mission Narrative¹⁰¹ and, perhaps, seeing what it is already doing in its mission and outreach from a new perspective. Traditionally, this freedom for the local church to think for itself and then implement its own ideas has been lacking and, historically, change has been driven from above with unrealistic expectations coming from a centralised control within the National Church Offices. This theme is explored in my intervention in the service for the Third Sunday in Advent.

With local congregations, coming out of lockdown, and being encouraged to do their own thing in response to the new Five Marks of Mission, it was my engagement with the HeartEdge movement that encouraged me to embrace their way of doing things at the local level. In so doing, I hoped that collectively we might resurrect the vision that St Cuthbert's had helped shape in the 'Church Without Walls' concept, as highlighted in the Parish Profile. The approach of "being with," as opposed to "being for" others forms the basis for what has become the theology of the HeartEdge movement¹⁰² to which we will now turn.

2.7. HeartEdge: Incarnational Theology

The HeartEdge Movement is very much about doing pastoral mission as detailed in its Mission Statement:¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The Working Group are currently writing one for the new Union.

¹⁰² Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto, Being with God*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015).

¹⁰³ HeartEdge Mission statement, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://heartedge.org/about>

- We work with churches moving beyond conventional notions of church, being open to partnership and collaboration with others in the wider world.
- Reimagining church and society mean church becoming a model of what a renewed society might look like. The approach is open to the gifts of strangers and exhibits the life of faith.
- In contrast to exclusion - distinctive congregations whose life is shaped and renewed through the energy and gifts of those culturally, economically and socially 'on the edge,' and whose diversity reflects the diverse glory of God.
- HeartEdge is about recognising the activity of the Holy Spirit beyond and outside the church and about a church that flourishes when it seeks to catch up with what the Spirit is already doing in the world.
- There was a time when church meant a group that believed it could control access to God – access that only happened in its language on its terms. But God is bigger than that, and the church needs to be humbler than that. Kingdom churches anticipate the way things are with God forever – a culture of creativity, mercy, discovery and grace – and are grateful for the ways God renews the church through those it has despised, rejected, or ignored.

This mission statement provided the basis for sharing, through the Advent sermon series, the mission we already do at St Cuthbert's, particularly with the homeless and the refugees so that they might be fully present with us in our worship. To achieve this I thought it vital to involve both groupings in the sermon delivery.

Sam Wells details his sense of incarnational ministry as one of "being with" rather than "being for" others. This offers a very helpful model on which a true community can develop as, ultimately, it is a model of a partnership of equals. In essence, "being for" others suggests that you know what is best for others and finds its roots in the "Colonial Church Compound mindset" as described by Newbigin, whilst "being with" others suggests you are willing to learn from and alongside them. At their heart, both approaches want the best outcomes, but one has the ability to alienate and control, whilst the other has the ability to embrace and learn. Congregations can find it very hard to reconcile these two subtly different approaches and be unable to countenance that a traditional "being for" others approach, whilst being carried out faithfully and graciously,

might unintentionally be doing more harm than good. This subtle change of approach in how to ‘be church’ would be explored in the Sermon on the Second Sunday of Advent as part of my research intervention.

The Incarnate Word is just that: a synergy of word and action. Wells suggests that there is a model of how this synergy might be achieved within the church community. Before exploring it in more depth, it is worth noting that, for Newbigin, “The church cannot be defined simply as that which is constituted by the event of the preaching of the gospel and the administering of the sacraments. It belongs to its true nature that it is a continuing historical society, that society which was constituted and sent forth once for all by Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁴

This sense of journey and movement by being part of the continuing “historical society” links well with the theology of “being with” as developed by Sam Wells. The incarnation was defined by movement, the movement of the Word into a new space and the Word “being with” its creation in a new and living way, namely in the flesh. The incarnation could be seen as God’s greatest risk; it was certainly the mostly costly way in which He could share His grace. This sense of risk-taking, at a cost that is worth paying for, is how the Church today is being encouraged to reimagine its mission and outreach. Mission requires the ability to enter and journey into new liminal spaces and discern the numinous opportunities to be God’s people that might be offered by the outsider rather than the insider. So, new ways of “being Church” become vital, as are fresh expressions of Church. These fresh expressions, as noted by Liam Fraser, are not to be found on “a

¹⁰⁴Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*, (London: SCM Press, 1953), 59.

detached intellectual plain” but arise “from and are grounded in, concrete social interaction and living communities.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, “it is therefore the nature and activities of the Church, as the community of the people of God, on which the plausibility of the gospel largely stands or falls.”¹⁰⁶ I believe that it is by being “the community of the people of God” in action that the Church remains distinctive and relevant amongst all the excellent secular approaches to serving the community. Changing the nature and activities of the Church may not require a huge physical change but it does require a change of mindset and perception.¹⁰⁷

Sam Wells helps root this spectrum of “being with” within the theology of the Incarnation; perhaps God’s ultimate example of direct action and no longer speaking through the Prophets. In *A Nazareth Manifesto*, Wells breaks down the life of Christ into three categories, all within the theology of “being with,” the argument being that, at the heart of the Christian faith is God’s commitment to be with us.¹⁰⁸ “Being with” involves “paying attention to the other and asking what do you seek, what do you bring? It focuses on working in partnership.”¹⁰⁹ For Wells, the nature of the incarnation helps us understand incarnational mission and ministry. In the Incarnation he highlights that, in

¹⁰⁵ Fraser, *Mission*, 156.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ It was important that research participants should be allowed the opportunity to think themselves into this mindset before the intervention of the sermon series and so Advent 1 became a paper that laid out this new way of “being with” which I sent out in advance. See Appendix 4. This will be reflected upon in Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁸ Wells, *Manifesto*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 62.

Christ's earthly life, he spent a week (1%) in Jerusalem working for us, three years (9%) in and around Galilee working with us, and, most significantly, spent 30 years (90%) in Nazareth just "being with" us. Wells suggests that a truly Incarnate practice of mission seeks to reflect those percentages.

My intervention, which is the Advent sermon series, sees each service start with the lighting of the advent candle and the word '**with.**' So, for example: "with John the Baptist, with Mary, with the prophets and with the gospel writers." Sam Wells reflects on this small word:

It's an unprepossessing little word, but this is the word that lies at the heart of Christmas and at the heart of the Christian faith. The word is *with*. With is the most fundamental thing about God. Think of how Jesus concludes his ministry. His very last words in Matthew's gospel are, "Behold, I am with you always" (28:20). Then, at the very end of the Bible, when the book of Revelation describes the final disclosure of God's everlasting destiny, this is what the voice from heaven says: "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3).¹¹⁰

As Wells notes: "Think back to the very beginning of all things. John's Gospel says, "The Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God... Without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1-3). In other words, before anything else there was a *with*."¹¹¹

2.8. Newbigin and Pastoral Necessity

Newbigin too had been particularly focused on the pastoral side of ecclesiology in that "he did theology and got people to do theology in life and in the situations of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

need.”¹¹² He pointed out that, if he was to fully engage in the church in India, he needed to be a member of the church he was serving and not a Church of Scotland guest. For me, this is very similar to working with Steps to Hope in lockdown; to fully engage I needed to be stripped of all the entitlement and complacency (that sense of being listened to because of one’s status) that came with my role as minister (this was easily done as the Principle Clerk had ordered that ministers were to stay in their manses and the church doors were to remain closed) and to re-engage by being accepted as a volunteer in the charity and their main key-holder to St Cuthbert’s, which they had been given permission to keep open throughout lockdown by the City Council.¹¹³

Newbigin looked to interject into the ecumenical debate a different starting point, and an ecclesiology that had overcome its colonial dimension and heritage. This is very similar to the mission statement in HeartEdge, which tackles the forceful domineering entitled approach that the Church has become complacent in using. His drive was to measure your community through a different lens, as HeartEdge is now encouraging others to do. At St Cuthbert’s, through our mission and outreach to the homeless and refugee communities, we try to live out a fresh expression of “being Church” in Scotland, which Liam Fraser sees as being vital to the future of the National Church; nothing less than a ‘transfiguration moment,’¹¹⁴ is required to have this new perspective on mission and community engagement, and, at St Cuthbert’s, the opportunity to host our homeless

¹¹² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (London: SPCK, 1995), 15.

¹¹³ Whilst many churches were engaged in forms of Mission during the coronavirus pandemic, I believe that the way Steps to Hope facilitated my ministry was a good example of how secular society can reinvent the way the Church sees itself. This relationship between the secular and the sacred is reflected upon by Fraser, *Mission*, 144.

¹¹⁴ Edwin Chr. Van Driel, “Reformed Ecclesiology and Ecumenism” (lecture, New College, Edinburgh, June, 2022).

and refugee guests is a transfiguration gift which, if shared, will allow us to do mission in a more inclusive way, prioritising its pastoral nature. If the main participants of my research, the Working Group, could see and embrace this and in turn share it with others by following the Advent sermon series then my hope is that everyone will feel more part of our ministry in the parish.

Perhaps, for both Newbigin and Fraser, it is not so much about defining the membership of the community, but rather that the Church should engage with the community in action to create a sense of “being with” and break free from the control and constrictions that have historically defined mission in the past.

Meanwhile, it is important to explore how mission must start from a pastoral imperative to “be with” and serve others as opposed to any self-serving token agenda, and this will now be done through the Biblical story of Ruth, and also through Calvin reaching out to his fellow refugees in Geneva.

2.9. Ruth and Calvin Challenging Social Norms

During lockdown, members of my congregation started to ask if they would ever receive Communion again? As we were not able to meet in person, there was no obvious way of administering the Sacrament. I then started to hear of other denominations practising on-line Communion. I was hesitant to do this without the required permission from Presbytery, even though there was an obvious pastoral need within my members. It was only when the Moderator of Edinburgh Presbytery celebrated Holy Communion at the first Advent online Meeting that I felt I could follow suit with my own congregation. The need to receive permission often seems to override the necessity for immediate

intervention. However, with the encouragement to implement the new Marks of Mission at a local level and, in so doing, prioritise pastoral engagement, it is worth reflecting on how this is nothing new; rather, it is perhaps the case that, as the Church became more of a centralised institution, people became less bold in practice.

The Biblical story of Ruth challenges this forced stereotype. Set within the time of the Judges when the Israelites were looking for leadership and waiting to be told what to do, Ruth stands out as a very different sort of Judge and leader. “She, [Ruth] who is not one of them, turned to Naomi as she returned home, and Ruth, in her turn, turns a people to the best of themselves.”¹¹⁵

Each year at the Festival of Shavuot, when Jews celebrate the giving of the Law, the story in Exodus of Moses receiving the Law on Mount Sinai is read alongside the story of Ruth. This might seem to be an intriguing partnership. A key word in Ruth is the Hebrew “*chesed*,” which is translated as “*loving kindness*.” It is often understood in terms of generous and kind acts that an individual chooses to do in favour of another. These are spontaneous acts which one is not obligated to perform. In Jewish tradition, “*chesed*” is a vital contribution in “*tikkun olloam*” the repairing of the world.

Law, by itself cannot repair the world, even though the Torah provides the beloved ground on which this work of repair can happen:

“Law can compel acts of generosity, but it cannot supply the magnanimity that draws generous actions from us in places where the law does not extend. The story of Ruth, set alongside the story in Exodus, establishes an ongoing dialogue between Law and simple loving kindness; a lens through which the law of Moses should be read.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Pdraig O Tuama “et al.” *Borders & Belonging the Book of Ruth: A Story for our Times* (London: Canterbury Press, 2021), 22.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

As Dacher Keltner notes in his work on awe ‘witnessing acts of moral beauty [which Keltner refers to as a type of awe] prompts us more generally to be ready to share and lend a helping hand’.¹¹⁷ Alongside the story of Ruth, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) perhaps demonstrates this “moral beauty” in its purest form within the Scriptures. Jesus tells the Samaritan story in response to a provocative question from a lawyer, “And who is my neighbour?” in the context of the Great Commandment in which loving one’s neighbour is rooted in the Law. Perhaps we see this synergy of law and service most eloquently articulated in the Reformed tradition in Barth’s third use of the Law as a form of grace whereby, “Grace must be lived out, or it is not Grace.”¹¹⁸

It is in similar settings that modern day mission must find a new ground, and it will not do this by enforcing ancient laws and habits, but, rather by acts of loving kindness. Keltner would argue this is the most successful way to cultivate a sense of awe and, if it comes to be known that these acts have been performed by church members, then the church might be held in a renewed high regard. Liam Fraser notes that, “if we have understood our local contexts correctly, then every act of service increases the possibility of faith, making it easier for our neighbours to believe the astounding claims that Christ makes through his church.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Dacher Keltner, *Awe: the New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), 81.

¹¹⁸ Karl Barth, *The command as the decision of God; the definiteness of the divine decision, CD 2/2 The Doctrine of God* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1942)

¹¹⁹ Fraser, *Mission*, 145.

Likewise, as imperative as evangelism is, it should almost always take place in the context of loving relationships. Fraser further notes that, “Many Scots know what the Church claims about Jesus, but they are not always certain that they want to be part of what we’re offering. Jesus is clothed in both law *and* grace; judgement *and* love and aimless evangelism can sometimes do more harm than good.”¹²⁰ Whilst Fraser presents a new mission and outreach field in the nation, he also hints at a Church that is currently not fit for purpose to engage with it.

Just as Ruth acted spontaneously to the pastoral need of Naomi, the final example of how mission and outreach must be a response to pastoral need is to be found in Calvin’s, Geneva. As previously noted, a sense of doing things with due reverence and control was key to establishing the new reformed church in Geneva, but just as Calvin saw Communion as a pastoral act, so too, he was prepared to potentially give up some control, (doing things “for others”), in response to pastoral need in his congregation. This can be evidenced in the way that he allowed the singing of the Psalms when previously, he had decided that no singing should be allowed in the Reformed Church.

Barbara Douglas explores the Reformed tradition of psalmody in which John Calvin favoured using “quasi-popular tunes that the congregation could use to sing the Psalms in their own language.”¹²¹ This sense of populism perhaps indicates that Calvin was keen to embrace the culture of his day. Whilst Calvin seems initially to have agreed

¹²⁰ Ibid., 211.

¹²¹ Barbara Douglas, ‘*Why Should I Sing the Psalms?*’ In *Reforming Worship: English Reformed Principles and Practice*, ed. J. Templeton and K. Riglin (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers), 131.

with Zwingli, who banned all singing, it was from his own pastoral experience, relating to his fellow refugees in Geneva, that he came to the view that congregational singing was invaluable, not as an aid to preaching as used by Luther, but as an aide to prayer. It is interesting to note that this change of mindset in Calvin came about through practical experience of engaging with people in their time of need,¹²² “so much so that, by 1537, he listed music as one of the three things necessary for congregational life and for public worship to be rightly ordered.”¹²³ The result of this was the thought of private singing as also being prayer, and so people might pray without ceasing as Paul commanded. As Douglas notes, “We may conclude from this that people sang habitually in daily life, in Calvin’s Geneva, as those in exile in Babylon had to learn how to do once again in a foreign land.”¹²⁴ For his fellow refugees there was perhaps a sense that their memories and voices from home could now be shared in a foreign land and, most importantly, in their worship.

Both Ruth and Calvin were able to see the bigger picture when they made a pastoral assessment of their respective situations. Mission prioritises pastoral outreach and, by responding to the needs of others, so that we are with them and alongside them, we develop a bigger understanding of God: just as our perspective of God was changed through the Incarnation, whereby He became bigger and closer to us, no longer the smaller God who was further away doing things “for us.”

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 132.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 133.

At the conclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told the lawyer who had asked, “And who is my neighbour?” to “Go and do likewise.” Mission involves *going*, following the way of Jesus, but it is also *doing*, living out that call to follow in love and service. Love of God and love of neighbour are at the core of Christian mission. This is most beautifully articulated in 1 John 3: 18, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

We also see this *going and doing* model of mission in John 15: 1-8 (I am the true vine...), where Liam Fraser notes the importance of the dynamic within the Trinity which grafts us in:

Jesus’ teaching in John 15 is that Father, Son and Spirit incorporate us into their divine life, and it is from being rooted in Christ by the Spirit, and tended by the Father in love, that we bear fruit. One of the fruits of this participation in God’s own life is what we call mission: working with Christ to bring people to faith, serve and heal them, challenge injustice and care for creation. This fruit is an essential part of God’s own mission to the world [launched at the Incarnation] and is a non-negotiable part of being like Christ. Yet this fruit is grown by being engrafted into Christ by the Spirit, and tended by God the Father. There is no other way for this missional fruit to grow.¹²⁵

The aim of my research intervention was to share this bigger perspective of God, which we can see through our participation in the life of the Trinity, and to do so through our mission at St Cuthbert’s of “being with” those we seek to serve. As noted, perspective draws on appreciation of The Holy Spirit,¹²⁶ “The one who witnesses to the self-

¹²⁵ Liam Jerrold Fraser, “The Primacy of Worship and the Necessity of Mission,” *The Church Service Society Record* Vol 57 (2022): 39.

¹²⁶ The perspective we have on mission is vital and Liam Fraser uses a lens of witness throughout his work on mission, which is derived from John Flett, *The Witness of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010).

knowledge and love of the Father and the Son is *himself* a witness: knowing and loving, and being known and being loved, by the father and the son in turn.”¹²⁷

As mentioned in Chapter 1 when setting this paper in a national context, the Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, argued that, “Urgent change is needed in almost every part of our church life. ... The ministry of the local church needs a new reformation.”¹²⁸ The ministry of the Church, and the local Church in particular, needs a new reformation. One of the chief motivations for undertaking my Doctor of Ministry studies was to remain attentive to the God who said, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19). Before turning to the specific results of the research project that was conducted, I wish to outline the research methodology used.

2.10. Research Methodology and Framework

This project was completed using community-based participatory research,¹²⁹ (which aims to align researchers’ and communities’ agendas through focused collaboration) and by means of gathering both qualitative and quantitative information and data through a questionnaire.

The main intervention was delivered through an Advent sermon series which included participation and collaboration with members of the charities that St Cuthbert’s

¹²⁷ Fraser, *Mission*, 4.

¹²⁸ Chalmers, *Time for change*, 23.

¹²⁹ Community-based participatory research (CBPR): Towards equitable involvement of community in psychology research, accessed 10.04.24, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2018-02701-001>

is partnered with in its mission and outreach. Images and tableaux, reflecting the outreach work of the charities that takes place in St Cuthbert's Church, were created by the charity volunteers during the sermons which the research participants were in turn asked to reflect upon from the perspective of an incarnational ecclesiology of "being with" others.

The research participants were made up of the members of the Kirk Session Working Group who were elected to prepare the way for St Cuthbert's to enter into a Union with the neighbouring parish of Greyfriars Kirk by the end of 2025. All the research participants were sent a questionnaire to complete prior to the Advent sermon series. They then received the same questionnaire after the intervention had been delivered and were asked to complete the questionnaire again in light of the sermon series.

The questionnaire included ranking questions to gather quantitative data for analysis along with open-ended questions to provide qualitative data. The intention of both components of the questionnaire was to examine whether there had been a shift in perception of the research participants understanding as to how mission and outreach was being carried out in St Cuthbert's.

A contemporaneous journal was kept to record real time feedback that I received immediately following each service during the regular fellowship and refreshments gathering.

The data produced by the questionnaires was used to perform quantitative and qualitative analysis respectively and the findings are reported and analysed in Chapter 3

and provide a starting point for the development of themes within the project as a whole for further reflection in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

A THICK DESCRIPTION

*A “thick description”¹³⁰ telling the story of the project in a deep, rich manner.
This project explores mindsets about the church’s mission and how to influence them.*

Introduction

This chapter concerns an in-depth presentation on how my research project was implemented. As a reminder, the primary question is: “Can an Advent sermon series which highlights the congregations present missional activity lead to a greater appreciation of incarnational ecclesiology?”

Chapter 1 set out the context of the research intervention whilst Chapter 2 set out the Biblical and theological foundation for the study. This chapter concerns the implementation of the project and sets out the results obtained. Looking ahead, Chapter 4 discusses these results, how they relate to the purpose of the study, and what was revealed about the topic and ministry context in which the paper is set. In recounting every step in the implementation of my project, particularly linking it to the local context of my ministry as outlined in Chapter 1, and how the project is theologically and biblically rooted in the Reformed tradition as explored in Chapter 2, I aim to show in this chapter how everything in this project connects.

¹³⁰ “DMin Handbook, 2023-2024” (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary), 46.

Firstly, I will give an overview of the project and its development. Following that, I will detail how the project was implemented, and then set out the project results. Finally, I will summarise the key conclusions which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Part I: Project Overview

In this first part I will tell the story of how I arrived at the design of my research project. The key elements in telling the story come under eight headings. The first two were the hardest as they challenged my own perceptions and mindset:

1.1. Broadening the Focus of the Project

As detailed in Chapter 1, my research question emanated from the national and local contexts that included the removal of the pews in St Cuthbert's. This was done so that we might better serve the homeless community, working with our charity partner Steps to Hope. Initially, I wanted to research how people felt about this change to the sanctuary at St Cuthbert's. However, I realised that this was only one part of how we were addressing the Five Marks of Mission and my research question would be better focussed if it looked outwards to the future, and how we might better prepare for going into a Union, rather inwards to a past event and the removal of the pews which could potentially turn into a project about me trying to justify my decision to remove them.

In looking outwards to the future Union, despite my frustration with the Presbytery Plan, I had an opportunity to help St Cuthbert's in a positive and constructive way to shape the Union with Greyfriars through my project if I made the focus of the

project “Bigger and closer not smaller and further way.” If we could start to see our mission and outreach from the perspective of others, specifically those of our neighbours at Greyfriars and those we collectively seek to serve in the city centre then, we would be part of a bigger picture as we worked more closely together.

Both congregations preparing for Union are members of the HeartEdge movement (see Chapter 2) and, whilst Greyfriars were well-versed in its aims and mission, St Cuthbert’s seemed to me to be (from personal feedback I received) over-awed by the need to do mission differently as HeartEdge encouraged and supported at the local level. By drawing on the aims of HeartEdge and linking these to the recently-adopted five Marks of Mission of the Church of Scotland, I hoped to share in my research project how at St Cuthbert’s, I thought, we were already engaging with both the aims of HeartEdge and the marks of the Church and, hopefully, give my folk the confidence to see and articulate this too

Thus, I became aware that all the contexts in which the project was set were concurrently addressing the same challenge focussed on the mission imperative of the Church. A unique opportunity appeared to be presenting itself and I started to marvel at God’s timing and the liminal space that was opening up. Theologically, as noted by Paul Tillich in Chapter 2, a risk needed to be taken to enter into this space, which seemed pregnant with the potential for doing and “being Church” in a new way. Whilst we might already be engaging in “being Church” in a new way, my perception was that we had not yet collectively taken ownership of the process of being so and, as a result, so much of the potential was as yet unrealised.

1.2. Articulating the Research Question

As we started to prepare for Union, and I engaged with the Working Group, it was my belief that many at St Cuthbert's, including several on the Group, (as witnessed at the first meeting of the Joint Session which explored how the respective two churches saw themselves as "being Church") were only seeing things from a traditional perspective which meant we seemed small in ambition and were often a prisoner of the past in how we had gone about "being Church". Hopefully expanding the research question would also challenge my increasingly bitter and small mindset too with regards to the Presbytery Plan. Thus, the title of the paper became; "Bigger & Closer not Smaller & Further Away"¹³¹ - a new perspective on how to "be Church."

As noted, my research centred around an understanding and appreciation of how, in St Cuthbert's, we were engaged in delivering the new Marks of Mission of the Church. In Chapter 2, I reflected on how the Church of Scotland had given its encouragement for local churches to engage with the Marks of Mission as they best fitted with their local context. This sense of ownership at a local level had also been encouraged by the report on the Marks of Mission by the Theological Forum. Before writing the Advent sermon series, which was to form my main research intervention, it was important that I

¹³¹ The title of the current David Hockney immersive exhibition at The Lightroom, London, accessed 10.04.24 <https://lightroom.uk/whats-on/david-hockney/>

Hockney dislikes the traditional one-dimensional way of seeing perspective in painting, often referred to as the 'vanishing point' or 'one point perspective.' For him this does not do justice to the space around the subject matter being painted. He always looks to see things from all angles. It's the space around things that fascinate him because then he can really see the potential in what he is painting. He can be immersed in and be with the subject. In the incarnation God chose to enter our space fully and from all angles and perspectives so that he could be fully **with** us; "*bigger and closer not smaller and further away.*"

identified which Marks to use. I decided to take two of the Marks of Mission from the Australian version, which I believed best suited our local context and which I thought we were already engaged in delivering. My challenge now was to flesh out these words and make them alive within the sermon setting. The two marks I choose were:

- Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith.
- Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy.

I felt these two marks would allow St Cuthbert's to engage with our charity partner in serving the homeless, and also the Ukrainian refugee community, both of whom had become part of the extended St Cuthbert's family. These two marks also encourage reflection on the first Christmas when the Holy Family were homeless and soon to be refugees in a foreign land requiring protection.

Having identified the two Marks of Mission that I would focus on, the wording of the research question became clearer. I was now able to see a direct link between the two Marks and the theology of the HeartEdge movement, as referred to in 1.1, which promoted an incarnational way of "being with" others as opposed to a more traditional "being for" mindset. I realised that my research intervention would have to be congruent of this traditionalist version of the Reformed mindset which I have detailed in Chapter 2. This realisation would help me identify the research intervention and design concept of the project which I will now outline in 1.3.

1.3. Identifying the Intervention and Design Concept

To share my understanding of how we were engaged with mission at St Cuthbert's, I decided that my main intervention would take the form of an Advent sermon

series, and this would be undertaken using participatory research methods. As noted, Advent centres around the Word becoming flesh and God participating in a new way with his creation by “dwelling with them” and I saw my challenge to take this Word and to “flesh it out” by using a traditional format (the Sunday sermon) but by delivering it in a new way with the participation of those we served as part of our mission and outreach. Both before and after the sermon series, I would send out the same Questionnaire to the research participants who would agree to follow the sermon series either in person or as recorded on-line. The Questionnaire would include both Qualitative and Quantitative questions, and, sending it out before and after the main intervention would ensure that the impact of the sermon series could be analysed and reflected upon.

As the HeartEdge movement was rooted in the incarnational theology of Sam Wells that encouraged doing mission from a “being with” perspective rather than a traditional “being for” perspective, the season of Advent seemed the ideal time to deliver the Sermon Series as in it we see God choosing to “be with” us in a new way that encourages us to see Him differently (in the Christ child) and to do things in a new way too by following in the footsteps of His Son, Jesus.

The sermon series would also explore what I saw as being the traditionalist mindset that prevented many members of the church from seeing and doing mission from a new perspective. I have suggested that this mindset was the result of the historic practices that some in the Reformed Church had adopted and concerned access to its sacred spaces and sacraments, and how it gifted to and served others as detailed in Chapter 2.

In discussing my proposal with my first reader, I was encouraged to reflect on how a sermon series might potentially undermine the research topic of incarnation and “being with.” If I was going to challenge a traditionalist mindset within the Reformed Church, then, doing so through a very traditional means of communication (a sermon) might inadvertently make it harder to achieve the change in mindset that I believed was needed. In Chapter 2, I noted how the Scottish poet, Edwin Muir, was concerned that in the Reformed church, “the Word, made flesh, was only to be made word again.”¹³² I was encouraged to think of how to make the sermon series different; and, most importantly, not just to be me delivering words, but rather any words being seen to be put into action as the new Marks of Mission were encouraging the Church to do. Theologically, there was an onus on me to share the *imago Dei* while also ensuring that it became the *missio Dei*. This would necessitate a specific research methodology which I will now describe.

1.4. Choosing the Research Methodology

In order to ensure that a sermon series was an appropriate way to carry out my research, I sought advice from Dr Katie Cross, who had taught the research methodology component of the DMin course. She very helpfully pointed me in the direction of participatory research as potentially being the most appropriate research methodology to use.

Participatory research typically sets out to improve some real situation. In such a search, two outcomes are typically pursued, research and action. The research provides increased understanding of the situation. The action seeks to bring about desired improvement. Best results are achieved by engaging participants as

¹³² Edwin Muir, *The Incarnate One in Penguin Book of Religious Verse*, ed. R.S. Thomas, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).

equals. In addition, the interests of all stakeholders are preferably taken into account. Good outcomes, if possible, are pursued for all¹³³

Pursuing the two outcomes of “research” and “action” seemed ideally suited to engaging with the Marks of Mission which were new and needed to be shared, but also were just nugatory if they did not encourage action. I was also keen to facilitate, through the sermon series, increased understanding of the situation and how, in our case, this was about how we were already doing mission in St Cuthbert’s, although very few of the weekly worshippers had actually seen it in action. The need to “engage participants as equals” was also very refreshing as often the minister is seen as being set apart, looking down on the congregation from the pulpit rather than “being with” them at their level. As each sermon was going to be a unique event involving different approaches in delivery and different participants each Sunday, it was encouraging to note that, in participatory research: “Every application of participatory research is likely to be unique to some extent with different styles of participant engagement being appropriate at different stages of facilitated, participatory research.”¹³⁴

Key to successful participatory research are the relationships between the participants and the researcher, particularly as this develops within small groups. This approach was ideally suited to how, as minister, I was already engaged with the St Cuthbert’s Working Group. Together we had been managing the move towards Union with regular meetings updating on progress and managing hopes and expectations. This linked well into the research methodology which noted that:

¹³³ Bob Dick, “Facilitating Participatory Research,” *Participatory Methods*, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/facilitating-participatory-research>

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Expectations are clarified so that participants, whatever their role, develop shared aspirations for research and action outcomes. These engagements aim to build trusting relationships between all those taking part, whether researchers or participants. These components in participatory research increase the likelihood that participants can continue to be involved as equals in actual research, but it does acknowledge that implementation in action may or may not occur. However, as research becomes more participatory, the likelihood of action often concurrent with the research is increased.¹³⁵

The fact that every application of participatory research is likely to be ‘unique in some way’ was well suited to the sermon series in which, each Sunday, new material would be shared and delivered involving different groups in a creative way. Working with the participants before, during and after fitted in very well with identifying the Working Group from the Kirk Session to be part of it. They were known to me and one of them would play a key part in constructing and delivering one of the sermons.

On the face of it, the research participants would primarily be participating by listening to words delivered by me in the sermon, whilst also participating in the overall act of Sunday Parish Worship as they did regularly. I needed to have participation in the sermons so that the words didn’t just remain words and I therefore chose to enrol the outreach groups that we work with in our mission to help me deliver them. I needed the participants in the research to see how the newly configured space in the sanctuary could be used to make God’s Word ‘bigger and closer not smaller and further away.’

Participatory research also encourages keeping those in the research project involved throughout. Due to the nature of parish ministry, I would be in communication with the participants after each Sunday service, both in the fellowship gathering immediately after worship and in the daily life and work of St Cuthbert’s in which we all

¹³⁵ Ibid.

shared. I would be able to thank and encourage them for taking part throughout the research project and they would know I was working with them, not at a distance, but rather alongside, thus fostering the relationships that are key to good participatory research. A copy of the questionnaire (the specifics of which are discussed in section 1.6) that was sent out to the research participants can be found in its final format at Appendix 2.

1.5. Selecting the Research Participants

Initially, I thought I would use all the members of the Kirk Session as my research participants. However, there are 25 members of the Session and it soon became apparent that it would be difficult to include them all and their feedback, particularly as the topic of my research had by now become quite focused with regards to preparing for the Union. Given this focus, it made sense that my research participants should be made up of the Working Group from St Cuthbert's that had been elected from the Kirk Session to enter into conversations with Greyfriars Kirk.

The group consisted of eight members and included the Session Clerk, the Treasurer, the Head of Outreach, the Church Manager, the elected Presbytery Elder, the Director of Music, and John, a member of the lay-led Soul Space team, who deliver a monthly midweek lunchtime reflective service primarily for the business community. John and I together planned the sermon for Advent 3 which he wrote and we co-delivered (see 2.6). Thus, the research participants consisted of three women and five men representing all the major areas of the life and work of St Cuthbert's with an age range from 35 to 90.

A further rationale for choosing this group resulted from an ‘Away-Day’ I had attended in November 2023 at which the two Kirk sessions had first come together. I was impressed with the way that the Greyfriars Session all seemed to be ‘on message’ with regards to new ways of doing mission whilst the St Cuthbert’s Session seemed mainly to draw on examples of how they had traditionally done mission in the past. They seemed to have little ownership or, sadly, interest in sharing the new ways of doing mission that my ministry was encouraging and engaged with. I think this had a lot to do with me operating on my own in lockdown as reflected upon in Chapter 1. Whilst I had been able to discover a ministry and outreach of “being with” others in person by becoming a member of our Charity partner, I had not been able to share this with my parishioners who I had not fully appreciated were now grieving for a time that they had been separated from their church. In addition, in November last year, the Session Clerk and Head of the Greyfriars Working Group had attended the St Cuthbert’s Session Meeting and, once again, they seemed to dominate the discussion about mission leaving the St Cuthbert’s team slightly floundering to express themselves. I realised that there was now a ministry imperative for me to engage with this lack of collective confidence and help effect a change of mindset within the congregation.

1.6. Finalising the Questionnaire

My epiphany moment that helped me broaden my research topic, as detailed in 1.1, and particularly how I would need to engage with a traditionalist mindset that was potentially preventing the need to embrace change within the congregation, came about when I was serving as the locum chaplain in St Peter’s English Church in the Zermatt in

the Swiss Alps in September 2023. Not only did I rewrite my research proposal, I also focussed on what questions now needed to be included in the questionnaire. These were to be mainly qualitative questions that would allow for simple analysis and comparison. These questions would cover the whole range of life and work in St Cuthbert's and allow the individual members of the Working Group to be able to share their own priorities and concerns by reflecting on familiar topics over which that they had a shared ownership.

My aim in selecting these questions was to give the participants a good foothold in the questionnaire, one which would give them the confidence to share their preferences. However, the need for individual, unfettered feedback soon became apparent, and this could only be achieved by including some open questions that would encourage qualitative answers. Identifying fresh expressions of church, through the new Marks of Mission, could not just be a numbers exercise; it also needed to be person-centred.

My first reader also noted the need to include open questions in the questionnaire as opposed to just having ranking questions. These questions would necessarily take more time to answer as they required a greater depth of thought that went beyond the ranking questions and focused on the heart of the research about how to be Church with others. Open questions would allow for qualitative responses, whereas ranking questions would on the whole restrict the responses to being quantitative. Both would be required for good in-depth research. As it turned out, it was the rich responses that I got to these open questions that would prove to be the most helpful to my research study, as will be explained in Chapter 4.

1.7.Preparing the Sermon Series

Whilst out in Zermatt, the link between the incarnational theology of HeartEdge (as reflected upon in Chapter 2) and the season of Advent started to take shape. I was drawn to John's Prologue and "the Word made flesh and dwelling amongst us." I felt a need to "flesh out my words" and stop them from just remaining words after the worship. Having selected two Marks of Mission it was important that the words that made up these Marks became living words during the sermon. Just as in the incarnation God had participated in a unique new way, the sermon series would require participation, not just from me, the minister, as the teaching elder, but also from others. The other participants would be drawn from our partner charity and the Ukrainian refugee community who we supported in our mission and outreach along with, as noted, one member of the Working Group who was also a lay preacher.

I did not want to place undue pressure on any of the participants, nor would there be much time to rehearse their involvement, so I decided that if the focus wasn't to be on the Word alone, but rather the Word put into action and 'dwelling amongst us,' then the best way of involving the participants would be to have them visually take part in the creation of images within the sermons as part of my main research intervention.

In 2021, I had attended the Oberammergau passion play in Bavaria and had been struck by the way the production had included visual tableaux depicting episodes in the Old Testament, which were linked to the passion of Christ. These tableaux, made up of cast members, were quickly constructed in between each Act and set the scene for what was to come, rooting Christ's passion in the familiar stories of the past. I decided to draw on this Oberammergau dynamic of moving into the future by firstly rooting change in the

past. If I was going to share how St Cuthbert's was doing new ways mission and try and move the traditionalist congregational mindset into seeing mission from a new perspective, I needed to do the same. By rooting change, in the familiar stories of Advent, my aim was to help the mainly elderly congregation (for whom change could understandably be challenging as they were still grieving for what had been lost in lockdown, and navigating the uncertain route towards Union) feel a sense of ownership of the current mission and outreach in the church which I believe they felt disconnected from. As noted above, I decided to do this by creating visual tableaux in the sermons made up of the volunteer participants.

Creating the tableaux in real time, in front of the congregation during the sermons, would witness a lot of dynamic random movement which would initially look messy and haphazard. The lack of rehearsal time would also mean that this was a "live event" and things might potentially go wrong. My hope was that this busy creation of the tableau would suddenly come together once the participants were in their final places. At that point, the congregation would be invited to move forward into the space around the tableau so that they were part of the story too and, seeing it from a new perspective, they might have an epiphany moment. I saw this relational coming together, through dynamic movement, as drawing on the doctrine of perichoresis in which the three persons of the Trinity are in a constant movement and dance around each other whilst also inviting us to join in. I hoped that the congregation's epiphany moment might be one in which they felt that they were either already part of this dance or certainly they were being invited to take part in it. The movement of the congregation towards the space in which the tableau was to be set would also seek to mirror the movement of God to be 'with us' through the

Incarnation. The build up to the birth of Christ had been messy and unpredictable, and so too would be the building of the tableaux, but I hoped that, just like the first Nativity, a sense of awe and wonder might result, if only just momentarily, as a new liminal space and image were created.

Lastly, before looking in the next section at the logistical support required to deliver my research intervention, I decided that the sermon series would benefit from an image that could be used throughout Advent, which told the story of the difference between how to “be with” others and how to “be for” others. I knew immediately, which one to use as I often went to visit it in our neighbour in the parish at the National Gallery of Scotland. One of the elders had shared it with me soon after I was inducted. The painting is “Christ in the house of Martha and Mary,” 1655, by the Dutch Painter, Johannes Vermeer, and it would prove to be a valuable aid throughout the research intervention, as will be reflected upon in Chapter 4.



Reproduced by kind kind permission of The National Gallery of Scotland

1.8. Getting the Logistics Sorted

I sent out a Microsoft forms questionnaire, then identified and approached those who were going to participate in the sermon delivery. As noted, I was conscious that there appeared to be a disconnect between the congregation and those we sought to serve. This was particularly in relation to the homeless and the addicts that we hosted twice a week. I was keen to involve our guests and show how they now broke bread together in our main sanctuary at the foot of Christ's feet.¹³⁶ However, due to safeguarding concerns, it would not be appropriate to use the homeless guests themselves and therefore I turned to the volunteers, some of whom had previously been addicts.

Due to the nature of serving the homeless, a charity such as 'Steps to Hope' will often include volunteers who are inspired by their religious persuasion to put their faith into practice by carrying out acts of moral beauty. Such were some volunteers from St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Edinburgh, and I asked them to take part in one of the sermons along with their Archbishop. It would be interesting to note how the congregational mindset would first and foremost identify with them as being Roman Catholics, as opposed to them being volunteers of the charity, which was in fact the capacity in which I had been invited them to take part. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4. I also invited some of the Ukrainian refugees who were based in St Cuthbert's to take part in another of the sermons. They are based in the clock tower during the week where they weave camouflage nets to send back to the armed forces in their homeland. Lastly, I approached one of the Working Group, who was also a Lay

¹³⁶ The wall of the apse is dominated by a life size alabaster relief of Leonardo da Vinci's, *The Last Supper*.

Reader, to share the planning, writing and delivery of a sermon with me. See Appendix 6 Advent 3.

Having described the logistical support that was required to deliver my research intervention, I will now look at the project implementation which will include describing each of the Advent sermons.

Part II: Project Implementation

In this second part, I will present a description of the actual implementation process and the changes and adjustments I had to make to the design during its course.

In this section, I will give details of each sermon and the theology behind it, along with the words of the Marks of Mission that the sermon was trying to flesh out. I will also look at those who played a part in its delivery, the creation of the tableaux, and the key images that were used to create a sense of being ‘bigger and closer, not smaller and further away.’ The full details of each sermon can be found in the appendices.

2.1. Enrolling the Research Participants

As I hoped to enrol the Working Group (the members of the Kirk Session who were preparing the congregation for moving into a Union with our neighbouring parish), I thought it important to initially approach the Chair of the Group and check that she felt this was appropriate. She proved to be very enthusiastic and thought that it would give her meetings an extra theological focus and edge. This sense of supporting one another fitted in well with the participatory research methodology I had chosen to use. With her approval, I approached all the members individually, introducing the research topic,

laying out expectations and the time commitment that would be involved to follow the sermon series. Everyone agreed to take part and I then obtained ethical clearance to involve them in the research.

At this stage, I did not want to share too much about my understanding of the incarnational theology of “being with” as it was important that they they answered the first questionnaire from their own perspectives, before the Advent sermon series started. This was vital in ensuring that the second questionnaire, to be completed after the sermon series, could be answered in light of what they might have learnt/gleaned during the four Sundays in Advent.

2.2. Completing the First Questionnaire

The first questionnaire was sent out in November, giving the participants two weeks in which to fill it out and return it on-line. All answers throughout the research were anonymous, although Microsoft Forms did allow me to monitor when the completed returns were received. This was helpful, as it allowed me to chase up the outstanding returns as the deadline of the 1st Sunday in Advent drew closer. I thought I might have had time to look at the answers once all the returns were in, but this proved to be unrealistic as the sermons themselves, and making sure they were fit for purpose, took longer to draw together than I had planned for.

2.3. Changing Approach to Advent 1

My initial plan, to deliver four sermons on each of the Sundays in Advent, had to be changed from the outset. As it was an Advent Carol Service on the first Sunday, there

was no sermon as part of the worship! I had told the research participants that they would have a sermon to follow on each of the Sundays and they had all committed to doing so. It was therefore important that they received one on the first Sunday or the integrity and credibility of my research and myself would immediately be open to question. I had not intended to write my sermons down in any detailed way as that is not my style of preaching, which is delivered by using a few bullet points to keep me on track and on message. I now had to discipline myself to write a full sermon for the first Sunday which could then be sent out in its full format to the research participants. Although this took up a lot of time, it was a really useful exercise as it allowed me to articulate the theology behind my research and also to have it open to full scrutiny. It also allowed me to outline in more depth the title of the research: “Bigger and Closer, not Smaller and Further Away.”

I sent out my first sermon on the 1st Sunday in Advent and this written format allowed me to root the other sermons in a detailed exposition of the incarnational theology behind “being with.” It also enabled me to set the scene for what was to follow by explaining in detail how the Marks of Mission would be engaged with going forward. However, I was immediately locating my intervention in words, not action, and this was something I had purposefully set out to avoid.

This first major adjustment to the design of my research intervention, whilst initially catching me out, meant that I would go on and produce hard copies of the other sermons that were to follow. These were sent out to the research participants once the sermon had been delivered in person. This was hugely appreciated by the participants and

proved to be a good way of disciplining myself to keep to the tight weekly Sunday schedule that I had signed up to.

2.4. Responding to Unexpected Feedback and Making Adjustments

This initial need to adapt and adjust my project design from the outset meant that I was better prepared for what was to follow. I thought I would have a tight control over my feedback, and the process of receiving it, by engaging specific research participants and having them sign up to my research methodology.

However, on the second Sunday in Advent, it became apparent that, because the main intervention was taking place during the traditional Sunday act of worship, I would receive real-time feedback from members of the congregation who weren't part of the Working Group. This happened over the usual refreshments and fellowship. In fact, this proved to be invaluable in giving greater depth and understanding to the research and also provided me with real-time feedback. To adjust to this unplanned feedback, I started a journal to record responses to the sermons.

I was then asked by the leader of the Bible Study Group if my sermons could be reflected upon at their weekly meeting as part of their Advent studies. Of course, I said yes and the informal feedback I received from the leader of the group proved to be extremely valuable in broadening the overall responses and also giving me a greater insight into the mindset of members of the congregation. This in turn allowed me reflect more fully on how the sermons were being received by those I had not specifically considered within the research framework. I also found that I would bump into members of the Working Group throughout the week just going about their daily church business

and they were keen to share their thoughts on the sermons. In fact, all these adjustments and the unexpected feedback fitted well into the participatory research methodology and highlighted how building good relationships throughout the research would always make for better feedback and more detailed results. The sermon series soon took on a life of its own beyond each Sunday and this was highly rewarding and exciting, if not a bit messy with regards to my research.

Another unexpected twist was when the topic of the sermon for the last Sunday in Advent was picked up by the Church of Scotland press team who wanted to run with it on Christmas Eve. They engaged the national press¹³⁷ to take it on as a Christmas story and I suddenly found that we had become a story of interest which boosted the numbers for worship on Christmas Day and was also greatly appreciated by the Ukrainian refugees who were taking part in the Advent 4 sermon which fell on Christmas Eve.

The last adjustment I made was to incorporate an extra meeting very late in the process. I happened to be over in California at the end of January 2024 and managed to arrange to meet with Dacher Keltner, whose work on awe I had referenced as part of the theology of my paper as noted in Chapter 2. This meeting was to prove to be highly valuable and especially helped me when coming to write up my conclusion as part of Chapter 4.

2.5. Delivering Advent 2

¹³⁷ *The Herald*, Scotland, accessed, April 4, 2024, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24010994.special-nativity-display-church-remind-ukrainians-plight/>

Whilst the sermon for Advent 1 had set the theme and the theology behind my research intervention, Advent 2 would see the words being put into practice. I chose to involve the volunteers from Steps to Hope in the delivery of the sermon. The title was “Welcoming the stranger in our midst” and the sermon particularly focussed on “welcoming, transforming, communities” within the Marks of Mission. I also wanted to draw on the theology of welcome and tokenism as outlined in Chapter 2. The aim of the sermon was to involve the volunteers from Steps to Hope by showing how they, and the homeless guests they serve, are fully part of the St Cuthbert’s extended family. I hoped that the regular Sunday congregation would see how the volunteers transformed and shared the familiar worshipping space so that, by each Sunday evening, we were welcoming and caring for others.

Traditionally, the second Sunday in Advent is the Gift Service at which members of the congregation bring in a wrapped gift to be distributed to the children in one of the housing estates in Edinburgh. Whilst acknowledging this is a good and kind thing to do, I wanted to also suggest how these gifts had become a token gesture, as the gifts were being given ‘for others’ without them being personally involved in the process. I shared with the congregation in this sermon how my experience in lockdown, working in person as a volunteer with Steps to Hope, had totally transformed my ministry. I wanted to show that the greatest gift the congregation could give was to share our sacred space with our homeless guests each Sunday evening and how this was a new way of doing mission and a fresh expression of Church. On reflection this was an insensitive contrast to make as the congregation were being made to see something from my perspective without being able to defend their own, and I could have done this much better by making the effort to

outline the contrast in advance with the team that gathered the gifts from the congregation.

During the sermon, I came down from the pulpit to join the volunteers and Archbishop Cushley (see 1.8). As I came down, I invited the congregation to leave their seats and move to where our homeless guests were served each Sunday at the front of the nave. As the congregation moved forward, the participants set up the space as it was done every Sunday evening with the tables moved into place and laid for a meal. A tableau was thus created with the participants from Steps to Hope, including their archbishop, sitting at the tables, facing the congregation as if waiting to be served a meal. In essence they were powerfully recreating the Last Supper as depicted behind them, on the wall of the apse, in the life sized alabaster relief based on Leonardo da Vinci's mural in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria Della Gracie in Milan, Italy.¹³⁸

Meanwhile, by bringing the congregation forward into this space, it was now shared by everyone – regular morning worshippers and the regular evening volunteers. In so doing, it was hoped that each would see the other, and the space which they now occupied where the pews had once been, from a new but shared perspective.

The feedback from this service, which will be presented in Part III, was fascinating as this service proved to challenge the mindset of the congregation more than I had anticipated. Also, as mentioned, I had also not envisaged getting real-time feedback immediately after the service.

2.6. Delivering Advent 3

¹³⁸ See footnote 133 and picture on page 175.

For the 3rd Sunday in Advent, I chose to work with a member of the Working Group, John, who was also a lay preacher and street pastor, as well as being a Steam Railway enthusiast. I had attended a Soul Space presentation he had delivered the month before which focussed on the centralised control of the railways that prevented local rail workers from using their own initiative to make things work on the ground. He had very cleverly taken a passion of his own (working on the railways) and related it to being a Christian and serving the Church. Specifically, he had pointed out, how in the Church, we often wait to be told what to do rather than putting our faith into practice as we see fit or called on to do by the Holy Spirit. This related particularly well to the theology of control and ways of doing mission that I have referenced in Chapter 2. We decided to hold a dialogue between ‘Control,’ which I played, giving out orders from on high in the pulpit, and the shed-master down at ground level amongst the congregation, as both tried to find room in the shed so that an engine that had ended up in the wrong place might be housed for the night.

It fitted in well with the Advent theme of ‘no room in the inn’ and the title became ‘Finding room in the Shed.’ It also meant that John could dress up as the shed-master as opposed to the traditional innkeeper! We sought to flesh out the words: ‘standing in solidarity with the poor and needy’ from the Marks of Mission whilst also exploring the theology of control and ways of doing mission as detailed in Chapter 2. I wanted to encourage the congregation to take ownership at a local level of how we did our mission and outreach and not to feel that we were being railroaded into doing things from above – in this case, the Presbytery Plan. I made the mistake of over-reiterating what had taken place the previous week rather than let this Sunday’s service stand on its own. This was a

mistake I had made the previous Sunday too; as mentioned, the Advent 1 sermon had only gone out to the Working Group by email, and I somehow felt that I needed to compensate for this by using precious time set aside on Advent 2 to go over the previous Sunday's sermon content. I found that the risk of a sermon series being used as a research tool is that it gets delivered specifically to engage the research participants, whereas it is also a real time worship event for every member of the congregation to engage with too.

This service thus focused on the sense of centralised control and the inability for people at a local level to take ownership and risk so that they can deliver specifically within the context of their own Church life. It was also important to highlight in this service how this traditionalist control dynamic in the church was now changing, as the General Assembly was encouraging local congregations to take ownership of how they wanted to engage with the new Marks of Mission in their own context.

At the end of the 3rd Sunday, it was becoming apparent how flexible and open to spontaneous gestures one had to be in conducting participatory research. As my chosen methodology, I found that working with different participants each Sunday, notably all of whom were volunteers, meant that I had to work around their timings and availability rather than the other way around. It meant that the sermons and tableaux were not perhaps perfectly delivered and a little 'rough hewn around the edges', but they were delivered in the hope and confidence that, if offered to God, they would be shaped by His hands into something special as the sermons unfolded. This way of worshipping would challenge the mindset and expectations of my regular congregation who, on the whole, loved order and predictability, both of which were now being challenged each Sunday in the sermon series. From their perspective, it probably appeared to be a different story.

Still grieving over the losses during lockdown and worried about going into an unplanned Union, these sermons, which were centred around me and our charity participants, had the potential of pushing the congregation aside, and making the rituals of worship that sustained and nurtured them on a weekly basis, now appear to be at a distance, and being prioritised in the smaller way, which made them feel further away from the worshipping experience.

2.7. Delivering Advent 4

The final sermon in the series took place on Christmas Eve. Traditionally, St Cuthbert's held its Young Church Nativity Play during this service. But, since coming out of lockdown, there is currently no Young Church to call upon. I knew that many in the small congregation found this really disappointing. I wanted to have a Nativity Play and I hoped to have children involved too. I approached my Ukrainian refugee friends who we supported and who operate "The Spiders" network out of the church, weaving camouflage nets to send back to their own country to protect vulnerable people. I had also recently been appointed Chair of the Trustees of the Ukrainian Saturday School and we had, the week before, hosted their school Christmas Party at St Cuthbert's. During the week before the service, a plan started to come together whereby we would invite 'The Spiders' to build a Nativity Tableau made out of camouflage nets, and pupils from their Saturday school would lay the baby Jesus (in the form of a swaddling winter camouflage net bundle) in the crib.

The acted-out sermon would draw on our well-established links with the Ukrainian Community but would take it to a new level by "being with" them in worship

and sharing our recently-reconfigured sanctuary which had been adapted exactly to facilitate this sort of shared mission and outreach. The title of the sermon was “What can I give him, poor as I am” and it fleshed out the following words from the Marks of Mission; “Build... faith... with the poor.”

Once again, the congregation would be invited, during the sermon, to move into the Manger space and, holding candles, all sing together the carol: “Away in a Manger.” Theologically, the sermon would draw on two of Dacher Keltner’s types of awe: Collective effervescence and moral beauty. Whilst, once again, we went to the wire in putting this sermon together, I do believe we were guided by the Holy Spirit. It was a sublime service and the Press interest that it received the week before was a real boost to the Ukrainian refugee community, and also the good folk of St Cuthbert’s who remained uncertain about their future as we moved towards the Union. The responses and impact of the sermon series will be reflected upon in chapter 4.

2.8. Completing the Second Questionnaire

I was conscious that, after the sermon series had been delivered, we immediately entered into the 12 Days of Christmas and the Festive Season and that it was important I did not lose the momentum of the research intervention. I sent out the second Questionnaire at the end of the month, giving a completion/return date of 12th January 2024. The ranking (quantitative) questions remained the same, but I adjusted the last open (qualitative) question to reflect the participants’ overall reflections on the sermon series itself. I was pleased to see that the returns started to come in quite quickly and, after having only to chase up one response, I had 100% completion rate. The one thing I

immediately noticed was that, on average, each return had taken longer to complete compared to the first questionnaire and this was encouraging as I prepared to compare and contrast the two sets of responses and analyse them, the results of which can be seen in the next section of this chapter.

Part III Project Results

Having shared the story of the implementation of my research project by reflecting on the main intervention of the Advent sermon series and accompanying questionnaires, I will now in Part III of this chapter present the results, before summarising them in Part IV in preparation for evaluating them in Chapter 4. I will present the results as follows:

3.1. The First Questionnaire

As a reminder, this questionnaire was sent out in advance of the Advent Series so that none of the answers were influenced by my research intervention. Answers were received from 14 participants, and they demonstrate the participants' views from their own perspectives at the time of answering the questions. The initial results of the ranking questions can be seen below, where the ranking of the options is based on the average ranking across all the participants. For example, the table below shows the data for Question 1, with Prayer ranked first overall with an average score of $(1 \times 7 + 2 \times 6 + 4 \times 1) / 14$, which equals 1.64, compared to the average for Sermon of $(1 \times 2 + 2 \times 1 + 3 \times 9 + 5 \times 1 + 6 \times 1) / 14$, which equals 3 etc etc.

Overall ranking		No of participants giving each ranking					
		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
1	Prayer	7	6		1		
2	Sermon	2	1	9		1	1
3	Singing	2	5	1	3	1	2
4	Sharing the Peace	3		1	6	4	
5	Fellowship after the service		2	1	3	5	3
6	Giftng at the offering			2	1	3	8

In order to give some sense of the spread of individual scores, the results tables below also contain the number of participants who ranked each option 1st. These answers can be better analysed when compared and contrasted to the replies in Questionnaire 2.

The Ranking Questions

Q.1. Rank in order of significance the following worship activities:

First Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st
1	Prayer	7
2	Sermon	2
3	Singing	2
4	Sharing the Peace	3
5	Fellowship after the service	
6	Giftng at the Offering	

Q.2. Rank in order of relevance to the life and work of St Cuthbert's the following groups:

First Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st
1	Members	11
2	Homeless/addicts	2
3	Refugees	1
4	Visitors	
5	External lets	

Q.3. Rank in order of significance the following activities in our sanctuary:

First Questionnaire		
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		Ranked 1st
1	Worship	10
2	Outreach	1
3	Service	2
4	Welcoming/guiding	1
5	Music venue	

Q.4. Where are you most likely to encounter God *in* St Cuthbert's? Please rank in order:

First Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st
1	Sunday worship	8
2	Welcoming and serving others	6
3	Monthly Soul Space reflections	
4	Fellowship after the service	
5	Tuesday coffee mornings	

Q.5. Where are you most likely to encounter the Holy Spirit *outside* St Cuthbert's? Please rank in order:

First Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st
1	In nature	6
2	Personal prayer	3
3	In meeting people and sharing your faith	4
4	In the visual arts (music, painting)	1
5	Bible study	

Q.6. Rank the following with regards to what is most likely to be relevant in the future ministry of St Cuthbert's as we seek to follow in Jesus Christ's footsteps:

First Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st
1	Developing outreach activities	7

2	New members	4
3	Finding new external sources of income	1
4	Personal transformation	2
5	Adapting the building (e.g. bigger kitchen)	

The Open Questions

The replies from the open questions (all of which are to be found in Appendix...) gave a more individual flavour to the responses and the selected examples give the best indication of the overall response from the participants:

Q.7. How do you feel about the removal of the traditional pews? Please give reasons for your answer.

Everyone, some despite initial doubts, thought that it was a good and necessary idea, with these two answers giving a good flavour of the others.

Removal of the pews has given us flexibility of use of the Sanctuary developing more into a community church. It gives the ability for everyone to feel comfortable in the space and has opened the Church to share the space with others instead of seeing the Church as a space to be used only by the privileged who go to Church on a Sunday. It has opened our doors with more opportunities.

It makes the sanctuary space more versatile and comfortable. I don't see it as a big problem - more a natural development that facilitates more relevant activities. However, I do recognise that the change does prompt questions about priorities and what the church (both building and people) is/are for.

Q.8. What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to “be for” others?

This answer was typical of most the of the replies:

The people of the church are there for others by providing a place for worship, social and community events. The church members are managers and stewards of the buildings and are therefore providers of facilities and are organisers of weekly worship and different services throughout the year.

However, one reply saw things differently and would anticipate my sense of a traditionalist reformist mindset that says it knows what is best for others without listening to their story.

Tom Wright has a good phrase - the Jews were to be "God's people for the world" - and this is one aspect of the role of the Church, to demonstrate God's love in action and "publish abroad His wonderful name". However, seeing ourselves as "for" the world carries with it the notion that we know what the world needs, and they just need to receive what we have to offer - which I think is an inaccurate simplification!

Q 9. What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to *be with* others?

Most of the answers saw "being with" others as something that the church still took the lead on, as evidenced by the use of the word 'granting': *"To be with others is to invite people to be a part of something. The granting of services can be done with others as well as for others."*

However, in another response there was a hint of putting the other first:

Being "with" others carries with it the connotation that the relationship is two-way. We seek to serve others alongside them, responding to their agenda; also, they influence us and our thinking (often to challenge and raise uncomfortable questions) and, if we let them, be used by God to make us more relevant - and hence more effective as God's people.

Q 10. Please use this space to put down anything that you would like to share.

This question was included to give the participants an opportunity to share whatever they wanted at this stage of the research. Interestingly, not many of the participants used it, and perhaps the question was too open ended? (Sometimes a mindset likes to be told what to do and say? I felt it would be interesting to see in the second questionnaire if this mindset had been freed up to be freer thinking, as encouraged to be so in the sermon series.)

This response was typical of those who did reply: *"An interesting questionnaire because it gets one thinking what activities are really important within a church community. Some*

questions were difficult to rank because some answers were of equal merit. e.g. equal third. I look forward to the sermons.”

3.2. The Second Questionnaire

As previously noted, the second questionnaire was answered after the major research intervention of the Advent sermon series had been delivered. It included exactly the same ranking (quantitative) questions as before with one of the open (qualitative) questions, number 10, slightly adapted to encourage fully responses than had been received first time round. Participants on average spent an extra 10 minutes answering the second questionnaire in comparison to the first one. After a small amount of “chasing”, responses to the 2nd questionnaire were received from all 14 participants who had responded to the 1st questionnaire.

The Ranking Questions

The answers to the ranked questions overall did not change much between the two questionnaires, as can be seen from the following tables. I had deliberately not asked for rationale for the scores in questions 1 to 6, preferring to use the more open questions for qualitative feedback and rationale. Thus, I can only postulate on what might have caused respondents to change their scores.

Q.1 Rank in order of significance the following worship activities:

First Questionnaire			Second Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st			Ranked 1st
1	Prayer	7	1	Prayer	6
2	Sermon	2	2	Singing	3
3	Singing	2	3	Sermon	2
4	Sharing the Peace	3	4	Sharing the Peace	2
5	Fellowship after the service		5	Fellowship after the service	1
6	Giftng at the Offering		6	Giftng at the Offering	

As can be seen, there was no change in the overall first choice overall being 'Prayer', but it is interesting to note that 'Sermon' dropped to 3rd place, with 'Singing' moving up to 2nd place – perhaps reflecting the season of carol-singing, with the words of the hymns telling the story to be shared by all?

Q.2 Rank in order of relevance to the life and work of St Cuthbert's the following groups:

First Questionnaire			Second Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st			Ranked 1st
1	Members	11	1	Members	8
2	Homeless/addicts	2	2	Homeless/addicts	4
3	Refugees	1	3	Refugees	
4	Visitors		4	Visitors	
5	External lets		5	External lets	1

Again, there was no change in first place overall being 'Members', but it is interesting to note the drop in the number of respondents ranking it 1st (from 11 to 8) and the increase in the number of respondents giving 1st place to "Homeless/addicts". For some reason, one of the 14 respondents chose not to answer this question and the next (or inadvertently missed them out).

Q.3 Rank in order of significance the following activities in our sanctuary:

First Questionnaire			Second Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st			Ranked 1st

1	Worship	10	1	Worship	9
2	Outreach	1	2	Outreach	3
3	Service	2	3	Service	1
4	Welcoming/guiding	1	4	Welcoming/guiding	
5	Music venue		5	Music venue	

As can be seen, there was no change in overall order, with ‘Worship’ remaining overall first choice.

Q.4 Where are you most likely to encounter God *in* St Cuthbert’s? Please rank in order:

First Questionnaire			Second Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st			Ranked 1st
1	Sunday worship	8	1	Welcoming and serving others	6
2	Welcoming and serving others	6	2	Sunday worship	3
3	Monthly Soul Space reflections		3	Monthly Soul Space reflections	4
4	Fellowship after the service		4	Fellowship after the service	
5	Tuesday coffee mornings		5	Tuesday coffee mornings	

While there was little change in aggregate order, except for the 1st and 2nd ranked choices, with ‘Welcoming and serving others’ moving up into 1st place and ‘Sunday worship’ moving down into 2nd place, the apparent re-allocation of 1st ranking from “Sunday worship” to “Monthly Soul Space reflections” is quite striking – perhaps this suggests that the December reflection was particularly memorable, whilst it was also the reflection that I drew upon in the Advent 3 sermon.

Q.5 Where are you most likely to encounter the Holy Spirit *outside* St Cuthbert’s? Please rank in order:

First Questionnaire			Second Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st			Ranked 1st
1	In nature	6	1	In nature	6

2	Personal prayer	3	2	In meeting people and sharing your faith	6
3	In meeting people and sharing your faith	4	3	Personal prayer	1
4	In the visual arts (music, painting)	1	4	In the visual arts (music, painting)	1
5	Bible study		5	Bible study	

For this question, it is interesting to note that the change in order between the two questionnaires was in the 2nd and 3rd choices, with ‘meeting people and sharing your faith’ replacing ‘Personal prayer’ in 2nd place overall. ‘In nature’ remained in 1st place.

Q.6 Rank the following with regards to what is most likely to be relevant in the future ministry of St Cuthbert’s as we seek to follow in Jesus Christ’s footsteps:

First Questionnaire			Second Questionnaire		
		Ranked 1st			Ranked 1st
1	Developing outreach activities	7	1	Developing outreach activities	4
2	New members	4	2	New members	6
3	Finding new external sources of income	1	3	Finding new external sources of income	2
4	Personal transformation	2	4	Personal transformation	2
5	Adapting the building (e.g. bigger kitchen)		5	Adapting the building (e.g. bigger kitchen)	

While there was no change in overall rankings, with ‘Developing outreach activities’ remaining first choice, it is interesting to note some reallocation of 1st choice rankings between the two questionnaires.

The Open Questions

As I had hoped, the open-ended qualitative questions were much richer in feedback, allowing participants to openly express their perceptions after following the Advent sermon series. The responses also showed greater articulation both theologically and pastorally of

the themes that had been included in the sermons. I was really encouraged by the responses to the adjusted final question in the second questionnaire, in which many people articulated a sense of “being with” in a more confident manner than they had done in the first questionnaire, and referenced the sermon series in their answers. The acknowledgement that image is helpful was also very encouraging, as were the specific references to the tableaux that were created to integrate others into sharing the worship.

Q.7 How do you feel about the removal of the traditional pews? Please give reasons for your answer.

The answers were more theologically articulate and there was the first mention of the word “mission.” In addition, there was an appreciation that the creation of a new space in the sanctuary had not just been for the traditional church members, but also would now allow others to use the sanctuary and how this “promotes mission” : *“At first, I was against this, however, it has been a very good thing, allowing flexibility in the use of the sanctuary, thus allowing more diverse groups and organisations to use the space which promotes mission, hopefully sowing seeds of faith.”*

I was also pleased to note that the focus on the Word had been picked up along with the concept of making the word flesh; *“Having everyone come up and sit around the meal table or stand around the stable were both very effective ways of making the Word flesh through our physical involvement.”* There was also evidence of the importance of sharing the traditional worshipping space; *“I think it has allowed our outreach partners, Steps to Hope members, to enjoy the sanctuary, as they eat their meal there on a Sunday evening giving them the same experience the worshippers have hours before.”* The sense of worship and service being linked was also highlighted; *“It says that people are the Church. It says that the Church is about*

...serving others. It says the Church can be both adaptable but nourishing in its worship and service to a community.”

Q.8 What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to *be for* others?

I was interested to note how, on the one hand, “being for” was linked to a controlling influence: *“we need to beware of being prescriptive with preconceived ideas of people's needs”* – which in turn was linked to colonial style of mission; *“avoiding the white saviour mentality.”* There was also an acknowledgment of the positive dimension of “being-for”: *“that it can encourage a servant mindset towards others.”* But balanced by the fact that: *“it too easily can become us deciding what others need and then just putting it on.”* This was further picked up by how “being for” was generally to do things at a distance from others; *“To say we are "for" something generally infers we are in some way "above" those we serve, rather than "the same" as those we serve”.* And more obviously: *“To be for others is to say and do things from afar. To make decisions or contributions without the input or presence of the people you are working for.”* Whilst it was encouraging to see a direct link to one of the sermons linking “being for” with giving and how the congregation was adapting to doing things differently: *“A good example being the Christmas Gifts to Wester Hailes; we now ask what is needed rather than making that decision ourselves.”*, the same response concluded; *“I wonder however if there are still things which we need to do for others and that there is a balance to be reached between ‘for’ and ‘with’.”*

Q.9 What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to *be with* others?’

The sense of needing a balance was well articulated in the answers about “being with” and

very helpfully, as it suggested building upon the past, the word ‘*development*’ was used: *“I think doing things with folk is a development of doing things for others. It enables a much better focus on what is needed and targets what to do and what help to offer. It gets away from doing what we think is needed and replacing that with doing what people ask us to do. As a concept this provides a more empathetic way of providing mission and help.”* There was also an acknowledgment that “being with” could get messy and that it would involve handing some over control to others. Both of these had been evident in the sermon series: *“Being “with” others implies a two-way relationship and also more involvement with others. “being with” people can be messy and challenging, since we cannot then control what happens.”*

It was also important to see things from the perspective of others: *“being with” people should enable us to be more relevant to where they are and how they see things and, in so doing, recognise the historic baggage that the Church carries and which is getting in the way of effective mission and service.”* This historic baggage was further articulated: *“The Church in the past has inwardly worked out its own needs with lots of committees etc which at the end of the day achieved very little for people but often met the needs only for those present justifying our own existence. It is so important that we listen to people, the people we seek to serve, to walk with them and to share.”* Whilst the link to the Incarnation was also reflected upon: *“It is better to say we are “with” others and reveal that this means we are in fact in their service. It assumes mutuality, equality, equanimity, humility, and malleability. It places us more readily into Emmanuel, God-with-us, whom we love and serve.”* There was also a sense of how this in turn encourages us to be with others; *“To be with others is to invite and stand alongside. Not to support something going on elsewhere but to be right there with people. Not to take control of a given situation, but to work with others.”*

Q.10 Please use this space to put down anything that you would like to share particularly in response to the sermon series.

Unlike Question 10 in the first questionnaire, which several people chose not to answer, I specifically focused the question on reflecting on the sermon series, and this had the desired effect of getting some very full and detailed responses. It was encouraging to see how the use of image and participation by others had facilitated people's engagement with the sermons. I noted that there was no specific mention of “mission” in the answers, and this will be reflected upon in Chapter 4.

There was a sense for some of moral beauty being at the heart of what we did as putting our words into practice was vital to “being Church”;

I have become more aware of the dangers of working for others. It is easy to say something that is right, it is easy to donate to something that is right or to choose something. It is not a bad thing to be for others but it is not what we should strive for. We must go and do things with others, work alongside, get the insight of those who need help, gain perspective and work towards a good life alongside others. The use of imagery was very helpful. Having an image as an example during talks and discussion can help to guide the thinking process.

However, for others the idea of having to do more was daunting, and there was a sense of a tired congregation that had done their best in the past and wanted to be loved and acknowledged for doing so, but who were now frightened of what the future might hold and sensed that “their church” was disappearing, *“I suspect we did not emphasise how people who do not have the energy or the drive to be with people might fit in? Clearly any initiative needs much prayer around it and funding.”* This was put more directly in the following response: *“Too much concentration on "others". We must nurture the congregation and not forget their needs. Without them it would not be possible to carry out outreach work. St*

Cuthbert's has a history of helping others. Some of this was done with other churches eg evening meals for homeless in our old church hall - an example of "for" and "with".

I now realise that I hadn't acknowledged this sense of fear and distance within the traditionalist members of the congregation. A couple of the answers did demonstrate a traditionalist approach to St Cuthbert's and suddenly such words as "members" and "adherents" seem very out of place. They were certainly not to be dismissed and perhaps this was something I was guilty of doing in the delivery of the sermons series

I think great care is needed to ensure the Sunday morning congregation and members/adherents do not feel less worthy compared to the other groups in St Cuthbert's. I fear, by preaching to members/adherents about the homeless/addicts and Ukrainians regularly, members/adherents are beginning to feel like everything they and their ancestors stand for, and everything they do for St Cuthbert's, is not as appreciated as much now. I suppose 1 Peter 4:10 comes to mind - sometimes these talents are not working with the homeless/addicts and Ukrainians, and that should not be an issue.

In some answers, there was a sense of fear as to what it meant to be with others at the expense being for the members of the church. The answers also expressed a theological grasp of the situation which was well articulated; *"I appreciated the centrality of the theme of "God with us". The incarnation expresses the idea that God is not remote but entered into and shared the human condition."* It was noted that doing the sermon differently encouraged further reflection after the service and so that work in one sense had only just begun: *"The use of elements other than direct preaching enhances the experience and assists in providing a focus for reflection after the Service is over."* A similar point was expressed by another respondent who said: *"I hadn't realised just how often the word "with" appears in the Christmas story. Being helped to notice this, and then to be open to the Spirit's application of this, made Christmas 2023 very memorable."*

Whilst there might have been very little specific mention of mission, the idea of doing things with our ecumenical partners, as encouraged in the Marks of Mission was mentioned:

I think that we need to do more with our ecumenical partners within the City Centre - this would allow us to reach out to more people of differing beliefs, of different age groups and would make us more aware of the needs of our local community.” And further; “I thought inviting Archbishop Cushly was wonderful, showing our willingness to work with others especially Roman Catholics with whom the Church of Scotland has had a difficult relationship. Also wonderful to have our Ukrainian friends with us, and to incorporate all these people and groups into our worship.

Lastly, the traditional print form of the sermon was well received, and this will be reflected upon in Chapter 4, whilst the same answer also appreciated the modernist approach to doing things differently thus demonstrating again the need to find a balance between the two so that no one finds it ‘difficult to relate to being in church.’

I have enjoyed the Advent Sermon Series and was also grateful to receive them in print which I have often read again getting further benefit. The Advent Sermon which had most affect on me was the one with the Ukrainian netters. The child in the manger today, the future - it felt so emotional and alive. I related to the visual parts of all the services and have remembered them quite clearly. I was just sorry that we had not been doing this in the past even a different type of service once a month as I think for some people it was so unusual for them they found it difficult to relate to. I welcomed the services as it reinforced what I felt about what Church was really about and the Church of the future.

3.3. Feedback from the Bible Study Group

As noted in Part II the Bible Study Group followed the Advent Sermon series and their leader shared the following feedback:

The Group did not see doing things “for” people and “being with” people as being mutually exclusive. To “be with people”, we often have to do things first “for” people, before we can “be with” them. For example, to support the Steps to Hope meals, we had to provide the sanctuary in its new layout by removing the pews for

the large numbers of homeless people. That afforded the opportunity for the minister and the outreach team to “be with” the homeless or marginalised.

Concerning reactions to the 4 services, the leader gave the following feedback:

We are aware that some people felt criticised that all the Christian service that they had given for decades at St Cuthbert’s was of little apparent value or at least it was not acknowledged in the sermons. However, some of the group pointed out that the sermons were about how we minister to people in the future. Perhaps, it came as a shock to some of the traditionalists within the congregation because the ground had not been prepared. However, sermons are not always meant to make people feel comfortable. On the other hand, for people recognising that we need to change to meet the Five Marks of Mission, and particularly the second one, in its original form, then these sermons were timely and helpful.

The illustrations in Sermons 2 to 4 of the preparation of the tables for the Steps to Hope meals, the conversation between the railway controller and the Shed Master, the camouflage netting over the nativity stable were good illustrations and were well received by some members and visitors. David Hockney’s painting of “Bigger and Closer” is an easy message to grasp. The Mary and Martha painting and scripture reminder was very appropriate.

Other observations noted: *“We need to chat to more people, notably outside the core membership. Doing things **for** people is easier than “being with” people. We will grow **bigger and closer** when we get to know people by name, personality and knowing their stories....and we need to meet them during the week.”*

The leader of the Bible Study Group fed back the following conclusion:

*The series of four sermons were well worth listening to because they were thought provoking and challenging. We need prayer and further discussion on how to respond with all the core members and stakeholders being invited to such discussions, not just the Kirk Session. The Bible Fellowship Group thank the minister for all the time and thought he had put into these four sermons. They are a good basis for doing things differently **for** people in the future so we can spend more time **with** them through the week.*

3.4. Real-time Feedback

The real time feedback was received immediately after each Sunday from members of the congregation who were not members of the Working Group. After Advent 2 (I previously noted that this Sunday in Advent was always the Gift Service), I was approached by one member who said I had not done enough to acknowledge the traditional gifts the congregation had brought in and did I not realise how important the Gift Service was?

Someone also remarked that “if I had wanted a Roman Catholic service, I would not have come to St Cuthbert’s”.

After Advent 3, a member of the Choir remarked that the sense of over arching-control being imposed from above was palpable and how refreshing it was to have it challenged within the context of a sermon. He mentioned how he experienced similar control issues in his own workplace, and it was debilitating. He could not believe that Church structures operated in a similar manner. Another member of the congregation pointed out that the start of the sermon had been a bit too wordy, and it would have been better to let the images do the talking.

After Advent 4, the same person who had taken me to task about the gifts, was seemingly encouraged to call me over to her coffee table and say that moving to the manger, holding a candle and “being with” the refugees to sing the carol was one of the most moving things she had done in St Cuthbert’s. Hanna, the lead Ukrainian who had helped me gather her refugee friends to take part in the service, told me later that week that her friend Margaret, who had weaved one of the camouflage nets, had told Hanna that the cry from the pulpit “C’mon St Cuthbert’s, let’s take some ownership over all this!” was the best

message she had heard all Christmas and gave her and the other refugees great hope, thinking we are all in this together.

In addition, after each service people all made mention of how good the use of images had been. Having shared the results, I will now summarise them in the final part of this chapter before evaluating them in Chapter 4.

Part IV Summary

Having told the story of my research project through a thick description of how it evolved, and having presented the results, it can be seen that several main themes emerged from the data. These main themes demonstrate a clear correlation to the biblical and theological underpinning of the project, as developed in Chapter 2, and fall into the following areas:

1. Equipping the Working Group with a theological language to enable them to articulate the sense of Church “being with” others in its mission and outreach. This can be evidenced particularly through the answers to the open-ended, qualitative responses in the second Questionnaire, which was issued after the delivery of the Advent sermon series.
2. The most appropriate way to communicate and share a vision. This included the risk that the delivery of a sermon was too wordy in itself, and potentially fell into the trap of ‘the Word becoming flesh only to be made word again.’”

Also, whether the use of image (whether painting or tableau) was successful in trying to avoid this potential pitfall and noting how some found it helpful to receive hard copies of the sermon series in the traditional way.

3. Being more aware and better able to anticipate the historical baggage of the past and slowing down to acknowledge this before rushing into sharing new ideas. This included whether my passion and vision for “being with” became controlling in itself; for instance, removing the pews could be seen as being controlling too.
4. The nature of my own ministry and being able to change my style of leadership to be with my congregation rather than being for them. In addition, the need to be the shepherd who goes out to firstly meet the flock where they are rather than gathering them up and taking them to a place of my choosing and thereby doing too much for them. How this might have been better achieved if I had involved the whole Working Group (not just one of them) in the actual sermon construction.
5. An understanding of tradition, as seen through a traditionalist mindset, as not being something which holds the change process back but is rather a vital part of the dynamic that ensures that future change is rooted in God’s love which never changes and is always present, but which rather now needs to be identified in new places and in new ways.
6. Whether the two new Marks of Mission are just words on paper or whether they can be fleshed out so that they become vital to the life and work of the congregation.

These themes will also form the basis for further theological reflection in Chapter 4, as well as provide pointers for how the Working Group might continue to prepare for the proposed Union and how other such groups in the Church of Scotland might also do likewise as we continue to be a Reformed Church that is *semper reformanda*. It is to these conclusions that I now turn in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

Having told the story of my research project through a thick description of how it evolved, and having presented the results, it can be seen that several main themes emerged from the data, all of them connected to changes in perception and mindset. These main themes, as outlined at the end of Chapter 3, demonstrate a clear correlation to the Biblical and theological underpinning of the project, as developed in Chapter 2, and fall within the following areas: an understanding of incarnational ecclesiology by the Working Group and others; the delivery of the intervention through a sermon series; the chosen participatory research methodology; the nature of my own ministry, and my theological perspective, in relation to the congregation within the context of this project; and the freedom to engage with the two Marks of Mission at a local level. I will now reflect on these themes and, in so doing, assess the success or otherwise of the research intervention.

4.1. The Success/Effectiveness of the Intervention

The main aim of the research was to locate the research participants' (the Working Group) understanding of an incarnational ecclesiology within the context of the mission and outreach currently being undertaken in St Cuthbert's. As a result of the sermon series intervention, this can be deemed to have been a success, as evidenced from three areas:

- The mindset of the Working Group.

- Other feedback received.
- My own changed thinking.

The Mindset of the Working Group

This can be seen to have changed in the responses received to the open-ended, qualitative questions in the second questionnaire, which was issued after the delivery of the Advent sermon series. These questions were answered in great depth and detail, and with a theological emphasis not evident in the same answers in the first questionnaire, ensuring that one part of my aim and the means of achieving it was successful. Not only did these answers reflect on incarnational theology, but they also engaged with the theology of mission and control, showing an appreciation of tokenism whilst also being pastorally sensitive to the process of change within the Church.

Key examples, as detailed in Chapter 3, give a flavour of this change in mindset. The centrality of the word “with” was reflected upon: *“I appreciated the centrality of the theme of “God with us”. The incarnation expresses the idea that God is not remote but entered into and shared the human condition.”* Whilst the sense of how the Church had traditionally been “for” others was well articulated, referencing the second Advent sermon:

This was historically what Church was, doing things for others however that overlooked that we may have been doing things we thought were best without actually finding out what those we tried to help really needed. A good example being the Christmas Gifts to Wester Hailes; we now ask what is needed rather than making that decision ourselves. I wonder however if there are still things which we need to do for others and that there is a balance to be reached between “for” and “with”.

Importantly, the same feedback also noted the need to find a balance between “for” and “with” and this was a need that started also to shake my own mindset during the course of the project as I will reflect upon shortly.

Meanwhile, it was reassuring to note that the use of image within the sermon series had a powerful impact for one of the group who also remarked how the project would be helpful for St Cuthbert’s as it moved towards its future union. This was particularly pleasing to note as it had been a key aim of my intervention: *“A brilliant and pictorially rich interweaving of Advent themes of coming into, emptying, humility, sacrificial service, etc. in pursuit of the best, most Biblical and prophetic means of being the Church with others. This project will be immensely helpful in guiding St Cuthbert's into the future that awaits.”*

Whilst not specifically mentioning Mission (the absence of any significant reflection on Mission is interesting and I reflect on this later in the conclusion) it was encouraging to note in the following response the affirmation of ecumenical engagement which was a key observation of the Theological Forum when considering it’s response to the new Marks of Mission.

I thought the Advent Sermon Series was carefully planned and fulfilled one if its aims of getting the congregation to think about the role of the church more fully. I thought inviting Archbishop Cushley was wonderful, showing our willingness to work with others especially Roman Catholics with whom the Church of Scotland has had a difficult relationship. Also wonderful to have our Ukrainian friends with us, and to incorporate all these people and groups into our Nine Lessons and Carols

As well as evidencing the success of the intervention by reflecting on the feedback as presented in the responses from the Working Group to the second questionnaire, further success can be evidenced in two outcomes which have transpired since the

delivery of the Advent sermon series and can both be directly linked back to it. The first was an email I received from the Chair of the Working Group who reported back to me, in March 2024, on a meeting that the St Cuthbert's Working Group had had with the representatives from Edinburgh Presbytery who were tasked with advising on how to implement the Union. The Chair noted that, whilst the agenda contained many items, it was dominated by a discussion between St Cuthbert's and Greyfriars about their different approaches to mission. This discussion specifically referenced the Advent sermon series and how St Cuthbert's had a distinctive incarnational approach to "being with" others.

The second outcome that suggests that the intervention can be deemed to have been a success was as a direct result of the second sermon in the series. One of the homeless guests, who regularly attends the Sunday meal in the sanctuary, was there to attend worship on Advent 2 as he heard that the volunteers from Steps to Hope would be taking part in the service. Our Pastoral Assistant who is also a member of the Working Group, came to see me in the New Year to say our friend wanted to be baptised as he had been so moved by the Advent 2 sermon that he wanted now to dwell "with us" his new family. He was duly baptised on Easter Sunday 2024 during the Parish Worship.

Other feedback received

The success of the intervention in the changing of mindsets and people's perceptions can also be evidenced from the individual feedback I received, over fellowship and refreshments immediately following the Sunday Services. The fact that these responses had not been ones I had gone out to illicit as part of my research, but rather were spontaneous and unprepared for, gives them a unique immediacy as they

were as a direct result of the sermons that had just been delivered, with little time to reflect on the message.

As previously mentioned, after Advent 2, I was challenged by a member of the congregation who said that I had not done justice to the Gift Service that was traditionally part of that Sunday's service each year. I had brushed over it, and it seemed that what I had to say and share was obviously more important. It didn't matter what my message was, it is what I didn't say that was the thing that she would always remember and feel hurt by. However, the same person made a point of coming up to me at the end of the Advent 4 service to say how special and beautiful it had been to be invited up to join the tableau around the Nativity and "be with" the Ukrainian refugees worshipping together in her church. This change of perspective and mindset was as a direct result of the research intervention during the course of its delivery.

The feedback I received from the Bible Study Group was particularly helpful in pointing out how my intervention and desire to get my "being with" message over had isolated some those with a more traditionalist mindset: *"We are aware that some people felt criticised that all the Christian service that they had given for decades at St Cuthbert's was of little apparent value or at least it was not acknowledged in the sermons."* This was never my intention, but it does reflect on how I was not empathetic in recognising the service in mission and outreach that many of the mostly elderly congregation had given over the years.

My lack of awareness and appreciation of the struggles of many of my congregation was further highlighted in the following feedback: *"It is easier at my advanced age to do things "for" others rather than "with" them. I would love to get out*

and about and serve and “be with” others but I struggle even to get myself to worship on a Sunday.”

I now realise that I only presented one dimension of what it is to love and serve the Lord. “The radical nature of the call of the first disciples (Mk. 1:17) to leave everything behind (1:18), including family (3:31-35; 10:28-30) and wealth (10:17-22) remains a daunting challenge today, and one which is difficult for many to realistically conceptualise in our modern-day society and world.”¹³⁹ What is the role of the elderly folk in a congregation such as mine and what is their responsibility? James Dunn provides a thought-provoking response.

In mission there are those who go out in evangelism (the twelve), but not all are evangelists. There are those who must leave behind everything and those for whom there is a prior obligation [...] whose role in mission is to pray and to provide hospitality and back-up for those who go forth. [Therefore], in a community not all responsibilities of discipleship devolve on all disciples, or on all disciples alike.¹⁴⁰

I believe this perspective gives comfort to those who are not physically able to respond to the strong call to leave everything behind, and yet gives them a suitable challenge and role to support the proclamation, mission and service of those who are thus called. Within the community of disciples there is no hierarchy of call, as the responsibilities for mission and service are exercised in different ways by different followers. The call is “to become part of the solution instead of part of the problem.”¹⁴¹ But many will only become part of

¹³⁹ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 183.

¹⁴⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus’ Call to Discipleship* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 114.

¹⁴¹ N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (London: SPCK, 1994), 40.

the solution if their gifts are recognised and acknowledged, and this is something to my shame that I failed to do.

In contrast it was interesting to note, as reflected on in Chapter 3, that a member of the Ukrainian community, who took part in the Advent 4 service and who had no prior connection with St Cuthberts or indeed with the Church of Scotland, and was therefore not of a traditionalist mindset, saw things differently. She was more embracing of a new “being with” perspective, when she fed back that the cry from the pulpit: “C’mon St Cuthbert’s, let’s take some ownership over all this!” was the best message she had heard all Christmas and gave her and the other refugees great hope, thinking we are all in this together.

I now recognise that my choice of intervention methodology, by definition of being delivered as part of an open act of parish worship, also touched a wider group beyond the research participants, some of whose feedback, as just shared, was particularly helpful in changing my own thinking and deepening my own understanding of Ministry and ecclesiology to which I will now turn.

My own changed thinking

Lastly, the intervention can be deemed to be a success in the way that, during the season of Advent, my own theological understanding of “being with” changed, as did my ministry style. I had set about believing that it was only by “being with” others and doing mission differently that things might change. During the course of the sermon series, I realised that “being for” others was a prerequisite to “being with” them. Doing the mission of God (*missio Dei*), which had been my main priority, could only perhaps come about by firstly encountering the image of God (*imago Dei*) within worship. This also

meant that, whilst I might have had my own experience of “being with” and doing things differently in lockdown, that was not the experience of the congregation. As they came out of lockdown, they could not be expected to move at the same speed or in the same direction as me. They needed time to tell their story and reflect upon it, just as I was telling them mine through the Advent sermon series.

4.2. Lessons learned about the Delivery of the Intervention

The use of a participative sermon series:

From the outset, there was always the risk that a sermon series would undermine my wish to “be with” others as a sermon, more often than not, sees the minister in a monologue telling the congregation what is good “for them.” The intervention had the potential for me to “be for” my congregation by traditionally controlling what is said and what is not said from on-high in the pulpit. This also included the risk that the delivery of a sermon would be too wordy in itself, and potentially fall into the trap of “the Word becoming flesh only to be made word again”, something that I had set out to avoid. The fact that some of the research participants found it helpful to receive hard copies of the sermons in the traditional way also suggested that words were the common and expected currency of this medium of delivery. To address these risks, and the possibility of my intervention failing, it was vital that others participate in the delivery of the sermons. Thus, the sermon delivery moved from being just words to words and tableau and ultimately to words, tableau and participation.

I received encouraging feedback that, whilst sharing that some found this format to be “*difficult to relate to*”, it was more because of the fact that folk were not used to it

as opposed to not warming to it. In fact, it was hoped that such a participatory sermon could be incorporated into the St Cuthbert's Sunday Service Schedule on a monthly basis:

I have enjoyed the Advent Sermon Series and was also grateful to receive them in print which I have often read again getting further benefit. The Advent Sermon which had the most effect on me was the one with the Ukrainian netters. The child in the manger today, the future - it felt so emotional and alive. I related to the visual parts of all the services and have remembered them quite clearly. I was just sorry that we had not been doing this in the past even a different type of service once a month as I think for some people it was so unusual for them that they found it difficult to relate to. I welcomed the services as it reinforced what I felt about what Church was really about and the Church of the future.

As previously noted, we have a monthly midweek Soul Space reflection led by lay members of the church and others. One of the leaders is John, a member of the Working Group who, as seen, shared one of his Soul Space reflections as part of Advent 3 Sunday sermon. I now hope to work with him to encourage other members of the Soul Space team to share their reflections as part of the Sunday worship following its midweek delivery.

Involvement of the Working Group

Participatory research methodology, as it suggests, involves the participation of others. By involving only the charity volunteers in the delivery of the sermon series I missed something by not collaborating with the Working Group in the intervention. This potentially could again be seen as me trying to be in control of the research from the outset and of my influencing the minds of the research participants by not allowing them to have some ownership of the sermons. My leadership style was very much open to scrutiny from the start of the project, and it took me a long time to realise it. My aim had always been to create, with the charity volunteers, a tableau that would allow the members of the Working Group to have an epiphany moment, by engaging with an

image, not words, just as all the participants in the original Nativity encounter had experienced it. For this reason, the research participants were not involved in the creation of the sermons (apart from one of the group who was directly involved in creating and delivering Advent 3). On reflection, I probably left this aim (of presenting an epiphany moment) too much to chance and was very fortunate that it came together right at the last, with the Working Group feedback sharing the experience of the awe of this epiphany moment around the crib: *“The Advent Sermon which had most affect on me was the one with the Ukranian netters. The child in the manger today, the future - it felt so emotional and alive. I related to the visual parts of all the services and have remembered them quite clearly.”*

It would have been interesting to see if the same result would have been achieved by involving the Working Group (ultimately the key research stakeholders in the intervention) in the choice of the sermon message from the outset or even just in the selection of the two Marks of Mission. On reflection, perhaps my zeal to get the Working Group into the “with” camp showed that I was inadvertently more in the “for” camp myself by trying to over-control the delivery. I (as noted in Chapter 3) “needed the Working Group to see how the newly configured space in the sanctuary could be used to” make God’s Word “Bigger and closer not smaller and further away.” My need to achieve this could be seen as self justification, an apology for the reconfiguration of the sanctuary space, and I should have had the confidence and faith to let our sacred space speak for itself rather than feeling this need, which others could potentially say was all about me. I hoped that the creation of tableaux and images would allow the space to do the talking.

These reflections on the choice of a sermon series as my chosen research medium and how I involved various participants during the process now need to be reflected upon

in light of the use of image/tableau as well as congregational participation, to help gauge the overall success or otherwise of the project.

The use of tableaux and congregational participation

The use of image (whether painting or tableau) was successful, I think, in trying to avoid this potential risk of being in control through my words and the pre-perceived notion of the minister dictating the sermon. The positive response to the tableaux would ultimately vindicate my choice of research intervention.

My aim was to deliver the sermons in such a way that I would “be with” others and, as mentioned, I aimed to achieve this by using images/tableaux and not words to share the message. By using volunteers to create these images, and with me coming down from the pulpit to be with them and share their space so to be part of the tableau, the focus in the sermon then moved to inviting the congregation to come up into the same space where the tableau had been created and so become a part of it, and so part of the story too.

I aimed to create a dynamic whereby we were “all in it together.” I certainly didn’t see this as a means of fixing or changing a traditional broken “being for” mindset; rather I saw it as an invitation for others to see things from a different perspective, just as those who were caught up in the first Nativity found themselves thinking differently because of what they saw and encountered and what they were invited to come and see and be a part of. This worked well particularly, as already evidenced and mentioned above, in the feedback from the last sermon (Advent 4) when the same person who thought I was being too directly challenging and telling them what was good ‘for’ them in the Gift Service (Advent 2) said how beautiful it was to be invited up to the nativity

tableau to be with those who were delivering the sermon. This for me was the coming together of the participatory research model whereby “best results are achieved by engaging participants as equals and in which the interests of all stakeholders are preferably taken into account.”¹⁴²

However, it is important to acknowledge that I only just managed to achieve this in the last moment, of the last sermon, when all the worshippers became participants in the intervention when they were invited into the space and, by coming up, became participants in the overall tableau. Literally the Word had become flesh before our eyes as the babe, swaddled in a winter camouflage net, which had been weaved in the clock tower, was placed in the crib.

Thus, I believe that my research intervention through a series of participative sermons, rather than through another medium was ultimately justified and successful.

The choice of Advent rather than another liturgical season

Advent, unlike Lent and Holy Week, is a story that people have grown up with, often within a family setting, where memories are cherished and protected. Advent traditionally affords a collective sense of well-being (effervescence) in the Church family, just as the Holy Family were surrounded by supporters in the Manger. Lent, on the other hand, challenges people individually, encouraging acts of moral beauty, mirroring Christ alone on the cross carrying out his act of sacrificial love.

Perhaps the message I aimed to share in worship would have been better suited to being delivered in Lent, where people are not so reticent about being taken out of their

¹⁴² Bob Dick, Facilitating Participatory Research in the Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/facilitating-participatory-research>

comfort zones and being challenged. On reflection, I don't think I gave the congregation, in the Advent sermons, enough time to engage with their spiritual sense of what Advent is all about and how it has sustained them in the past. I was in a hurry to get my point over, and this sense of rushing also had other consequences, particularly in Advent 2, when I was supported by the volunteers from Steps to Hope. I had hoped that the congregation would see them as volunteers first and foremost who shared our sacred sanctuary on a Sunday evening serving the homeless. However, as they were all members of the neighbouring Roman Catholic Church and were supported in person by their Archbishop, they introduced themselves as such. This allowed a member of the congregation to remark after the service, "*if I had wanted to go to a Roman Catholic service, I would not have come to St Cuthbert's.*" I could have avoided this if we had had more time to rehearse the creation of the tableau on that Sunday. It was a powerful service, and the message did get across, but at the expense, I think, of unnecessarily upsetting some people.

There was also no reason to believe that an epiphany moment could be better experienced during the season of Advent rather than Lent. Notably, it was the timeframe of writing this paper, which fell within Advent, that dictated my choice of liturgical season. This was perhaps an example of being controlled outwith the research intervention itself. However, ultimately, the incarnational ecclesiology of "being with" fitted in well with the season of Advent and gave it a particular focus and edge.

The design of the questionnaire

The overall success of the research intervention was also reliant upon the questionnaire both before and after the sermon series. Whilst the quantitative/ranking

questions did not reveal much, and were perhaps too crude and obvious to illicit any worthwhile research feedback, I hoped that they would act as a way of easing people into the survey. Had the research participants just been presented with the deep open-ended qualitative questions, I thought they would have seen the project as being all too vague and lacking in focus. I had hoped that, by being eased in with questions that concerned the familiar workings and practices of the life of St Cuthbert's, it would allow the participants to feel they were walking on familiar ground, which in turn, would then go on to give them the confidence to answer the open questions in the second questionnaire from their own perspectives. There is no evidence to suggest that I was successful in achieving this and the in-depth answers to the open questions cannot be related back to the ranking/closed questions.

Meanwhile, I found that, as a result of conducting this research and by being an instrumental participant in the sermon series intervention, both my theological understanding of incarnational ecclesiology and my style of ministry developed and changed during its course. It is to these two areas that I will now turn in evidencing whether the research intervention was successful in changing mindsets.

4.3. My Developing Theological Mindset

The theology behind the incarnational ecclesiology of “being with” as opposed to traditionally “being for” others:

This was reflected upon in detail by the research participants (see Chapter 3) and was the main focus of the sermon series. What emerged from their answers was a need to acknowledge a balance of both. Also, that for a predominantly elderly congregation, it is

easier to be “for” others rather than “with” them, as was evidenced in the feedback from the Bible Study Group. I had initially set about to push for “being-with” at the expense of all else and now realise that this was a mistake.

In reflecting upon my own change of mindset within the incarnational ecclesiology of “being with” as opposed to “being for”, I now see that this co-dependence of both ways of “being Church” can, for me, be best explained in the direct linking of worship to mission. In worship we see the image of God (*imago Dei*) and it is this in turn which inspires us to carry out his Mission (*missio Dei*) – we cannot have one without the other. In my eagerness to ‘be with’ others I had immediately prioritised what Dacher Keltner calls “acts of moral beauty” such as the Samaritan crossing the road to “be with” the victim and the widow Ruth selflessly staying to “be with” her widowed mother-in-law. I saw these as being a new way of doing mission and, in so doing, over-prioritised “being with” at the expense of seeing the bigger picture. This was helpfully pointed out in feedback from one of the Working Group:

The sermons suggested “being with” was the way forward and “being for” was passé. There was no attempt to “being with” others and being committed to others in action and reflection. The attempt to create an overarching theology of practice based purely on “being with” in my opinion is limited and runs the risk of obsolescence as society changes. There are alternative theological approaches which offer a more inclusive ministry.

I now realise that, for me, within the church community action must firstly be rooted in worship where collectively the traditionalists and the modernists have the opportunity of experiencing what Keltner calls “collective effervescence.” Encountering the image of God through worship, whereby our uniqueness is revealed through the person of Jesus Christ, can create a sense of “collective effervescence” which is vital for the church

family to feel at one and, in turn, inspire them to serve Christ in mission and outreach “with others.” Another way to understand this collective effervescence might be, as Rowan Williams suggests, that to become truly holy is to be “taken over with the extraordinariness of God” and the mark of the holy Church is one that is “taken over by the excitement of the extraordinariness of God.”¹⁴³

Keltner identifies the need to recognise what gives people a collective sense of happiness and comfort, this sense of feeling extraordinary in the presence of God, and to acknowledge this before expecting people to do more and do things in a different way. I failed to acknowledge what works for my congregation before encouraging them to see and do things differently. On reflection I now realise that I wanted to push my people too quickly into performing acts of moral beauty without firstly acknowledging the awe and sense of wellbeing, through encountering Christ’s unconditional love, that they collectively experience by regularly worshipping together, drawing on their cherished liturgy and hymns. Liam Fraser very helpfully points out that’ “discernment begins with worship and contemplation of his glory, and ends with the vision of the new creation that is breaking into the old. It neither begins nor ends with the preservation of historic feuds, theological systems, or denominational identities, but with God and with God alone.”¹⁴⁴

To manage the move from one way of doing things (traditionalist) to another (modernist) requires the type of change management that we see in Christ’s post resurrection encounters. Just as I had been fixed on presenting acts of moral beauty as the way of implementing mission by “being with” others at the expense of worship, I now

¹⁴³ Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life* (London: SPCK, 2016), 53.

¹⁴⁴ Fraser, *Mission*, 223.

realise that in Sam Wells's percentages of Christ's earthly ministry, that predominantly focus on Him "being with" us, there is a key component/percentage that Wells had not recognised. This missing percentage possibly holds the answer to achieving the fine balance between "being for" and "being with," which I now see as being vital to the success of changing minds and perceptions so as to better engage in mission.

Worshippers are traditionally dismissed from a service and, in many ways, place a tick in the box completing that part of their Sunday ritual. However, in Christ's earthly ministry there was a 40-day component that Wells does not touch upon; namely, the post-resurrection encounters. This is when people saw Christ differently and He engaged with them as if conducting participatory research, either by breaking the bread in the inn at Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), so that people would recognise Him, or by catching fish and having breakfast on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 24:1-14), always acknowledging people's fears and uncertainty and often starting with the words, "Peace be with you." (Luke 24:36). He needed to be with them, firstly by doing things for them, and to understand their grief and fear before He could expect them to see Him differently. These post-resurrection encounters occurred after a period of dramatic change – a 3-day lockdown in the tomb – accompanied by loss and grief. By gently being alongside others, the Risen Christ, whom His followers didn't recognise at first in His changed appearance, engaged with them by doing traditional, well-tried and tested things that they would be familiar with. In the case of Mary in the Resurrection Garden, it was identifying her by her name - nothing else, no preconditions or expectations - that gave her the hope to carry on in these changed and challenging times (John 20:17). These post-resurrection encounters would now seem to me to be a good model for engaging with change which

prioritises pastoral care and the ability to see things from different perspectives; a perspective that builds on ‘being-for’ by giving the congregation the confidence to go out and try to ‘be-with.’

I now realise that addressing the Marks of Mission is a collective effort that must start within the worship setting¹⁴⁵ through a shared sense of collective effervescence and then be put into action drawing on the example of Christ’s post resurrection earthly ministry and encounters. Whilst my theological perspective of how to deliver mission has changed as a result of conducting this research, so too has my style of ministry which I will now reflect upon.

4.4. My Developing Ministerial Mindset

Just as my theological mindset was changed during this research, so too has my mindset with regards to my style of ministry, most notably in three key areas:

Firstly, the need to be congruent with and empathetic of the past and thus build on the existing way of “being-for” to give confidence and grounding to embrace “being-with.” In the real time feedback after the services, there was a sharing of how important, as I see it and understand it, a collective sense of effervescence is, along with a sense of the need for order and the control of the worship through experiencing the familiar liturgical cycle. In other words, the familiarity of people and place and content of worship was of a great comfort to many of the traditional members of the congregation. On reflection, I had not created the time within the research intervention to allow for this

¹⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that Liam Fraser sees the new Marks of Mission as being focussed, “too much on the outward life of the church...it is only when a proper integration of worship, discipleship, service and evangelism is achieved that Mission is both effective and sustainable.” Fraser, *Mission*, 219.

vital part of who the people of St Cuthbert's were, to be acknowledged. This sense of my letting some of the congregation down was shared in this response:

Whilst the series was to get the congregation to think about the role of the church more fully, I think care is needed to ensure the Sunday morning congregation and members/adherents do not feel less worthy compared to the other groups in St Cuthbert's. I fear, by preaching to members/adherents about the homeless/addicts and Ukrainians regularly, members/adherents are beginning to feel like everything they and their ancestors stand for, and everything they do for St Cuthbert's, is not as appreciated as much now. I suppose 1 Peter 4:10 comes to mind - sometimes these talents are not working with the homeless/addicts and Ukrainians, and that should not be an issue."

This resort to the familiar should not be underestimated and how one goes about questioning this, or suggesting other ways of "being Church", should not be taken lightly. For example, I think my use of the concept of a token gesture was too harshly presented in Advent 2 when I used the Gift Service to make this point, and the feedback I received immediately after the service (see Chapter 3) showed that it was insensitive and hurtful to try and make the congregation see something from a different perspective by undermining a much-loved tradition that had served them well in the past. Fortunately for me, the participatory research method allowed me to explain in person after the service the point that I was trying to make. I hadn't factored this in and now realise the importance for creating such time and space as part of the responsibility for leading worship. There has to be space for a pastoral follow-up in worship or else God's work is not being fully done. The time for coffee and fellowship, I now see, is a time for the minister to listen rather than fill it up with more words.

Likewise, the prayer before a sermon is delivered; ("May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength, and our Redeemer") needs to be reversed in post worship fellowship, in order that it is the minister who does the meditating in her/his heart as the congregation share their thoughts.

This discovery for me links in well to the pastoral imperative (see Chapter 2), as noted in Calvin's Geneva, that must accompany any change in the Church.¹ An elderly congregation can feel threatened by change, as some of the replies suggested, and this makes the whole process of change management all the more important to get right by involving, and giving ownership of the process to, as many as possible and understanding people's pastoral needs. This is something I think I failed to do in my zeal to get everyone to see mission from my new perspective. I ultimately lacked an understanding of the tradition of St Cuthbert's and could only see it as being something which holds the change process back. This was quite rightly picked up in one of the responses: *"Too much concentration on "others". We must nurture the congregation and not forget their needs. Without them it would not be possible to carry out outreach work. St Cuthbert's has a history of helping others. Some of this was done with other churches eg evening meals for homeless in our old church hall - an example of "for" and "with"."*

I now realise that to appreciate the more traditionalist mindset is not to be shackled by it and the past, and to be weighed down by it; it is rather to facilitate and build upon what has already been achieved and adapt it to make it fit for purpose going forward. It was Richard Rohr who best described this sense of building upon the past to enable positive participation and change in the present which in turn would lead to sustainable new ways of "being Church" in the future:

The solid ground of the perennial tradition never really shifted. It was only the lens, the criteria, the inner space, and the scope, that continued to expand, I was always being moved towards greater differentiation, and larger, viewpoints and simultaneously towards a greater inclusivity in my ideas, a deeper understanding of people, and a more honest sense of justice. God always became bigger and led me to bigger places. If God could "include" and allow, then why not I?¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (London: SPCK, 2013), 107.

I now acknowledge and recognise that awareness of the past is a vital part of the dynamic that ensures that future change is rooted in God's love which never changes and is always present. Only from this starting point can we identify how it is to be found in new places and in new ways. I was not able to identify who was controlling what in the process – control has a dynamic of its own, as I found out in some of the feedback. For instance, the worship setting should not be a place to push my own agenda, and I needed to acknowledge that my research agenda was specifically for one particular group (the Working Group) and, as a result, I perhaps didn't respect why others had come to worship on each Sunday. That said, I do believe that each service had a stand-alone integrity of its own, along with the incarnational theme for Advent of "being with" running throughout the liturgical season.

Even within the writing up of the research, I had to work hard at describing without evaluating from my own perspective or research agenda. This vital research capability requires creating a bit more distance than I was able to achieve and also handing over ownership to others. Whilst I chose the research topic, I did not own it, as, by signing up research participants, it became as much their project as mine.

Secondly, the realisation that leading from the front can be too "for" and controlling and not enough "with." As mentioned, I think I now realise that I engaged with this project with a zeal and passion to share my understanding of "being with" others, as opposed to "being for" them, which didn't take into account where the congregation found themselves after the period of lockdown, which, for many of them

resulted in a period of grieving for all that had been lost and also a fear of what was to come in the new Presbytery Plan.

With regards to my own style of ministry, I think that I am good at getting things done, good at challenging people to see things differently and let their faith grow but, in my rush to deliver in these challenging and messy times, I think initially I should have stopped alongside others and listened to them to find out what their concerns, hopes and fears were. Participatory research encourages this way of working, and I don't think I did justice to the research method in this respect. The sense of rushing also became evident in the three in-person services. By involving others in the delivery of the sermon, I found that I was always trying to catch up, even during the sermon itself, to keep the participants on message and on topic. This was not fair on them nor on the congregation. I think I took a liberty at times with the worship.

Thirdly, reflecting on how my mindset changed in light of my experience in lockdown versus that of my congregation. Whilst I had experienced "being with" others during lockdown, and this had radically changed my understanding of ministry (which previously I had seen as being the leader doing things "for" others), I now realise that this was not an experience shared by my congregation who were not fortunate like me to be able to carry on their ministry in person during the pandemic. Coming out of lockdown, I first and foremost forgot the need to be the shepherd who goes out to find the flock where they are and to safely bring them home, rather than gathering them up and taking them to a place of my choosing and thereby doing too much for them.

My own leadership style had evolved from the being "for" minister to the being "with" minister. I had achieved this, I think, in lockdown with the homeless community

but had yet to do so with my own congregation who, as I noted in Chapter 3: “seemed to have little ownership or, sadly interest in the new ways of doing mission” that my ministry was encouraging and engaged with. I never stopped to take account of how, whilst I had been able to have an in-person ministry in lockdown, they had existed online and were still grieving and lost and had not been given time to share their hurt and disconnect.

Meanwhile, I pressed on trying to keep St Cuthbert’s intact and fit for purpose in the eyes of the Church which wanted us to prioritise new ways of doing mission, seemingly at the expense of everything else. I failed to be pastorally sensitive to the needs of my congregation before encouraging them to see things differently. This included whether my passion and vision for “being with” became controlling in itself; for instance, removing the pews could be seen as being controlling too.

Concluding reflections of my change of mindset with respect to my ministry

Ultimately, I now see that, in a period of change, one should not expect to immediately see the results one is planning for – they might emerge in unexpected ways. It is only by slowing things down, and identifying at a personal level with others in a familiar setting, that it is possible to move forward. In the post-resurrection encounters, Christ engaged with His grieving followers in such a manner and, as minister, I have learned, by trying to push mission forward, that my congregation are still grieving for what was lost in lockdown and are starting to grieve again as they prepare to lose their unique historic identity by going into a Union that was never planned for. This sermon series did not do justice to this and did not journey with the congregation as a whole, but was rather too focussed on engaging with the research participants at the expense of

others. My leadership style was very much open to scrutiny from the outset of the project and it took me a long time to realise it.

4.5. Evaluation of the Participatory Research Methodology

Whilst noting that time limitations (eg: not being able to rehearse the sermon tableaux until on the day of delivery) did not do justice to my chosen research methodology, participatory research by its very nature did support the incarnational theology of “being with.” The use of participatory research worked well, despite my not being familiar with its methodology prior to this paper. Its emphasis on continuous engagement with the participants, and building up relationships throughout the research, was well suited to the church community/family setting. Not only did I have engagement with the research participants themselves, through the daily ongoing life and work of St Cuthbert’s, but I also had engagement with the volunteer participants through the sermon series and their involvement through the charities they serve which operate out of St Cuthbert’s. It was a really exciting dynamic to be part of throughout Advent and I would recommend participatory research methodology for future research projects that might be undertaken in the church setting. This might incidentally be one of the most unplanned for discoveries resulting from this paper!

Having said that, I did probably play quite loose and easy with the precise methodology of participatory research. This has become clear due to the nature of not having just one group participating in the project. On the one hand, I had the volunteers who helped construct and deliver the research intervention. Then I also had the research participants themselves, namely the Working Group, who engaged with the research in a

different way to the volunteers. Whilst I stand by my reasons for not engaging the working group in the construction of the sermons (see 4.3), I do think, on reflection, that there was scope to have them involved in the choice of the Marks of Mission that the sermons hoped to address.

I could have asked the Working Group what Marks they most connected to and saw being lived out in the life of the church rather than me just choosing two on my own. This could perhaps have been done by holding a workshop on the Marks of Mission in advance of writing the sermon series. I think the fact that the new Marks have just landed on the Church as a whole, with no real time to consider them (just as we have been thrown into preparing for an unplanned Union), shows that, at the moment we are trying to play “catch up at the congregational level” and, as a result, things are sadly being done piecemeal including my own ministry. My key task, however, was to get the volunteers from the charities involved in the delivery of the sermons, so it could be seen that our mission and outreach involved us “being with” others, specifically through our worship, and this became my main focus.

4.6. Success in Sharing a Vision

As detailed, the research intervention came very close to being in direct conflict with its aims, with me potentially being seen to be controlling the outcomes. However, as the feedback shows, I think the sharing of images and tableaux was a way of ameliorating this risk, as it left the congregation free to interpret what was being delivered from their own perspectives. In a way, it was a subtle transfer of control. The reformed tradition has, for so long, focussed solely on the word and images have, overall, been shunned. It was

interesting that the painting of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) seemed to reflect the theology of “being with” and “being for” and needed no interpretation from me. From the feedback it can be noted that the Protestant work ethic, as identified by Max Weber¹⁴⁷ (to be seen to be doing things “for” others) can become more important than the spiritual encounter and “being with” others. I think that the spirituality of service, as located within the worshipping sanctuary during the sermon series, was well received and feedback noted how the members of the congregation enjoyed having others participate in the worship with them.

4.7. Conclusion

I think that, whilst I have achieved my aim of allowing the Working Group to articulate theologically their appreciation of the on-going mission and outreach at St Cuthbert’s, there is still a long way to go in linking this directly to the new Marks of Mission. Although these are now the primary focus of the Church of Scotland, we do not seem to have the structures, or indeed the confidence in place at the local congregational level, to take ownership of them. Whilst Presbyterianism is not Congregationalism, presbyteries need to encourage and support local initiatives with regards to mission and outreach and how these can best be delivered by those who have an understanding of the local context (this was explored in Advent 3). Traditionally, through its system of Courts, members of the Church have waited to be told what to do. The fact that none of the new five Marks of Mission mentions worship also means that the focus of the Marks is seen to

¹⁴⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: Penguin books, 2002).

be distanced from a vital part of the practicing life and work of the congregation.¹⁴⁸ This lack of mention of mission was also reflected in the feedback I received which, on the whole, did not mention mission either. As I discovered for myself in this project, it is by being inspired through worship and seeing the image God in our praise and prayers that we are then left with no option but to serve Him through mission and outreach. As Liam Fraser notes:

Worship then, is not just a good singalong with likeminded churchgoers in a nice building, but a foretaste of eternal life. Today – haltingly, half-heartedly, but really and truly, - we can experience something of our eternal destinies, and act as signs of the coming Kingdom to an unbelieving world.¹⁴⁹

It is this going out to “act as signs of the coming Kingdom” having experienced “something of our eternal destinies” through worship that links mission and praise inextricably together, and as such, “the prioritisation and coordination of worship and mission is therefore a matter of crucial importance.”¹⁵⁰

Through the incarnation, God put “the ball in our court” not to become referees and write a rule book, but to become dynamic players in this amazing on-going and necessarily messy story, one in which we continue to be a Reformed Church that is *semper reformanda*. I hope that my research findings might have pointers for how the Working Group might continue to prepare for the Union and how other such groups in the Church of Scotland might also do likewise within their own unique narratives.

¹⁴⁸ Acknowledging this lack of focus on worship, Liam Fraser, in suggesting his own Marks of Mission for the Scottish Church, suggests that they should start with, “To glorify Father, Son and Holy Spirit in worship and prayer.” Fraser, *Mission*, 220.

¹⁴⁹ Fraser, “Primacy of Worship,” 41.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

In concluding with Ephesians 3:20; “Now to him, who is able to do measurably more than all we ask or imagine” there is a sense that no matter what we know of God’s love already, there is still more to learn and wonder at, and no matter how much God reveals to us even perhaps in this paper, but specifically through the Incarnation, there is an infinite amount beyond still to be grasped.

APPENDIX 1



**INFORMED
CONSENT FORM**
**Pittsburgh
Theological
Seminary
Doctor of
Ministry
Program**

INTRODUCTION:

My name is Peter Sutton, and I am a Post Graduate Student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

My phone number is 07718311319. My email is: psutton@pts.edu

My research advisor is Prof Angela Dienhart Hancock. Her phone number is (412) 924-1453. Her email is: ahancock@pts.edu. The study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary chaired by Dr Donna Giver-Johnston. Her phone number is 412-924-1421. Her email is: dgiverjohnston@pts.edu.

Feel free to contact any of us at any time if you have questions at any point about this project.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is to theologically resource the Working Group of the Parish Church of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, who have been tasked by the Kirk Session to prepare the congregation for going into a Union with the neighboring Parish.

I am trying to learn more about what perspective the group have on new ways of “being Church” particularly with regards to Sam Wells’ incarnational theology of ‘being-with’ others which underpins the Heart Edge Movement of which both congregations going into the Union are members. The anticipated title of the study will be ‘Bigger & Closer not Smaller & Further Away:’ a new perspective on how to “be Church’ in the Parish Church of St. Cuthbert in Edinburgh. _____.

PROCEDURE:

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways and make the following commitments: Answer a questionnaire before committing to following an Advent Sermon Series delivered by me at St Cuthbert’s during the regular 10.30am Parish

Worship over the four Sundays in December and then answer the same questionnaire again at the end of the series.

TIME REQUIRED:

The project will begin on 1/12/23 and conclude on 31/12/23. You are being asked to commit to 6 hours of your time.

VOLUNTARINESS:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still decline to be part of any session or answer any question that you do not wish to engage. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

RISKS:

I do not anticipate any risks associated with this study. In any human subject research involving self-disclosure, there is always the possibility that you may feel discomfort or distress in the course of the research. If this happens, please inform me immediately and decline to participate if you wish.

BENEFITS:

I anticipate the following possible benefits (in list form) to you and/or your congregation.

1. A personal time to reflect on your own faith in action.
2. A shared sense of the Working Group having a new perspective on what it means to be Church.
3. For the Working Group to be theologically resourced as it prepares the congregation for going into a Union.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:

I will be the only researcher present during the study. I will be the only person who sees/listens to any of its recordings. I will not share personal information that you tell me you have decided you do not wish to disclose. When I write the final paper, I will use pseudonyms (made-up names) for all participants and/or code the data I have received in such a way that your name will not be associated with it.

SHARING THE RESULTS:

I anticipate that the results of this research will be shared in the following ways: At an in person meeting with the Working Group where I will my findings and at which we can discuss them. You will receive my research findings by the end of January 2024.

There is the possibility that I may publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

BEFORE YOU SIGN:

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this project with the possibility of being audio-taped, videotaped, and your words being written in a final paper. Be sure that you are fully satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have before signing. If you agree to

participate in this study, you will receive a copy of this document. I will keep a copy, and the original will be kept in print form for three years in the Office of the Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Assessment.

Participant's printed name:

Participant's signature:

Date: _____

Parent or guardian's printed name:

Parent or guardian's signature:

Date: _____

Researcher's printed name: Peter

Sutton _____

Researcher's signature:

Date:

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

THIS IS THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO COMPLETE ONCE YOU HAVE FOLLOWED THE ADVENT SERMON SERIES.

Please rank in order of significance **for you**, the following questions. You should place your choices in descending order with your first choice being at the top and your last choice at the bottom of the list.-thank you!

‘Bigger & Closer not Smaller & Further Away’ - a new perspective on how to ‘be Church.’

1.Rank in order of significance the following worship activities: Ranking.

Singing

Gifting at the offering

Prayer

Sermon

Sharing the Peace

Fellowship after the service

2.Rank in order of relevance to the life and work of St Cuthberts the following groups: Ranking.

Members

Visitors

Homeless/addicts

External lets

Refugees

3.Rank in order of significance the following activities in our sanctuary:

Ranking.

Outreach

Music venue

Worship

Service

Welcoming/guiding

4.Where are you most likely to encounter God **in** St Cuthberts? Please rank in order: Ranking.

Sunday worship

Monthly Soul Space reflections

Tuesday coffee mornings

Fellowship after the service

Welcoming and serving others

5.Where are you most likely to encounter the Holy Spirit outside St Cuthberts? Please rank in order: Ranking.

Personal prayer

Bible study

In nature

In the visual arts (Music, Painting)

In meeting people and sharing your faith

6. Rank the following with regards to what is most likely to be relevant in the future ministry of St Cuthberts as we seek to follow in Jesus Christ's footsteps: Ranking.

Adapting the building (eg bigger kitchen)

New members

Developing outreach activities

Finding new external sources of income

Personal transformation

7. How do you feel about the removal of the traditional pews? Please give reasons for your answer in light of how the newly configured space has been used in worship and for other events.

Enter your answer.

8. What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to **be for others? Please answer in light of your experiences during this Advent.**

Enter your answer.

9. What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to **be with others? Please answer in light of your experiences this Advent.**

Enter your answer.

10. Please use this space to put down anything that you would like to share having followed the Advent Sermon Series, reflecting on any of the key themes that were developed along with specifically referencing things that were helpful/unhelpful, things that worked/didn't work for you.

Thank you for taking part in this second survey and I hope you enjoyed following the Advent Sermon Series and revisiting this questionnaire. I hugely value your input and support and hope that our findings will help support the Working Group moving forward. I look forward to sharing my research findings with you at a feedback session in due course. Warmest wishes, God Bless, Peter.

Enter your answer.

APPENDIX 3

Selected Questionnaire Responses

The Open Questions

Q.7 How do you feel about the removal of the traditional pews? Please give reasons for your answer.

“At first i was against this however it has been a very good thing allowing flexibility in use of the sanctuary thus allowing more diverse groups and organisation to use the space which promotes mission and introduces more people to the amazing space, hopefully sowing seeds of faith in some of those visitors.”

‘The services during Advent have demonstrated how helpful to worship the versatility that removing the pews has provided is, as well as to other activities (e.g. feeding the homeless). Having everyone come up and sit around the meal table or stand around the stable were both very effective ways of making the Word flesh through our physical involvement.’

“I was sceptical until I saw how it changed the sanctuary. When I first walked in, after the pews had been removed, I was moved to tears as I realised how it created a. more modern, adaptable building yet retained its beauty. I think it has allowed our outreach partners, Steps To Hope members, to enjoy the sanctuary, as they eat their meal there on a Sunday evening giving them the same experience the worshippers have hours before.”

“Brilliant on many levels. It says that people are the Church. It says that the Church is about serving others. It doesn't diminish the beauty of the worship space. It says the Church can be both adaptable but nourishing in its worship and service to a community. It sets precedent for further, perhaps even more radical changes in the future in pursuit of the best future for St Cuthbert's.”

Q 8 What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to be for others?

“Being "for" in the sense of being available but we need to beware of being prescriptive with preconceived ideas of people's needs - akin to "white saviour" syndrome and the way the IT industry devises and pushes the products it decides that we should want.”

“Being "for" others is good in the sense that it can encourage a servant mindset towards others. However, it too easily can become us deciding what others need and then just

putting it on (often through others, without us getting our hands dirty), and then bemoaning the fact that people didn't come to get it.”

“This was historically what Church was, doing things for others however that overlooked that we may have been doing things we thought were best without actually finding out what those we tried to help really needed. A good example being the Christmas Gifts to Wester Hailes; we now ask what is needed rather than making that decision ourselves. I wonder however if there are still things which we need to do for others and that there is a balance to be reached between "for" and "with".

“It's a beautiful, but slightly insidious, answer. We are in fact "for" others in the sense that we are bond-servants (slaves) to Christ and, by his example, to God the Father and those whom God loves (everyone). To say we are "for" something generally infers we are in some way "above" those we serve, rather than "the same" as those we serve”.

“To be for others is to say and do things from afar. To make decisions or contributions without the input or presence of the people you are working for.”

Q. 9 What do you think it means to say that the Church is there to **be with others**?

“I think doing things with folk is a development of doing things for others. It enables a much better focus on what is needed and targets what to do and what help to offer. It gets away from doing what we think is needed and replacing that with doing what people ask us to do. As a concept this provides a more empathatic way of providing mission and help. We need to be careful however to ensure that what we do is going to be beneficial to others, especially those who may not really know what is needed to better their lives. As mentioned above there is I feel a balance to be struck.”

“Being "with" others implies a two-way relationship and also more involvement with others. “being with” people can be messy and challenging, since we cannot then control what happens. We can only love and listen and seek to respond as the Spirit leads us. “being with” people should enable us to be more relevant to where they are and how they see things and, in so doing, recognise the historic baggage that the Church carries and which is getting in the way of effective mission and service.”

“The experiences of the four Advent services illustrated how we need to come together to make relationships with the marginalised (Steps to Hope- Advent 2), the Ukrainian Refugees (Advent 4) and the people new to church (Advent 3). We must work hard at being open and welcoming and show we are being transformed by God by being humble in serving God in our real world. Hence the illustrations of the Steps to Hope meal in front of the sanctuary (Advent 2), the camouflage netting over the Holy Family Stable and the placing of the camouflage winter net in the manger (Advent 4), and the conversation between Control and the Railway Shed supervisor in Advent 3).”

“We will grow bigger and closer when we get to know people by name, personality and knowing their stories. For as long as we are smaller and further away, we will remain in a Holy huddle, and St Cuthbert's will literally pass away because our demographics mean we are below critical mass in the number of physically active members we have, and we have yet to cross the generational divide. “

“We do not have a choice, we must be a growing church, not a maintenance church. To grow we have to be with people, one to one, or in small groups, and relationships have to develop in both directions - there cannot "them" and "us" - just one family of God helping one another through the challenges of life by “being with” one another.”

“It is better to say we are "with" others and reveal that this means we are in fact in their service. It assumes mutuality, equality, equanimity, humility, and malleability. It places us more readily into Emmanuel, God-with-us, whom we love and serve.”

“The church is there to be with others through both good and difficult times. Obviously the Advent series focussed on the homeless/addicts (Steps to Hope) and our Ukrainian friends, who all use the building at times other than Sunday mornings. The church “being with” these people as they ensure hardship and difficulties is important. Again, I would stress the church “being with” others is as important for members/adherents and the Sunday morning congregation. Our members/adherents also endure difficult times, e.g. I suffered from a difficult spell of poor mental health and I could have benefitted from the church “being with” me through that time.”

“It is there to walk alongside others especially those in difficulties, the homeless, people from other countries. It is there to enable others to grow in love and care for others, to experience the space between us where Christ and love is. For too long the Church has tried to do things for others without finding out from them what their needs are. The Church in the past has inwardly worked out its own needs with lots of committees etc which at the end of the day achieved very little for people but often met the needs only for those present justifying our own existence. It is so important that we listen to people, the people we seek to serve, to walk with them and to share.”

“To be with others is to invite and stand alongside. Not to support something going on elsewhere but to be right there with people. Not to take control of a given situation, but to work with others.”

Q 10 Please use this space to put down anything that you would like to share. Thank you for taking part in this survey and I hope you enjoy following the Advent Sermon Series:

“I appreciated the centrality of the theme of "God with us". The incarnation expresses the idea that God is not remote but entered into and shared the human condition.”

“I found the series of Sermons to be thought provoking and well presented. The use of elements other than direct preaching enhances the experience and assists in providing a focus for reflection after the Service is over. Some of the images used are very powerful and deeply moving (the picture of Christ standing at the shut door with no external handle being a particular example).”

“I felt the Advent sermons were imaginative, fresh and thought-provoking. They were very moving too, especially when Peter explained the history of the relationship with StH and his own journey of understanding and awareness during Covid. The bundle of camouflage net laid in the manger was also a very vivid representation of Christ with us today. I hadn't realised just how often the word "with" appears in the Christmas story. Being helped to notice this, and then to be open to the Spirit's application of this, made Christmas 2023 very memorable. Many thanks,, Peter!”

“I think that we need to do more with our ecumenical partners within the City Centre - this would allow us to reach out to more people of differing beliefs, of different age groups and would make us more aware of the needs of our local community. I think we need to grow our members so that there are more of us to be 'with' our community, I think we need to learn how to mingle, without making our presence felt, with the people on the edge of our congregation and community so that we can begin to understand their needs and what we can do to help them - this will include many of little faith or none. I also think we have to look out for St Cuthberts as if we do not we will not be there to look after those within our community who depend on us.”

“The illustrations of the meal preparation (Advent 2), the railway controller and shed supervisor, (Advent 3), and the camouflage netting over the Holy Family Stable (Advent 4) I thought were innovative and practical ways of getting alongside people. David Hockney's painting worked well because it was simple message to grasp. I suspect we did not emphasise how people who do not have the energy or the drive to be with people might fit in? Clearly any initiative needs much prayer around it and funding.”

“To deliver being "with" people needs two part-time paid postgraduates to be with people on our behalf because the congregation, with a few exceptions, will not change.

They are serving God with their best endeavours and are doing what they can at this stage of their lives.

The work is great, but the labourers are few...and we need new labourers now.”

“Too much concentration on "others". We must nurture the congregation and not forget their needs. Without them it would not be possible to carry out outreach work.

St Cuthbert's has a history of helping others. Some of this was done with other churches eg evening meals for homeless in our old church hall - an example of "for" and "with".

“The questions further compound the division by creating an arbitrary difference between “being with” or being for. The sermons suggested “being with” was the way forward and being for was passé There was no attempt to “being with” others and being committed to others in action and reflection. The attempt to create an overarching theology of practice based purely on “being with” in my opinion is limited and runs the risk of obsolescence as society changes. There are alternative theological approaches which offer a more inclusive ministry. One example is Tutu’s premise that we are all God’s family created in his image and utilising the framework of Ubuntu we are all interdependent “I am because you are “ There is no division or duality of Church and Other there is the community and society and world in which we reside. This redirects focus from an anthropocentric view to one directed to God and his love that we follow in Christ’s path.”

“A brilliant and pictorially rich interweaving of Advent themes of coming into, emptying, humility, sacrificial service, etc. in pursuit of the best, most biblical and prophetic means of being the Church with others. This project will be immensely helpful in guiding St Cuthbert's into the future that awaits.”

“I thought the Advent Sermon Series was carefully planned and fulfilled one if its aims of getting the congregation to think about the role of the church more fully. I thought inviting Archbishop Cushly was wonderful, showing our willingness to work with others especially Roman Catholics with whom the Church of Scotland has had a difficult relationship. Also wonderful to have our Ukrainian friends with us, and to incorporate all these people and groups into our Nine Lessons and Carols.”

“Linked to my answers above, whilst the series was to get the congregation to think about the role of the church more fully, I think care is needed to ensure the Sunday morning congregation and members/adherents do not feel less worthy compared to the other groups in St Cuthbert's. I fear, by preaching to members/adherents about the homeless/addicts and Ukrainians regularly, members/adherents are beginning to feel like everything they and their ancestors stand for, and everything they do for St Cuthbert's, is not as appreciated as much now. I suppose 1 Peter 4:10 comes to mind - sometimes these talents are not working with the homeless/addicts and Ukrainians, and that should not be an issue.”

“I have enjoyed the Advent Sermon Series and was also grateful to receive them in print which I have often read again getting further benefit. The Advent Sermon which had most affect on me was the one with the Ukranian netters. The child in the manger today, the future - it felt so emotional and alive. I related to the visual parts of all the services and have remembered them quite clearly. I was just sorry that we had not been doing this in the past even a different type of service once a month as I think for some people it was so unusual for them they found it difficult to relate to.

I welcomed the services as it reinforced what I felt about what Church was really about and the Church of the future.”

“I have become more aware of the dangers of working for others. It is easy to say something that is right, it is easy to donate to something that is right or to choose something. It is not a bad thing to be for others but it is not what we should strive for. We must go and do things with others, work alongside, get the insight of those who need help, gain perspective and work towards a good life alongside others. The use of imagery was very helpful. Having an image as an example during talks and discussion can help to guide the thinking process.

Reactions to the 4 services from the Bible Study Group

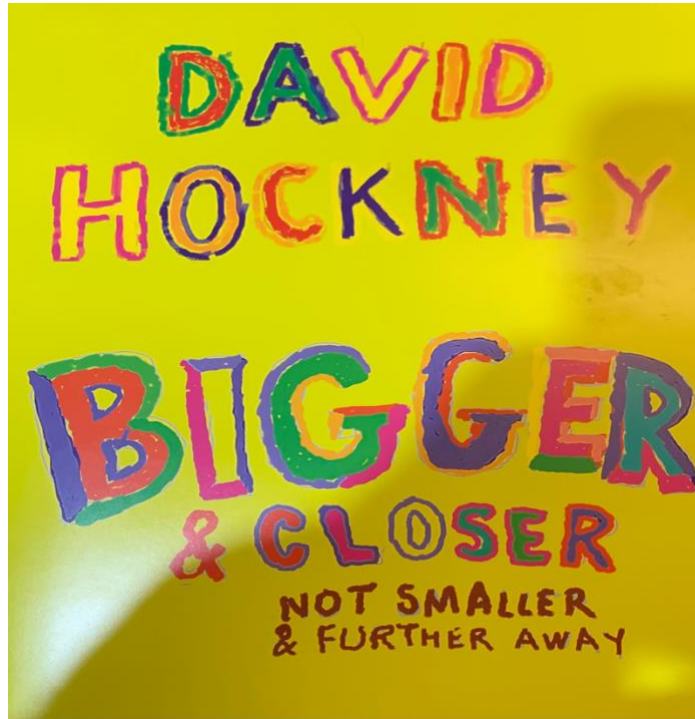
We are aware that some people felt criticised that all the Christian service that they had given for decades at St Cuthbert’s was of little apparent value or at least it was not acknowledged in the sermons. However, some of the group pointed out that the sermons were about how we minister to people in the future. Perhaps, it came as a shock to some of the traditionalists within the congregation because the ground had not been prepared. However, sermons are not always meant to make people feel comfortable.

On the other hand, for people recognising that we need to change to meet the Five Marks of Mission, and particularly the second one, in its original form, then these sermons were timely and helpful.

The illustrations in Sermons 2 to 4 of the preparation of the tables for the Steps to Hope meals, the conversation between the railway controller and the Dalry Rd Shed, the camouflage netting over the nativity stable were good illustrations and were well received by some members and visitors. David Hockney’s painting of “Bigger and Closer” is an easy message to grasp. The Mary and Martha scripture reminder was very appropriate.

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APPENDIX 4

1st Sunday in Advent

‘Bigger and Closer not Smaller and Further Away.’

Reproduced by permission of The Lightroom Gallery, London.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is to theologically resource the Working Group of the Parish Church of St Cuthbert, Edinburgh, who have been tasked by the Kirk Session to prepare the congregation for going into a Union with the neighboring Parish.

I am trying to learn more about what perspective the group have on new ways of “being Church” particularly with regards to Sam Wells’ incarnational theology of ‘being-**with**’ others which underpins the HeartEdge Movement of which both congregations going into the Union are members. The anticipated title of the study will be ‘Bigger & Closer not

Smaller & Further Away:’a new perspective on how to “be Church’ in the Parish Church of St. Cuthbert in Edinburgh.

PROCEDURE:

Having kindly consented to participate in this study, you should by now have completed the on-line questionnaire and be ready to follow the Advent Sermon Series prior to resubmitting the questionnaire, by 6th January 2024, reflecting any new perceptions you might have. I will send you a new link to this questionnaire by 31st December 2023. We will then gather online and/or in person in January to share my feedback in the hopes that it might prove useful going forward in the discussions with Greyfriars Kirk.

As the 1st Sunday in Advent is a Carol Service the rest of this document is in lieu of a sermon from the pulpit! Please read it before 10th December, The Second Sunday in Advent. If you are not able to be present on 10th/17th/24th you will be able to follow the sermons online by going to the Church website: stcuthberts-edinburgh.uk.

Setting the scene

Lighting of the Advent Candles:

Candles are lit progressively through Advent. Candles from the previous Sundays are lit before the service begins. Each Sunday repeats the script from the previous Sundays accumulatively. The refrain is used only once each Sunday after the candle-of-the-day is lit.

*On this day, **with** all the faithful of every time and place, we bear witness to the light of Christ:*

*1. **With** Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophets of Israel, we await the promised salvation of the Lord,*

and look for the coming of the one who will bring justice and righteousness to the earth.

The first candle is lit.

REFRAIN: ***The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.***

Alleluia!

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with** God, and the Word was God.*

*The same was in the beginning **with** God... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among (**with**) us full of Grace and truth. John 1:1-2,14.*

Advent is an appropriate time for us to start thinking about seeing things from a different perspective as it was God's intervention, through the incarnation, which shared **with** us His wish to be Emmanuel- God **with** us, rather than being a God at a distance who we continually asked to do things **for** us. The Messiah was not what people were expecting; they were waiting for a General, along the lines of King David, who would take back control of their land and do things **for** them. Instead, they got a baby who needed them to be there **with** him and later to learn **with** him how to be **with** others, sharing his message of love and peace.

There is I think a huge difference between the Church being **for**-others as opposed to the Church "being with"-others. At the recent 'Session Away-Day,' I came away with the impression that Greyfriars Kirk have a good understanding and, are able to coherently articulate, what it means for them to be Church. This was also very apparent when their Session Clerk and Pastoral Associate shared their concept of "being Church" at our November Kirk Session Meeting. Greyfriars is very much the HeartEdge¹ model of

mission and outreach which is rooted in the theology of Rev Dr Sam Wells¹, the vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. He argues, in his incarnational theology, that the Church has to move away from the idea that it is there **for** others to becoming a Church **with** others.

In essences he locates this idea in the percentages of Christ's earthly ministry: If Jesus lived for 33 years with his ministry in Galilee starting at his baptism when he was 30 years old; then 90% of his life was just "being with"-us. 9% was working alongside us preaching and healing for 3 years. Only for 1% of his life, his final week in Jerusalem, was he alone doing things **for** us, things that only he could do, as he journeyed towards the Cross.¹

Historically however it is this 1% of Christ's life that the Church has, on the whole, adopted to be its model throughout the ages. It has decided to be a Church that is **for** the people at the expense of "being with" the people. For example, it has told people how they can only be part of the Church by fulfilling its membership criteria, it has historically decided on who is fit to take Communion at the Lord's Table. Its model of mission has been one which thinks it has already got all the answers and knows how best to impose its beliefs and culture on indigenous peoples, without having the courtesy of listening to their story first. Mission never stopped to abide **with** others as it had already decided what it was going to do **for** them.

Stopping to firstly just be **with** others is vital to a shared sense of belonging and respect. In the National Gallery of Scotland, there is one painting for me that that gives focus to this perception of Church 'being- **with**' others as opposed to 'being **-for**' others.¹ The painting tells the story of Martha and Mary [See Page 78].

For me Martha epitomises the Church of Scotland which often seeks to do things **for** people but never really feels the need to engage **with** them or their story. Meanwhile Mary is making time to ‘be **with** Christ’ to share each other's stories and in so doing see things from the perspective of the other which ultimately means they will be better placed to serve each other and in turn those they encounter.¹ Both Mary and Martha serve, yet Mary understands the priority and necessity of choosing to firstly abide **with** Christ (Luke 10:38-42) just as God abides **with** us in the incarnation. The inviting bench at the foot of the painting, which encourages us to abide there a bit longer, stands empty as mostly we are in a hurry to rush off and see the next masterpiece in a visit that often becomes a tick box exercise, whereby the quantity of paintings one sees becomes more important than the quality of each individual engagement. I think this is similar to how the Church has traditionally been a church **for** others. Church has become a numbers game in which the quality of each spiritual encounter has been diminished.

Within the local parish setting, “being Church” **for** others sees us collect things to give to others for example at the Harvest and Christmas Gift Services, usually money and goods. We decide what others need, what will be suitable **for them**, without engaging **with** them. We never get to know those we seek to serve and so never hear their stories first hand and in so doing fail to find out what they really need and what would really help them. We rush around like ‘wee Marthas.’

Contrast this way of “being Church” with an example in Jesus’ ministry when he encountered Bartimeaus near Jericho in Mark 10:46-52. Jesus asked him: “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus didn’t assume he knew what was best for Bartimeaus he

chose to firstly be **with** him before he might do anything **for** him. Anything that was going to be done **for** him was from the starting point of asking him first what he would like and thus creating a sense of equal partnership in the encounter. By firstly “being with” him anything that did follow would be bespoke, recognising the uniqueness of Bartimeaus’ individual needs, and in so doing respecting him and affording him the dignity that all human beings, each unique in God’s eyes, deserves.

So how can we be a Church which prioritises firstly “being with” others and in so doing mirrors the percentages of Christ’s earthly life?

Two more biblical examples perhaps point us in the right direction. The story of Ruth is first and foremost one about about “being with.” One thinks of the beautiful lines, ‘Where you go, I will go,’ that Ruth said to Naomi who had moments before, told her daughter-in-law, what she thought was best **for** her to do. Naomi wanted Ruth to leave her alone to start a new life, whereas Ruth wanted to be **with** Naomi, so that together they could work out what the next step in their lives might involve. (Ruth 1:16).

The other example is the parable of the Good Samaritan who stayed **with** the injured man throughout the story, and even promised to come back to be **with** him (Luke 10:25-37).

Yes, he did vital, kind and generous things **for** him but from the perspective of being there **with** him first.



The Ruth Window in St Cuthbert's Church

This is not to say that “being Church” **for** others isn’t well intentioned and delivered with love. However, being firstly **for** others on the whole avoids the need to be **with** others, unless they are prepared to ‘fit in’ with how we do things, ask no questions and seamlessly become part of the Christian Story as we see and tell it. So, you could say that the Church has been over the ages; patronising, patriarchal, often feeling superior and entitled as the National Church, whilst being conceited and complacent in believing that nothing needs to change because change more often than not involves risk which means making yourself vulnerable and open to criticism. Taking risks might mean you lose some of your power and control by involving others and for a denomination ruled over by Courts this is anathema.

TIME TO CHANGE

But as we know, the General Assembly has decided that change needs to take place and so passed The Radical Action Plan in 2019 and then, in 2021, The Presbytery Mission Plan. At the heart of this radical plan is the need to prioritise mission and do everything from a missional perspective.¹ It is time to put mission first and see things from a new perspective because the old way of being **for** others, on our own terms and conditions, is no longer fit for purpose and that includes many of the Church buildings that need to become ‘well equipped spaces in the right places’ so that they can in turn become community assets, hubs of outreach shared **with** the local community.

So far, I have bombarded you with words which is the traditional way of delivering a sermon as the congregation deferentially look up to the minister in the pulpit and more often than not as the Scottish poet Edwin Muir pointed out in his poem *The Incarnate One*, ‘*The Word made flesh here is made word again.*’ What we are surely being asked to do is take this Word made flesh and be **with** it, sharing it **with** others not through words but by service.

We have a habit in the Presbyterian tradition, through our sessions, presbyteries and General Assembly of making decisions that become words to gather dust in minutes, agendas, deliverances etc etc. It is perhaps of little surprise we can become controlling through our Courts that produce them. We are a very wordy denomination that even when it does do things it often does so on its own terms and conditions or so rushes around trying to justify itself and being seen to be doing good works that it never stops to listen to the people it seeks to serve, to “be with” them and to share the love of Christ personally.

As a controlling Church which is there “for others” we often find ourselves controlling the gift of the Spirit, that part of the Trinity that was gifted to be “with” us now, as we prevent it from roaming as it ought: *‘The wind blows, where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.’* (John 3:8) That same Spirit (*ruach* meaning *breath* in Hebrew) that blew across the face of the waters at Creation is more often than not shut down by us as we try to control God’s will for us and others especially if they they do not fall into line with our own demands and expectations as to how we think things ‘should be done in my church.’

I have often heard it said at St Cuthbert’s, *‘This is my church minister; I have been coming here for...’* I heard this said rather more generously by one of our homeless guests who I passed on Princes St pointing down to St Cuthbert’s and saying to his mate, *‘that’s our church they look after us there, we need to look after it and make sure its ok.’* Those same fine folk sit and eat at the feet of Christ each Sunday in our sanctuary and for them we are a church that is alongside and **with** them. They don’t hear about us second hand because of what we like to think we do **for** them. They see themselves as being part of the St Cuthbert’s family; equals in the sight of God. Previously our pews meant we had control of our space, now the Spirit is freer to roam as it wishes, which I find very exciting.

Bigger and Closer not Smaller and Further Away

David Hockney, the title of whose current exhibition in London, has been borrowed for this Advent Sermon Series, dislikes the one-dimensional way of seeing perspective in

painting, often referred to as the ‘vanishing point’ or ‘one point perspective.’ For him this does not do just to the space around the subject matter being painted. He always looks to see things from all angles. It’s the space around things that fascinate him because then he can really see the potential in what he is painting. He can be immersed in and be with the subject. In the incarnation God chose to enter our space fully and from all angles and perspectives so that he could be fully **with** us.

Although not of a religious persuasion, Hockney whilst grappling with the concept of space and how to do it justice, had his mind partially set at the rest, as he notes in the exhibition catalogue, *‘The whole of landscape experience is really spatial. It’s a spatial experience. We like space, I mean, I do, I’m a space freak, really. Actually, my sister once said to me that she thought space was God. I thought that was rather poetic in a way.’*

At St Cuthbert’s, we have a beautiful space to share in our sanctuary. During the course of the next three Sundays in Advent, I hope to be able to share **with** you how I see our mission and outreach at St Cuthberts. This will involve being in worship **with** those we seek to serve and partner with. My starting point is the incarnation. If God chose to share our space **with** us, then we must do the same **with** all his people. I will be basing the sermons around two of the five marks of Mission which were adopted by the General Assembly and which give us a structure upon which to build our outreach:

1. Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith.
2. Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy.

In sharing these sermons, I hope to share my perception that at St Cuthberts we are already putting flesh on the bones of the words of these two vital marks of mission¹that specifically relate to outreach. In so doing we are already “being Church” **with** others but perhaps the problem is that we still inhabit a mindset that sees us as “being Church” **for** others. If we can become confident in who we really are and not be held back by thinking and acting in a way that is no longer fit for purpose, then anything can be possible because we will have released the Holy Spirit to roam amongst us.

“being with” Greyfriars

My perception is that Greyfriars are doing a very good job of implementing the 4 C’s¹as they are known of the HeartEdge Movement. Meanwhile I would say that we, in an equally good way, are doing a good job of “being Church” **with** others which is what underpins the essence of what HeartEdge is all about. Our “being with” others is perhaps more obvious as we do everything ‘under one roof’ in the church building. The folk folk we engage with come to a church not to an outreach or community centre. Hopefully we have something to share **with** Greyfriars going forward; from them we can gain a better understanding of how to implement the 4 C’s, and perhaps from us they can have a better understanding of the concept of what it means to be **with** others which roots all that HeartEdge is about in the theology of the incarnation.

My perception is that by “being with” others in worship we encounter together, the image of God (Imago Dei)¹which, only first by “being with” Him, then allows us to go and do God’s mission (Missio Dei)¹making sure that the preached word is indeed fleshed out. Imago Dei automatically drives Missio Dei.

However, this Advent Season comes with extra hope, expectation and trepidation as we find ourselves moving towards a Union with our neighbouring parish. It is a defining moment in the life of this historic church, and we are challenged to see the future from a new perspective. First, and understandably so, I guess we try to see things from our own perspective. Next, perhaps, rather more generously, we try to see things from the perspective of our neighbour. Surely however, the challenge for both congregations is to try and see the future from the perspective of those we seek to serve.

If we try to see things through the eyes of others, we might also learn to see ourselves differently. This is what I hope to share with you over the next four Sundays to see ourselves as other see us and in so doing how God sees us too. A God who truly knows, understands and unconditionally loves us because he was **with** us in the flesh and continues to be so now through the presence of his Holy Spirit.

A tall order you might say but anything worth doing well should not necessarily be easy. It means taking risks and acknowledging we could do things better. But we are being asked to do this, to think and be Church differently, as part of the whole Church of Scotland and its radical plan for change- we are all in this together! Our new way of doing mission means we need to start being, *'bigger and closer not smaller and further away.'*

Look ahead the next three Sundays.

1. Advent 2: Sharing worship **with** St Joseph's RC Church, Broomhouse **and with** Archbishop Leo Cushley.

2. Advent 3: Sharing worship **with** John Kirk one of our 'Soul Space' Team and choir member.
3. Advent 4: Sharing worship **with** the Ukrainian Spiders and **with** refugee children from the Saturday School.

APPENDIX 5

2nd Sunday in Advent

As we lit the Advent Candle at the start of this service we did so:

‘**With** John the Baptist, calling from the wilderness, we cry: "Prepare the way of the Lord!

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Last week we did so:

‘With Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophets of Israel, we await the promised salvation of the Lord,

and look for the coming of the one who will bring justice and righteousness to the earth.

Each Sunday in Advent, as we light the Advent Candle, we start our worship with a different character from the Christmas Story. Then we cry out the same refrain:

‘The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.

Alleluia!’

Within the refrain there is another sense of “being with,” this time the word is among.

There is a great sense of “being with” others at this time of year and surely at its heart lies

Emanuel which means God is **with** us. In the incarnation God abides **with** us.

So, what in turn does it really mean for the Church to be **with** others? It might mean that we have to start seeing things from a different perspective. Instead, perhaps of the traditional way of “being Church” **for** others we need to start “being Church” that is first and foremost a church that knows how to be **with** others.

What is this key difference “being with” or being **for**?

In the National Gallery, our neighbour at the other end of Princes Street Gardens, there is a painting that gives focus to this idea of Church ‘being- **with**’ others as opposed to ‘being -**for**’ others.¹ The painting tells the story of Martha and Mary.

[See Page 78]

For me Martha epitomises the Church of Scotland which often seeks to do things **for** people but never really feels the need to engage **with** them or their story. Meanwhile Mary is making time to ‘be **with** Christ’ to share each other's stories and in so doing see things from the perspective of the other which ultimately means they will be better placed to serve each other and in turn those they encounter.¹ Both Mary and Martha serve, yet Mary understands the priority and necessity of choosing to firstly abide **with** Christ (Luke 10:38-42) just as God abides **with** us in the incarnation.

Being **for** others is often the default mode we fall into. It is easier to be like this; we can do things **for** others at a distance when we can do things on our own terms, when we can keep control of events, when token gestures often mean we feel we have done our duty but have never really been alongside **with** those we seek to serve.

God decided, through the incarnation, that He no longer wanted to be a God at a distance remotely doing things **for** us up in the Heavens but rather wanted to be **with** us in a new and radical way as part of His new mission (often referred to as the ‘*missio Dei*’) **with** us

through the Christ child born in the manger. This was no token gesture this, was rolling up his sleeves and getting stuck in **with** us.

At this time of defining change in The Church of Scotland we are being told to prepare to be **with** others in new ways specifically through Five new Marks of Mission, in buildings that are 'well equipped spaces in the right places.' Over these three Sundays in Advent we will be sharing some words which make up to two of these new Marks of Mission as we are challenged to see what it means to be church from a new perspective, to be a church **with** others.

The two marks are:

1. Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith.
2. Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy.

And the specific words this Sunday that we aim to flesh out and dwell amongst us are:

Welcoming, transforming and communities.

If we are going to be a welcoming, transforming community church that is truly **with** people then we need to start from a familiar setting that is known to everyone but one which we all see from a different perspective. In our case, as the worshipping congregation and the members the setting is St Cuthbert's Church where we try to live out the story of Christ in our own context. For others, the homeless and the refugees, our partner charity volunteers and our ecumenical friends the setting is the same St Cuthbert's Church, but they will engage **with** it from a different perspective.

How we see things and others is so important if we are to have a shared perspective of what it means to be **with** and to belong. We are not going to meet the marks of mission unless we engage with them with others; our neighbours (Greyfriars), our ecumenical partners and our charity partners specifically.

As this service started with John the Baptist and today's Gospel reading (St Mark 1:1-8) tells the story of Christ's baptism and how John had been preparing the way for Jesus to be **with** us at the start of his ministry, he wanted him to have the best of welcomes and this welcome would be reinforced in by God in verse 11 declaring, 'You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.' I briefly want to look at how two painters made John's story our story so that we become one **with** the other and that we can welcome others **with** similar words of affirmation and love.

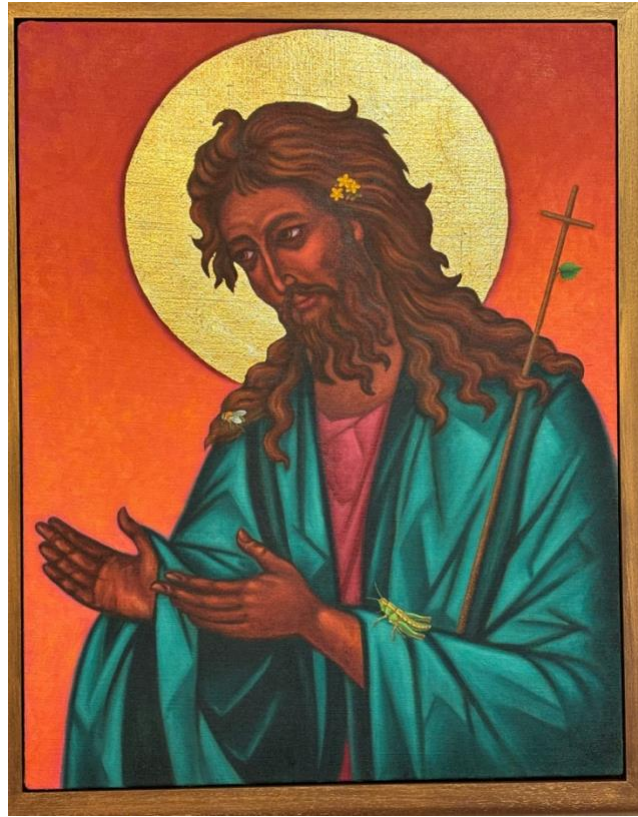
The first painting is by Piero della Francesca. We see Christ being baptised by John in the River Jordan with the Holy Spirit descending on him as a dove. In the gospel reading we read in verse 5 that, 'the whole Judean countryside went out to him'. But if you look closely at the painting, you will see that the baptism is set in the hills of Tuscany just outside Piero's hometown of Borgo Sansepolcro. It was a familiar setting known to all those who would have first seen the painting. They would have walked and had their picnics in this same spot.



“The Baptism of Christ,” 1437, Piero della Francesca. Reproduced with permission of The National Gallery, London.

They would have felt they belonged to this story and that they were **with** Christ at his baptism as they gazed on Piero’s painting.

The second painting of John the Baptist is actually with us today, appropriately placed at the foot of our Font and also displayed on the screens.



“John the Baptist,” 2020 by David Grossart.

It is by a friend of mine, the local Edinburgh artist David Grossart and is in the style of an Icon. From a distance John looks very much like he is depicted in our gospel passage, ‘John wore clothing, made of camels hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.’ But look closely and David has painted symbols of the story that are familiar to us here in Scotland. Not a locust but a grasshopper, St John’s wort flowers which bloom in our countryside here depicting the Holy Trinity, the carder bee complete with ginger fluff and John’s staff is made of hazel wood native to Scotland and often used in Celtic myth as a prophetic tree or staff.

Both these painters have gone out of their way to make sure that the viewers of the paintings would have felt at home and connected with these images. They have gone out of their way, gone the extra mile to welcome the viewer into the painting and share

with them in a way that they would have felt they belonged, that they too were a part of this greatest story ever told.

How can our welcome at St Cuthbert's be a transforming one that creates a sense of community as we draw on the words from the marks of mission? How do we make St Cuthbert's be a church that is **with** others not just in words but in action.

There is a little word here that makes all the difference, and it is the word **among**, or we might say **abide** but let's use with the word **with**. It's our Advent word that makes all the difference for in Emmanuel it is God **with** us. It's a word that takes us back to the start of the story that we hear each year in John's Prologue:

'In the beginning was the Word and the The word was **with** God. And the word became flesh and dwelt **with** us.'

But sadly, it's often not long before this welcome turned sour, if there even ever was any sort of real welcome at all:

'He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognise him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.' (John 1: 10-11)

There was to be no room in the inn.

And even those who did welcome Him, has it not just become a token welcome, one which doesn't really want to be **with** Him but rather to have control over who He was and the way in which he was **with** us? We who have 'believed and accepted him' (verse 13) we who He gave, 'the right to become children of God,' we have often denied this right to

others. As the Scottish poet Edwin Muir notes in his poem *The Incarnate One*, ‘The word made flesh here is made word again.’ We turn the Word made flesh to be **with** us into words again where we are not **with** people as we encounter them, but instead we make laws, rules and regulations; all words with no action which makes us a church **for** people and imposes control over them ensuring as they meet us under our own terms and conditions which are often far removed from God’s unconditional love that came down to be **with** us all so that we might share that same love **with** others.

How do we stop this happening, how do we become a church **with** people but not one that sees itself being **for** people? For surely this would be an Epiphany moment, a new way of seeing and doing things just like the incarnation that first Christmas.

AT THIS POINT I COME DOWN FROM THE PULPIT TO THE LECTERN.

THE SEATS HAVE BEEN REARRANGED IN SOUL SPACE FORMAT TO BE IN A SEMI CIRCLE AT THE FOOT OF THE STEPS LEADING UP TO THE CHANCEL.

Last week we welcomed, probationer minister Sue from Greyfriars to be **with** us and to share in our worship, this week as we develop our Advent theme of “being with” others, it is my privilege to welcome members of St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church in Broomhouse to share in our worship along with their Archbishop, Leo Cushley. In welcoming our guests, we learn so much already from the words that stand at the entrance to their church:

“You are a stranger here, but once.”

Jonathan Sacks the late Chief Rabbi notes that a real welcome involves often a cost and a risk; ‘you have heard it said, “love your neighbour, as yourself,” that is the easy bit try, “loving the stranger in your midst.”’

“Guests only remain strangers because we choose to make them so.”

A true welcome often involves taking a risk; the German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer would describe this as costly grace, whereas a token welcome that doesn’t stop to be with the stranger, but rather welcomes them on our own terms and conditions, might be described a cheap grace.

So how do we avoid tokenism which as not really meaning what we say or what we do. We have to locate ourselves in a local context that would be understood and identified by friend and stranger alike – a place where everyone would have equal ownership of. Our guests from Broomhouse are very familiar with the space they are sitting in **with** us this morning. On many a Sunday evening they are here as volunteers with ‘Steps to Hope’ taking risks and dispensing costly grace as they welcome and serve homeless guests in our Sanctuary. This is truly “being with” and is a way of “being Church” we all at St Cuthbert’s should be very encouraged by as it hits our chosen words this week of welcoming, transforming and community. These are no longer words on paper, but they are lived out at the feet of Christ and his disciples.

Before we see them act out their Sunday mission of “being with” in St Cuthbert’s please come and join us and be with us in this sacred space.

VOLUNTEERS GO AND COLLECT THEM USHERED BY THE DUTY ELDERS AS
IF FOR MONTHLY COMMUNION

PEOPLE MOVE FORWARD TO BE WITH THE VOLUNTEERS AND GUESTS.

I have often heard it said at St Cuthbert's, 'This is my church minister; I have been coming here for...' I heard this said rather more generously by one of our homeless guests who I passed on Princes St pointing down to St Cuthbert's and saying to his mate, 'that's our church they look after us there, we need to look after it and make sure its ok.' Those same fine folk sit and eat at the feet of Christ each Sunday in our sanctuary and for them we are a church that is alongside and **with** them. They don't hear about us second hand because of what we like to think we do **for** them. They see themselves as being part of the St Cuthbert's family; equals in the sight of God. Previously our pews meant we had control of our space, now the Spirit is freer to roam as it wishes, which I find very exciting.

The wind blows, where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.' (John 3:8)

When I look at the painting of Martha and Mary, it reminds me of the steep learning curve I have been on since coming into parish ministry. With a background including leadership roles in the Army, in education and now a traditional parish Church it comes with a mindset of 'I know what best for you.' I would crack on regardless often by

giving orders which come by virtue of my privileged position. Moving from Martha to being more like Mary came **with** my experience in lockdown.



The sanctuary at St Cuthbert's set up each Sunday evening to serve our homeless guests, note the life size alabaster replica of Leonardo's "Last Supper" in the apse.

When the first lockdown was enforced, it came with the huge frustration that as a Church of Scotland minister, I could no longer get out and about doing things **for** others which was my way. I had to learn like all of us new ways of "being with" others, and as far as being a minister goes that meant not operating outside of the Manse and not being able to open up the church. Virtual relationships were created online. But I did find a way of "being with" others in person and it was nothing to do with me. Richie, founder of 'Steps to Hope' got permission from the Council to keep St Cuthbert's open on Sundays to look after the homeless. I had to find a new way of "being with" St Cuthbert's as I was not

allowed to do it as the minister and so volunteered to become the key-holder for Steps. I would open up St Cuthbert's not as the minister, but as an equal volunteer within the charity. For 18 months, every Sunday without a break, I had the privilege of "being with" those who kept St Cuthbert's open. They became my extended family in lockdown and gave me a new appreciation of how St Cuthbert's could operate in partnership **with** others.

The rules and regulations did not prevent me from wearing my clerical collar, and I found myself becoming the Chaplain to this incredible community of volunteers and guests. One guest in particular gave me the inspiration to remove the pews. Paul had to be coming to worship at St Cuthbert's prior to lockdown and he very much missed not coming into our beautiful sanctuary. During lockdown, although we could use the facilities of the church, we were not allowed to gather lots of people at a table inside and therefore had to feed everyone outside. It was his appreciation of what it meant to be part of our worshipping community that inspired me to share this space **with** others in a new way, by removing the pews, so like Paul they might be able to feel fully part of our story. Paul tragically died in lockdown, a beautiful young man, full of such hope and promise, but whose legacy we are about to see, acted out in front of us now as we see how others can now abide like us each Sunday at the feet of Christ. Paul's favourite passage in the Bible was Psalm 23.



STH
@STEPSTOHOPEsc

90 days clean and sober 🙌🙌



Paul

THE VOLUNTEERS START TO LAY OUT THE TABLES IN FRONT OF US AS
ARCHBISHOP CUSHLEY READS OUT PSALM 23.

ONCE THE TABLES ARE SET, HE AND I ROLL OUT TWO SLEEPING BAGS ON
TOP OF THEM.

ARCHBISHOP, VOLUNTEERS AND I READ OUT THIS POEM BY REV RICHARD
CARTER OF HEARTEDGE:

Homeless Sunday

Hello, there is a human being in here,

Not an object, not a type, not an enemy

Not an irritation or a nuisance

Not a big issue

Not just a need to be fed second-hand sandwiches on a cold street

Or cups of tea in polystyrene

Not something to be processed, avoided, removed or discarded

Not something that has come to steal your territory

Not a colour, or a nation, or a category

Not a problem to be solved or an agenda to be discussed

Not a drug, or drink, or a knife, or a bet, or a nut or a take-away

But a human being in here

To be welcomed, recognised, respected, seen, heard,

Allowed space to grow, to flourish, to laugh, to speak, to give, to sing

To love

A human being like you

With you, with God

And God with us

A human being in here

A heart on the edge

The kingdom of God is here now

WE HEAR THREE TIMES OVER THE WORDS FOR THIS SUNDAY:

WELCOMING TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES.

FINALLY:

THE WORDS BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONGST US AND MADE HIS
HOME WITH US. (John 1:14).

APPENDIX 6

3rd Sunday in Advent

The Light of the World

Title: 'Making Room in the Shed.'

During this advent series of sermons, we are looking at how God chose to be seen in a new way and from a new perspective by sharing our space and “being with” us through the incarnation Emanuel- ‘God is **with** us.’ He wished no longer to be seen as a remote distant God, with dominion over us doing things for us and controlling us rather He chose to become one **with** us.

It is this small, but life changing word **with** that we have been focusing on; a Church **with** others as opposed to being a church for others that often can be controlling as it feels it has all the answers and solutions which often means it never deals directly **with** the people, friend and stranger alike, that it seeks to serve.

The church has often seen its role as doing things for people rather than be **with** them and we are exploring how St Cuthbert’s is **with** people in a new way in its mission and outreach as opposed to being for them in the traditional sense, which often involves controlling its spaces and delivering token gestures. Just as God chose to be in our space, to dwell and abide amongst us – how do we follow this example and style of engagement by in turn sharing our space **with** others?

So far, we have considered that we cannot carry out our mission and outreach on our own perhaps as we used to do. (the Outreach Team at St Cuthbert's tried to run its own evenings when Bethany disengaged but soon found it did not have the expertise or know how to do it safely for both its guests and the volunteers and so 'Steps to Hope' were an answer to a prayer allowing us to go into partnership **with** them).

We have shared our space this Advent **with** our Neighbour in welcoming the probationer minister from Greyfriars, and last week, we shared it **with** our ecumenical partners and charity partner.

This week were going to explore how to get beyond the controlling mindset that thinks it has all the answers to an inclusive and flexible mindset or perspective in which we are prepared to see and more importantly do things differently alongside others, standing in solidarity **with** them.

I want to do this by welcoming my friend John Kirk who recently led one of this year's Soul Space reflections in which we use this space differently and seek to share it **with** others on their terms and not ours, by inviting them to come and go as they please and telling them this is their space to engage **with** as they see fit. It's a beautiful style of lay ministry which is all about "being with" others in a new way. It is all about making room for others in our sacred space.

Before John and I take you on a Soul Space encounter where you are invited to be **with** us this morning, a short reminder on how this little word with starts off our worship on these Advent Sundays.

We started this morning's service by lighting the third advent candle **with** the words:

‘**With** Mary, the mother of Jesus, we magnify the Lord, rejoicing in God saviour, for the mighty one has done, great things for us. And holy is God's name.

Are refrain as it is each week is that:

‘The word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory’.

It seems important to note, and it picks up on last week's theme of Martha and Mary that the mighty one has done great things for us, only because he first was **with** us and lived among us.

What He did for us was to ultimately sacrifice himself in a way that only he could do on the cross.

Through the incarnation and Emanuel God, “being with” us, he had an understanding of what we needed most. He stood in solidarity alongside us in the earthly life of his own dear son.

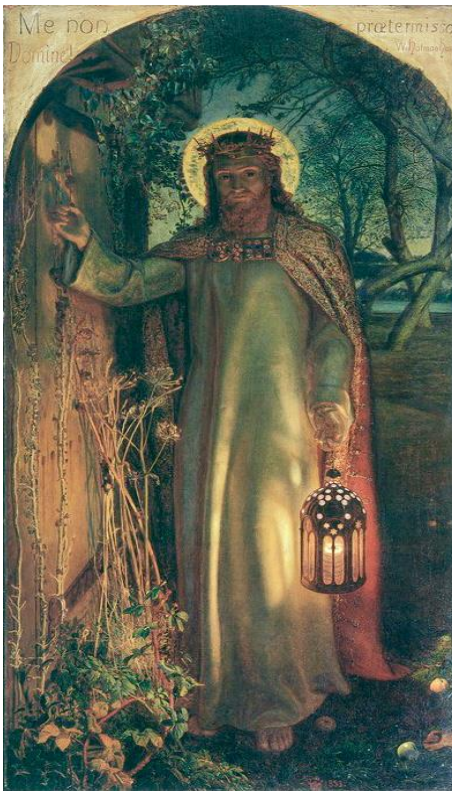
In other words, God in the incarnation developed a new way of “being with” us through his son, so that we might have a new perspective on who he was, and that we too like God might start to see things more closely, and in more detail by being alongside, **with** those, we seek to serve. We start to see the bigger picture.

The painter, David Hockney has an exhibition in London called ‘Bigger and Closer, not Smaller and Further Away.’ During this season, when we prepare to celebrate the incarnation, we too encounter a God, who is bigger and closer, not smaller and further away. But as Hockney says to be able to do this, we must have a new perspective on how we see things. Traditionally painters have seen things from a single perspective often called the vanishing point, it is I suppose a bit like gazing into a dark tunnel and having one's eyes drawn to the light at the end of it. But Tunnel Vision can only see things from one point of view and Hockney argues that our perspective on how we see things must be three dimensional. We must be able to see things in the round. Being able to see things in the round means that we have to be creative **with** the spaces that we occupy. He was fascinated by space and as he tried to work out how to use it in his paintings. It was his sister who gave him a bit of peace of mind by saying, ‘David, don’t you realise that God is space.’

So how during this season of Advent, are we to find space for God in our often-one-dimensional lives, and our more often than not one-dimensional view of church which is reinforced by the words, ‘But minister we have always done it this way at St Cuthbert’s!’

We have a tendency, particularly in the church of doing things for people rather than “being with” them and alongside them.

The Painter, William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) created a sense of how we have to let God into our spaces, and this is rather beautifully shown in the painting on your screens, called ‘The Light of the World.’



The Light of the World, 1903, by William Holman Hunt, reproduced by permission of the Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, London.

This painting which is framed tunnel-like. **With** its dark background, I have always imagined Christ like a railway worker emerging from the tunnel carrying the lamp to light the way towards us, emerging out of a dark and dangerous place. As he does so he knocks on the door, but he has to wait to be let in because there is no handle on his

side. He emerges out of the darkness to share the light but needs us now to make the space to let him in.

How are we going to make room in the inn?

We need to be creative just like in removing the pews as we explored last Sunday which has created space to let our homeless guests be served in our sanctuary at the feet of Christ and so we too now need to be creative as we set about engaging **with** new ways of doing our mission and outreach in the Church of Scotland as it emerges out of a dark place into hopefully a new of hope and light, but we can't do this using traditional styles of outreach and ministry, which will leave people in the dark in a tunnel, stuck in the tomb **with** no sense of the resurrected Christ. It was perhaps Christ's post resurrection earthly ministry which saw him coming out of the dark tomb in a new light meeting **with** his followers on the road to Emmaus, on the beach by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in their homes that gives us a real sense of how mission might be going forward. Always starting **with** the words, 'Peace be with you.'

Which is why the Church has adopted the new Five new marks of Mission.

Although these marks have been passed down from the General Assembly via Presbytery Mission Plans there is an initial recognition in the marks of mission, that people at the local level know best and know how to engage **with** the marks and how try to implement them. There is an understanding from the Assembly Trustees that it is only

through local encounters and engagements, standing alongside others and working **with** them at a human level, and **with** our neighbours, and **with** our charity partners that mission and outreach specifically becomes a shared initiative rather than a one in which the church as it has done, traditionally in its mission, particularly in colonial days by imposing its beliefs and cultures on indigenous populations without first, listening to their stories. Sharing initiatives means taking risks as we saw last week **with** strangers in our midst and firstly hearing their stories before we tell our own.

In passing down the new five marks of mission, the Church of Scotland also said that congregations could choose to use the Australian variant of the marks as they perhaps might speak more closely to the reality of life in the parish as experienced by those who live and in it.

In this series of Advent sermons, I have focused on two of the marks out of the five which I think are most closely aligned to where we are as a worshipping congregation in our mission and outreach alongside others. They provide a structure upon which to build our outreach to:

1. Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith.
2. Stand in solidarity **with** the poor and needy.

Last Sunday I mentioned how important it was that the word made flesh is just not turned into Word again by us and our need to control the sense of God **with** us, so it fits into our own agendas. Edinburgh Presbytery it would appear has done just that it has turned the Word made into flesh into word again and many congregations in want of an easy life have fallen into line prepared only to offer cheap and easy grace. The words this

Sunday that seem so important as we seek to make more room in the inn and find God in our spaces are:

Stand in solidarity **with** the needy

As Christ stands knocking at the closed door, in Holman Hunt's painting he wishes to do so in solidarity **with** those in need. But being in solidarity **with** someone means understanding their needs first and understanding their realities on the ground. Just as Jesus by being on the ground firstly **with** Blind Bartimeaus was able to ask him in person and not through another agency what can I do for you? (Mark 10:46-52). Jesus didn't want to control the situation but rather, by standing in solidarity alongside Bartimeaus, he was giving him the opportunity to share **with** Jesus what he needs most. This is a great sense of giving him respect and dignity along with potentially costly grace in this encounter because it is Bartimeaus who knows what he needs most.

How do we go about "being with" as opposed to being **for**? This Advent Sermon has suggested all along that we need to see things from a new perspective, just as God chose to do so by "being with" us and this involves taking risks which in turn means that we might lose some of our control and power over how we are church.

I get new perspectives on my faith, and how to minister by attending the monthly Soul Space reflections which which take place at the foot of the pulpit and the font. For

me suddenly things become bigger and closer, not smaller and further away, perhaps due to the intimacy of how we configure the church by being close up, rather than distant, and at the back.

As I was thinking of the idea of ‘no room in the inn’, it was at John Kirk’s recent Soul Space that I came up with the title for this Sunday’s Sermon ‘Making room in the Shed.’

Introduce John as the shed master on the ground, the one who understands it as it is and myself, the controller, distant and remote high up, imagining that I have the solutions for John and can order him how to do them, but this will not result in any more space being created, unless I fully understand things from his perspective, the person who creates the space for others.

The railway controller is only interested in getting things done quickly, being the first across the finishing line and making sure that all the numbers add up. Getting the numbers right to fit the matrix becomes more important than the people behind these numbers. There is not just ‘no room in the inn’ but no room for pastoral care either when the church is determined to be a church for others as opposed to being a church **with** others.

Setting the scene:

John will briefly explain what the shed is using his reflection from his Soul Space:

“ON SHED”

A railway term for going on to a depot, whether it is your home shed or visiting a “foreign” shed. A place where engines will find a home, hospitality and welcome.

A steam engine would be; turned for it’s next duty, coaled up, tender filled with water, the fire cleaned and ash removed from the ash pan and smokebox, it would be stabled, any running maintenance done or if more serious work was required the engine would be taken out of service and repaired. For it’s next duty it would be oiled up, cleaned, the fire built up, sand boxes filled crewed with driver and fireman and go off shed for work.

A diesel engine would be; fuelled, oil, coolant and water levels checked and topped up, stabled and shut down ready for its next duty unless of course running repairs or heavier maintenance was required. When ready it would be checked over by the crew, started up and be ready to go off shed for work.

Engines whether on their home shed or visiting another shed would have a place to rest, be refreshed and be made welcome.

A QUESTION TO REFLECT UPON: How do we offer similar care to those we know (visiting their home shed) and how do we offer similar care to strangers (visitors from a foreign shed) ?

Having considered this, do we need to do better and if so how can we achieve this ?

And let us also keep in mind Matthew 25; 31 to 46 and the song that flowed from these verses; When I needed a neighbour, when I was hungry and thirsty, when I was cold and naked, when I needed shelter or when I needed a healer.....we need to be able to say for sure; Yes !! We were there !

Once done the dialogue begins as the words are fleshed out:

A discussion between railway "Control" and the Shed Master at 64C, Edinburgh Dalry Road one Christmas Time in the steam age.

CONTROL: Hello, this is control, is that Dalry Road shed ?

64C: Aye, this is the Shed Master at Dalry Road. What are ye
Wanting now ?

CONTROL: it is just to tell you that you have another special's
engine

That needs to be turned and stabled at Dalry Road
Tonight.

64C : oh are you now, well it can turn on the turntable at
Princes Street or by going round the triangle but it cannot.
Be stabled here.

CONTROL: why can't you turn it on shed?

64C: Seriously? Because there is no turntable at Dalry Road
The nearest turntable is at Princes Street station but it
Isn't big enough for say a duchess so engines turn by
Running out to Coltbridge junction, reverse through
Granton Junction to Slateford and reverse back to Dalry
Completing the triangle. But you should know all this.
Shouldn't you?

CONTROL: I see, so we can turn the engine but why can't it be

Stabled on your shed, after all that is what the shed is for
 64C : Are ye serious? I ken fine well what a shed is for but we
 Are pushed for space at the best of times, we struggle
 When the rugby is on at Murrayfield but Christmas is
 All but impossible. As it is I've the last engine to come in
 Off the last Perth job and I dinna ken where it is going to
 Go.

CONTROL: but you must have some space to stable just one more
 Engine ?

64C : I do not, let me remind you about the strengthened trains
 That need double heading that you have sanctioned. That
 Means extra engines (not to mention crews)

CONTROL: Of course I do, it is Christmas and we need to get folk
 Where they want to be.

64C : and what about the relief trains you have run, means
 Even more engines and crews and I don't have space
 For any more.

CONTROL: but surely you have planned for the additional traffic

64C : you are having a laugh my friend? I have a 4 road dead
 End shed which is full, the coal road is full, the preparation
 Road is full, the engine loops are full and I've already
 Shunted the breakdown wagons to Morrison Street
 Goods and that road is full too. As it is Christmas let me put it

In words you might understand; There is no room at the Inn

CONTROL: But there must be something you can do, this engine

Has to go somewhere.

64C : oh that is rare, you don't know the layout here, you don't

Understand how we have to work or how the plans you

Make cause us endless grief to cope with all the additional

Engines and crews you send us and then you are asking

Me to bail you out and sort out your mess ?

CONTROL: well I wouldn't put it like that we have to keep the trains

Going....

64C : jings man what do ye think we are doing ? But I'll tell

You what, your special engine can turn via the triangle, take

Water at Slateford and then it could stable in the goods

Head shunt across from Dalry Road Station. The crew will

Need to drop the fire there, there are no facilities but the

Shed isn't too far away. That is the very best I can do.

CONTROL: Oh, well it isn't ideal but if that is the way it has to be we

Will do that. Can I wish you a Merry Christmas ?

64C : aye ye can and to you and heres a gid New Year resolution

For ye; come out of your office and visit the places your

Instructions impact on and see for yourself the problems

You are creating so that you can do better next time ?

CONTROL: okay, I will maybe try that. Good night.

64C; and a good night to you too. Jings just wait until my running foreman Jimmy hears this.

Hey ! Jimmy ! You'll never guess what some numpty from Control was after sending us yet another loco to service and stable tonight and ye ken that our last Perth is still to come in and honestly I haven't a clue where it's going to stable when it gets here.

Whats that Jimmy ? the engine on the last Perth has failed at Stirling and Stirling have used a Haymarket loco to replace it and Haymarket are wanting their loco back. Oh RESULT !! Nae more engines in tonight.

Ye see Jimmy, whatever chaos Control shovel on to us, THERE IS AYE A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL !!!

'And its Christ coming towards us...'

We can make things happen if we work in partnership, and firstly don't think we have all the answers because we think we are better positioned to know what is right for someone else. Space can be created when we are creative, when we stand in solidarity **with** one another, just as God did **with** us through the incarnation.

When we try to operate at a distance, calling the shots and giving the orders we end creating a church that is smaller and further away as opposed to one that is bigger and

closer. We only see a light at the end of the tunnel and never see it coming bigger and closer as it moves towards us.

In a moment we are about to travel into a dark and tunnel and you will see this journey on your screen. There is a quote which is often used at the start of the New Year:

‘I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, give me a light so that I may go out into the unknown. He said to me, put your hand into the hand of God that is better than any light or any known way.’

We often hold back on the words of John’s Prologue, (those key words that share the mystery of the incarnation) until the end of a service, making the words seem distant and remote and out of our reach because usually they are read by a minister or a headmaster type and so they just remain that : distant and remote. If we reread them at the start, not only would we feel closer to them, but we could engage with them throughout the service creating a sense of being closer to God and Him standing in solidarity **with** us the needy right from the beginning of time.

As we lit the candle at the start of this service, we did so thinking of Mary. Mary became the handmade of the Lord. She put her hand into the hand of God, and stood in solidarity **with** him as she bore his son, which intern created a space for God, not just in her womb, but also in the hearts of all those who come to know and love him because they open the door to him by standing in solidarity **with** others particularly at this time the needy:

As we will say this evening at our and Carol Service as part of the bidding prayer:

‘Because this of all things would rejoice his Heart, let us at this time, remember in his name, the poor, and the needy, (All those who are in any kind of need this night) the cold, the hungry, and the oppressed; the sick in body, and in mind, and them that mourn; the lonely, and the unloved; the aged, and the little children.’

Our key words today:

Standing in solidarity **with** the needy.

Looking ahead to the 4th and final Sunday in Advent we will see how we have done just that for one group of people who we have stood alongside. We have listened to their story and their needs. We have adapted how we do things here at St Cuthberts so that we have become flexible and can truly be **with** them. We found a suitable space. Having initially thought we had found the answer which was not right for them or us and by standing in solidarity, the spiders now operate out of the clocktower and **with** them on Christmas Eve, we will build a place, rooted in the faith that, poor as we often are in carrying out the ‘missio Dei’ in this place, we know that we can play our part by giving our hearts and sharing Christ’s too.

At the end of his excellent Soul Space Reflection John posed the following questions which I leave you **with** know so that they become more than just words and dwell amongst us this coming week:

SOUL SPACE; Home, Hospitality and Welcome.

ON SHED; Questions;

- 1) How do we show we are Christians?
- 2) How necessary is gathering for Sunday worship?
- 3) How do we treat our own?
- 4) How do we treat strangers?
- 5) Do rules and regulations deter us from offering help to others?

OVERARCHING QUESTION;

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?
What, honestly might your answer be?

APPENDIX 7

4th Sunday in Advent

We started this service, as we have done on all the Sundays this advent season, by lighting the Advent Candle and saying the word '**with**'.

This Sunday, it was, '**With** the writers of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we tell the good news of Jesus Christ, the child of Bethlehem.'

And what a story they have to share **with** us this Christmas Eve, as we prepare for Emanuel - God **with** us. It is the greatest story ever told in which God chooses to be **with** us as the Word becomes flesh that we might see his glory.

This radical new way of seeing God challenges us all to have a new perspective on what it means to be **with** others. The church has historically gone about being **for** others, but this new way of "being Church", "being with" others, requires us to do things differently, to **build** new relationships and be prepared to have our **faith** challenged.

On the Second Sunday of Advent, we saw how, here at St Cuthbert's we have started to become a church **with** others, as opposed to being **for** them as we have traditionally been in our mission and outreach. We witnessed both ways of "being Church" come into contact with each other. On the one hand, we were church **for** others as presents were donated as part of the Gift Service to be delivered outwith the parish. On the other hand,

we were church **with**, as we watched our charity partner, Steps to Hope and their volunteers from St Joseph's RC Church supported by their Archbishop set up the tables in our sanctuary, where once the pews stood, so that we might welcome our homeless guests and serve them a meal at the feet of Christ.

During that service we talked about welcoming and transforming communities, and that is what we at St Cuthbert's have been able to start building as part of the Church of Scotland's new marks of Mission. In gifting our space in the sanctuary, we find ourselves "being Church" **with** others in a new way that involves sharing together in person under our church roof. Those we have gifted to are not anonymous but fine folk known to us. We need them and they need us.

This Christmas Eve we think of that first Christmas when a refugee and homeless family found themselves not just all alone in their own country, but soon to be all alone in a foreign country when they had to flee into Egypt and hide from Herod.

As well as learning how to be **with** our homeless guests and charity partner, we have, over the last two years, learnt how to be **with** the Ukrainian refugee community here in Edinburgh. But just as we started engaging with the homeless, believing that we could do things **for** them without firstly hearing their stories, so too there was a steep learning curve when it came engaging with the refugee community.

Traditionally in response to such a crisis as the war in Ukraine we might have an appeal through Christian Aid and put some money in an envelope at a retiring collection as we try to do something **for** others. This is a traditional way of “being Church”,’ that once again is removed from any personal contact and means we are never **with** those we seek to serve.

However, at St Cuthbert’s, slowly but surely, we are learning to do things differently as evidenced last Sunday when Hanna Tekliuk, a refugee mother from Ukraine now living in Edinburgh, read the passage from the Prophet Micah in Ukrainian as she took us once more even unto Bethlehem, (as well as being one of the Ukrainian Spiders who weave their camouflage nets in our church tower, Hanna is also Director of the Ukrainian Saturday School that we here at St Cuthbert’s support) in the during The Nine Lessons and Carol Service as we welcomed her into our church family and worshipped **with** each other.

Our mission and outreach with the homeless and refugees have developed so that we are church **with** these fine folk, far removed from how we used to be just **for** them. Both encounters have allowed us to explore and develop our two marks of mission which we are fleshing out this Advent Season:

1. Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith.
2. Stand in solidarity **with** the **poor** and **needy**.

Today we will flesh out the words: **Build, faith with the poor.**

What has this journey, **with** the refugee community been like? The journey from the first welcome two summers ago to where we find ourselves now?

For me, personally it started by welcoming two of the first Ukrainian refugees to arrive in Edinburgh to come and stay in the Manse. It was my privilege to have Maria and her beautiful daughter Dasha staying with me. I thought I had all the answers **for** them and tried to fix everything for them only for Maria to sit me down and say, “we can’t go on like this, you need to hear my story and how things will work for me if we are to live **with** each other in the same house.” It was a humbling moment to hear someone the same age as my eldest daughter point out that things were not working well despite the fact that I thought I was doing a good job **for** my guests. After an open and supportive conversation, we then got on like a house on fire. This experience of my firstly trying to be **for** others, imagining that I had all the answers **for** them was exactly the same as it had been when first trying to support our homeless guests. You might remember it wasn’t until lockdown, when Steps to Hope, got permission for St Cuthbert’s to stay open, that I really understood what it meant to be **with** others so that we might share things together.

After Maria and her daughter moved up to Aberdeenshire to their permanent home in Scotland that summer St Cuthbert’s became the weekend hub to organise activities for the Ukrainian community in Edinburgh. And what a joy it was to do things **with** our guests, each Sunday afternoon from visits to the Castle to Holyrood Palace to open bus tours and to the Zoo. Those were good days and happy friendships were made with members of the congregation accompanying our refugee guests on these visits.

By working **with** our guests, we got to know their community and in turn their Priest Father Vasly who came to take part in the Ecumenical Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows Service, and afterwards in all the events, both cultural and religious that we have held for the Ukrainian community in St Cuthbert's. I took Father Vasly and his family to the Tattoo with tickets graciously donated by the tattoo office, and since then we have become good friends. Most recently, he invited me to say the prayers at the Holodomor commemoration as we gathered around the statue of which is on the side of Calton Hill.

The pictures that you can see, tell great story of engaging **with** this community, and we must thank Martin Pearce for his huge efforts in facilitating so much of this work. Martin fully understands what it means to be Church **with** others, but "being with" isn't just about doing one off events, it is as we have seen with Steps to Hope, all about gifting what we have and sharing. In our case, gifting the space of this building where so much is now done 'all under one roof.'

During the Harvest Festival Service, I shared from the pulpit the story of the Ukrainian Spiders who initially started using the Nor'loch Room to weave their camouflage nets. and quite rightly we found that this did not work for them or us and so we were flexible in finding another space that would work well for both the church and the Spiders who are now based up in the Tower Room. St Cuthbert's is their home, and it would be interesting to know how many people sitting here have been up into the Tower Room recently. So, we have heard about them, and I guess we imagine we are doing things **for** them by giving them a space to **build** their nets in, but are we really "being with" them? Do we see them as part of our church community?

Our link with the Spiders is also through the same Hanna, who read last Sunday and who has also brought us into contact with the Ukrainian Saturday School, which meets for two hours each week in one of the classroom blocks at George Heriot's. Hanna is their director of education, and I recently became Chair of the charitable trust that looks after the Saturday School. This lovely new link saw the equivalent of a young church Christmas party taking place two weeks ago in St Cuthbert's in the Lindisfarne Room. By "being with" our Ukrainian guests, we have resurrected a children's Christmas party here in our church.

And so how do we this Christmas Eve feel that we are fully **with** our Ukrainian guests rather than just doing things **for** them. Well there is no better way of thinking of the Holy Family, homeless refugees, heading towards Bethlehem than having folk **with** us in our worship who have an understanding of what this actually feels like and to share **with** us, the greatest story ever told so that we might see it in a new light, in a new perspective just as we did by setting up the tables to serve our meals during worship two Sundays ago.

The Holy Family needs to be protected, last week in our worship we found out that by being flexible at the local level and breaking away from 'Control' a home was found for them in the shed, and this week they will be wrapped around and protected by the Spiders in one of their camouflage nets before it is sent out to Ukraine, the holy family starts its precarious life **with** us.

As the organ plays 'Away in a Manger,' the shed is brought out and covered with the green camouflage net. The congregation are invited up to stand in solidarity with the refugee community and to come forward as they do for Holy Communion whilst

Hanna and one of the children from the Saturday School walk down the aisle holding in their arms, a white winter camouflage net in swaddling netting about to be laid in the manger.

We all sing holding candles, 'Away in the Manger.' And the pupil from the Ukrainian School reads a poem.

“Being with” others involves taking a risk, it involves having **faith** in others so that we might **build** things together. ‘What can I give him **poor** as I am? if I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb. If I were a wise man would do my part yet, what can I give him give my heart.’

By sharing our hearts, we are prepared to take risks, we are prepared to see things differently, we are prepared to be taken out of our comfort zones, we are prepared first and foremost, to act pastorally and to be **with** the people whose names often appear just as numbers on a Government Census Form as they did that first Christmas Eve, or even today on a Presbytery Mission Plan.

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