Church planting and pioneering – a perspective study

1. Introduction

In this paper I pursue a trajectory developed in two recent books, *Becoming Who We Are: Re-envisioning Christian Identity* (BUS 2018 & Amazon 2020) and *Experiencing Faith* (BUS & Amazon 2020). Seeking to advise on best practice within my own context, I look to explore and reflect upon factors present in approaches to church planting and pioneering among the 13 Association which comprise the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). In doing so, I attempt to dialogue with what I perceive to be encultured understandings and approaches to mission and ministry.

This paper is written from my perspective as Mission and Ministry Advisor of the Baptist Union of Scotland (BUS). Through active-listening to policies and practices articulated by colleagues who are responsible for the coordination of mission and ministry initiatives amongst the BUGB Associations, I look to learn from them, reflecting on how my observations might help in developing initiatives within our Scottish context. I also pray that the observations and comments that follow may be of some use to colleagues who have readily and helpfully contributed to my research, kindly allowing me to interview them and take note of their responses.

I begin by reflecting upon the culture and context of Scottish Baptist churches, among whom I am privileged to serve. The representations that follow are mine and mine alone.

2. The Scottish Context

The Challenge

The relation between mission and ministry, as practices related to and affecting one another, has never been definitively articulated within the Scottish context. Our Baptist Union's *Declaration of Principle* refers to neither 'mission' nor 'ministry'; but both are inferred in the 3rd part of our *Declaration*, affirming the 'duty of every disciple to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world'. The proper business of Baptist churches may be said to be in the forming of disciples who will bear witness and evangelise, for the purpose of forming others into Christian disciples; and who will themselves go on to do the same, spreading by multiplication the message and liberating power of the Gospel throughout our society and beyond.

In practice, the provision and demand of maintaining ministry tends to eclipse the pursuit and practice of mission. We are witnessing an overall diminution in the number of disciples participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. One reason may be traced in the way that most of our congregations are configured. Baptist congregations, theoretically 'non-conformist', are often organised and managed in a similar manner to the dominant, Christendom-tradition within Scotland. Heavy reliance is placed upon stipendiary ministry. The stipendiary minister is usually ordained or, at least, accredited; and is normally made

responsible for the preaching and teaching programme of the local church. In addition, responsibilities usually extend to overseeing the pastoral care of the congregation and officiating at weddings and funerals. In all of this, there is little or no distinction to be found in the practice of Baptist from other Christendom-tradition churches. In other words, stipendiary Baptist ministers often function in largely the same way as their Presbyterian, Episcopal, Congregational and Roman Catholic counterparts.

Wherein, we might ask, lies any essential difference in the practice of Baptist church life? Perhaps surprisingly, difference does not arise so much from matters made explicit in our *Declaration of Principle*; but is expressed in an encultured habit of local church independency from the State and also in independency from other congregations and structures. Not simply affirming a bare Baptist conviction that church can be construed as a gathering of two or three persons in Jesus' name, there is often an emphasis on the independence, rather than the interdependency, of the local congregation from other congregations. Such practice is often considered to be an essential mark of Baptist ecclesiology, in popular understanding.

What of mission and the making of disciples? Mention of mission in the context of a local church can still be associated primarily with aiding efforts overseas. When home-mission is embraced as a local responsibility, it is often assumed that effective mission will be generated through building upon a core of effective preaching and pastoral ministry, through ancillary activities such as children's or youth work, 'messy church', café church, counselling services, running *Alpha*, *Christianity Explored* or similar courses and the provision of home groups. Again, during the Covid pandemic, in providing foodbanks, the hope is often expressed that people will be drawn from contacts made into involvement in the normal, inherited structures of church life.

All of this good work has, unfortunately, two consequences. Firstly, the frequent exhaustion of stipendiary ministers and other core volunteers in the local church, not only from undertaking tasks that keep core church activities running, week to week, but also from overseeing a growing number of ancillary activities. Secondly, mission activity can come to be construed as an adjunct to Christendom-tradition activities, rather than the driving motive that shapes all church life.

The inherited, Christendom-tradition of church continues to be both valuable and popular among churchgoers; yet it plays a significant part in generating this scenario of exhaustion in ministry and depreciation of any missional focus. Church as a place of performative, religious activity, where both oratorical and theological skill are looked for in professionals who are entrusted with expositing and applying Scripture to the lives of listeners, is treated as normative; and where digital as well as musical skills are demanded of supporting, often voluntary staff, enabling praise to be enjoined, supplemental to sermon and prayer. This, for many, is understood as a proper pattern for participation in worship. It remains the defining characteristic of much congregational life.

The challenge before us here, however, is how best to expand our missional reach and improve upon our practice of ministry. What steps forwards should we take, in this regard?

Steps towards change

Seeking to correct a perceived imbalance between practice within ministry and mission has not been easy, but a journey has been embarked upon. This journey is one where we are attempting to change the culture of both ministry and mission. We begin with ministry, where in practice the emphasis tends to be.

a. Seeking to reform our culture of ministry

In seeking to reform our culture of ministry, we have reviewed and continue to reform our practices in the selection and training of accredited ministry.

i. Clergy and laity

We have attempted to stop referring to 'clergy and laity', not making ordination a prerequisite for accreditation; and emphasising a baptistic perspective that all Christians are, in fact, called to serve as ministers of the Gospel. Accredited ministers are better viewed a species or sub-group within this church family, where all are called to ministry in Jesus' name.

Consequently, ministerial accreditation has been framed as an acknowledgment by our Union of a candidate's suitability to serve as a facilitator of ministry beyond the compass of their own, local church; and potentially, as a leader serving the leadership team of another congregation. To this end, we look to enhance skills that will serve this facilitative role. Ability in preaching and pastoral practice is still required; but demonstrable facilitation skills are increasingly being looked for. This facilitative ability and up-skilling where necessary would be important for all accredited ministers, whether their calling is to pastor a church formed by the Christendom-tradition or to pioneer something innovative.

ii. Preparing ministers for accredited ministry

In Scotland we have moved from a 'steeplechase model' of preparation, where emphasis is placed on gaining a requisite academic qualification prior to commencing work as an accredited minister, to a 'flat race model', where emphasis is placed on Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) throughout both preparation for and continuing in accredited ministry. The remit of our CMD Lead, who serves as a member of our National Team, is to encourage the ongoing pursuit of excellence in accredited ministry; and also to lay out a pathway into accredited ministry for any who, presently without the qualifications necessary for fully accredited ministry, have already been engaged as ministers by local congregations. Qualifications or non-validated equivalents can be pursued throughout the probationary period of 'pre-accredited ministry', towards achieving an acknowledged standard of professional competence. In some cases, the period of pre-accredited ministry would be extended beyond a normal three years, in order to enable the pre-accredited minister to achieve a level of competency in areas of learning and practice that are perceived as helpful, by our Union, in equipping men and women to serve as facilitative leaders. Emphasis is placed on the upskilling of accredited ministers for the challenge of leading congregations in the missional task of making disciples.

b. **Seeking to reform our culture of mission**

i.   **Beyond Broadcasting and Buildings**

Home mission in Scotland, during the post-war years and up to the 1980's, might be described as having been a time of 'broadcasting and buildings'. In the post-war years and following the pivotal, *Tell Scotland* Campaign and the *All Scotland* Crusade, there was a pattern of church extension which invested in erecting church buildings in new housing estates. This pattern of mission arose from the continuation of the Christendom-tradition model of ministry. Baptists and other Christian denominations sought to establish centres of Gospel proclamation in buildings that people were invited to gather into; and the primary task of mission was to encourage people to respond to evangelistic invitation and begin to attend activities based in buildings erected and provided by congregations, with church life centred around the catalyst of the preached Word and celebration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Certainly, a personal response of faith in Jesus Christ was looked for; but discipleship development and attendance at the preaching event in a local church's building were, more often than not, conflated together in popular understanding.

ii.   **Engaging a post-Christendom culture**

By the 1980's, attendance at Christendom-tradition church had decidedly become a minority practice in Scotland. Awareness grew that inherited, encultured patterns of churchmanship had not served well in reaching the wider population and in multiplying Christian disciples. Part of the problem, paradoxically, lay in the enduring popularity of an attractional, Christendom-tradition model of church. Some Christendom-tradition churches, presenting a high standard of performative preaching and praise, supplemented by ancillary facilities including Sunday School for children, youth and other age or interest-specific activity, provided an excellent catalyst for people coming together in worship; and they flourished. Well run Christendom-tradition churches often attracted people and, indeed, continue to do so. Other smaller, less attractive Christendom-tradition churches began to fail. That pattern persists through to the present. Some churches succeed in attracting people, drawing them into participation in a life of faithfully following Jesus. Others, lacking the same facilities as more successful Christendom-tradition churches, whilst longing for people to join with them in their building where the Gospel is broadcasted, increasingly fail.

At the same time, there has been an awareness of the responsibility to reach out to an increasingly secularised country, largely unaware of any gravitational pull towards the churches. Ways of propagating the Gospel afresh were sought after and developed. Programmes emerged to assist in personal evangelism, as with James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion*; and tools were developed for personal, spiritual growth, as in the growing use of Scripture familiarisation programmes, such as those produced by the *Navigators*. Evangelistic programmes were multiplied. The main focus tended, however, to be towards the gathering of people to Christendom-tradition church that was, in large measure, failing to recruit men and women as new disciples of Jesus Christ. The influence of the Charismatic Movement in the latter part of the twentieth century brought a measure of encouragement and spiritual refreshment; but spiritual renewal within church did not lead to any real change or reformation of an encultured, attractional model of church.

In the 2020's, a changing circumstance faces us. Firstly, a disparity between the wealthy and the poor, evidenced in increasing social deprivation, has seen an increase of ministries such as debt counselling and food banks run by local churches. Secondly, growth in both dissatisfaction with encultured forms of church, combined with desire to look to alternative means of effectively reaching and discipling people, has led to a growing interest in exploring other ways of being church. In this respect, we look both to continue seeking excellence in accepted and effective ways of pursuing inherited church models; and also ask whether there are innovative ways whereby we might engage in fresh initiatives in church planting and other forms of sharing the Gospel: not least, by investigating further the viability of pioneering new forms of mission and ministry.

What, then, is the difference between church planting and pioneering? Is there a difference? What vision, goals and assumptions are present when people talk of these things? This has been our question; and this is what we have sought to explore through conversation with Regional Ministry Team Leaders (RMTLs) and other influential proponents of mission within BUGB.

3. BUGB

Interviews

The sample group was composed of 13 RMTLs (due to the illness of one RMTL, a team member substituted). Interviews were also had with the 3 BUGB Pioneer Ambassadors.

In interviews conducted over *Zoom*, the following questions were asked of each respondent, with particular reference to their area of responsibility or overview:

a. What distinction is to be made, if any, between 'church planting and 'pioneering'?
b. What lessons have you learnt from church planting or pioneering initiatives?
c. What areas of development or training do you perceive as priorities for those engaged in stipendiary ministries?
d. How do you allocate resources to ministry and mission?

i.   RMTLs: what I heard

a.   What distinction is to be made, if any, between 'church planting' and 'pioneering'?

There was no clear consensus among RMTLs as to how 'church planting' and 'pioneering' relate, partly because there was no shared understanding as to how 'church planting 'and 'pioneering' be defined. For some, 'church planting' was the general category and 'pioneering' a species within that. For others, 'pioneering' was the general category and 'church planting' the species.

There was more agreement to be found over the respective objectives of pioneering and church planting. Pioneering was generally viewed as making meaningful connections with people outside church, not looking for continuity of practice with inherited models of church. Church planting, on the other hand, could be viewed as a local church replicating its values and practices within a church-plant. In this regard, pioneering was often seen as the more important concern for an Association's team, as pioneering involves spearheading initiatives and new areas of community witness. At the same time, suspicion was expressed over any approach to pioneering that did not involve establishing some measurable outcomes. What might a measurable outcome be, other than the establishing of a healthy church? The aspiration articulated by many RMTLs was the need to establish disciple-making communities, whether as the fruit of pioneering or church-planting.

A perception as to the type of person that makes a good pioneer was sometimes expressed. That pioneers should be team players connected with local church was highlighted by some, pioneers walking with and watching over their fellow ministers. Others saw pioneers as mainly loners, focussed on relating to the unchurched: extraordinary people with self-sustaining capacities. Pioneers might be described as self-starters, entrepreneurs, who are focussed on the outworking of the Kingdom of God upon Earth.

b.   What lessons have been learnt from church planting or pioneering initiatives?

The importance of having support structures in place, whether for church planting or in pioneering, was articulated. There is the need of a key leader for every team. There should be a priority in establishing teams. For some RMTLs, this would be as true in pioneering situations as in church planting situations. There needs to be a plan to build and develop a team who will support one another.

Different criteria for assessing success and the ongoing viability of both church planting and pioneering projects may need to be established. A realistic timescale must be allowed for: it takes time for a new group to form, gather around Jesus and learn his ways. Multiplying disciples can be a slow process. At the same time, the winning and making of disciples is a criterion that is hard to ignore, when seeking to assess success in both pioneering and church planting.

From an Association perspective, budgets need to balance. Unless there are large funds that an Association has access to, it is unrealistic that ministers should look to be fully supported in pioneer situations with a stipend and a manse, for an indefinite period; and it was to be noted that pioneering initiatives seldom transition from part-supported into self-sustaining scenarios. For this reason, pioneer initiatives are more likely to require to be self-funding in some measure from the start.

c. **What areas of development or training do you perceive as priorities for those engaged in stipendiary ministries?**

This question sought to discern emphases and skills that RMTLs felt were important to enhance among those engaged in both leadership and facilitative roles within local church and pioneering situations.

At a foundational level, ministers need to know how to preach, teach and disciple people. Self-awareness and not simply reflective practice is required here, as is good self-care.

A number of RMTLs expressed the strong conviction that a missional narrative should undergird all aspects of training and CMD: a failure to focus on the mission of church, beyond church itself, can too easily produce ministers who only set out to maintain the *status quo*. At the same time, it was noted that new ministers often come into post without understanding how to manage local church, let alone transition church into being a more effective missional agent. Likewise conflict management, communication skills, online ministry and change management are all areas where up-skilling is required. Ministers need to have the opportunity to acquire enhanced skills in these areas, in order to be effective in leading church forward, in order for church to become an effective agent of mission and ministry within contemporary culture and society.

Shortcomings in managerial competencies were seen to exacerbate difficulties in overcoming a prevailing culture of clericalism. This was identified as an inhibitory agent, slowing the development of effective mission and ministry. Where the minister is viewed as a provider of services by the church, rather than a facilitator of mission and ministry, it is hard to make progress.

Where does theological education and training find a place, in this ongoing process? In one sense, it was recognised as essential in preparing a person to be an effective preacher and teacher. On the other hand, it was also seen as essential to have leaders prepared with a mindset and skills that look to equip and enable other members of the local church, that all may engage in the work of mission and ministry.

d. **How do you allocate resources to ministry and mission?**

RMTLs varied in their approach to resourcing mission initiatives. Strategies varied from the *ad hoc* through to a funding strategy with clear criteria. In most cases, the use of home mission grant allocated around 50% to team staffing and 50% to supporting mission projects or persons. For some RMTLs it was policy to have team members working part-time for the Association and part-time in local church.

Most RMTLs prioritised funding for mission, when initiated by local churches within their Association, over initiatives undertaken by the Association. This should not infer that all RMTLs did not articulate a vision or focus for their Association: it is simply to note that the overall vision for mission and ministry, expressed by an Association, did not necessarily predicate a policy for the disbursement of monies to projects and people.

ii.   Pioneer Ambassadors: what I heard

Conversations with BUGB Pioneer Ambassadors Roy Searle, Ali Boulton and Simon Goddard yielded a number of valuable insights.

An understanding of pioneering referenced by all three was the *Pioneer Spectrum*. Here, pioneering is represented as a spectrum of people and initiatives. This perspective was laid out in an edition of *Anvil,* the Anglican *Journal of Theology and Mission* (34:1). This essay identified a range of modelled activities across a spectrum of mission and ministry, ranging from replicating an established model of church (M1) through to experimental venturing into secular space in an attempt to bring transformation, yet without seeking to establish a recognisable form of church (M5). In between these extreme models are placed three others. A third point in the spectrum is characterised by *Messy Churc*h or *Café Church* (M2). A fourth is gathering, in a hosted context, seeking to build relationship and offering discipleship (M3). A fifth model is found in venturing into contemporary culture in order to explore expressions of spirituality with seekers and wanderers (M4). These five models are illustrative of a spectrum of pioneering practices that can be employed.

It follows, from an acceptance of pioneering as represented by the *Pioneer Spectrum*, that a precise, generic definition of pioneering and pioneers would not be favoured by the Pioneer Ambassadors. This preference is evidenced further in the BUGB document*, A Pioneer Manifesto*, which offers an understanding of the relationship of church to pioneering through invoking the metaphor of forest: an organism varied and diverse, with many variants, yet possessing the unity of an organic, ecological system. Pioneering cannot be described in static, defined terms: it is an experimental journey, an exploration into new possibilities of development and growth.

One perspective and motivation expressed for pursuing more radical forms of pioneering was a perceived failure of church-planting, as represented by M1 and M2 on the *Pioneer Spectrum*. Such church planting initiatives have not proven highly effective in a reaching the unchurched and consolidating discipleship. Models of church that are simply a mutation of Christendom models, presupposing the legitimacy of an attractional ethos, may not be the right place to start. Our focus should be on the advance of God's Kingdom among those who are strangers to the Gospel, not upon establishing an antiquated way of being church. This challenge can lead us to seeking a reconstruction of Christian community that is more accessible to the wider, unchurched community.

Two other areas discussed are noted. Firstly, in the area of ministerial training and development, the importance of ongoing mentoring and coaching was highlighted. It is essential to build an environment of both support and accountability for ministers: a point also emphasised by RMTLs who had special interest in promoting pioneer ministries. Secondly, it was mooted that the entrepreneurial or apostolic, missionary spirit required of a pioneer married well with working part-time. In this sense, there was a case to be argued for pioneers basing themselves in a local context and finding gainful employment there, whilst looking to develop Christian community.

Conclusions:

Undoubtedly, the *Pioneer Spectrum* allows for a perspective that embraces the motivation behind church planting and pioneering, placing both within the category of pioneering. Confusion might arise, however, where the assumption is made that church planting means perpetuating a Christendom-tradition model of church: hence the preference of some RMTLs to articulate the relationship between church planting and pioneering in a more nuanced manner. Likewise, where RMTLs themselves favour a Christendom-tradition model of church, it can understandably become difficult to construe what pioneers are seeking to achieve.

4. Plotting a pathway

In beginning to plot a pathway for the continued pursuit of church planting and pioneering within our Scottish context I offer two observations, one regarding the type of people we are looking for to spearhead initiatives; and another regarding what might be conceived as essential to the nature and identity of church.

The first observation is that focus of any accredited minister must lie in the making and multiplying of disciples of Jesus Christ. It is about recruitment and replication. The focus should not solely be on preaching from a platform, or for caring and counselling clients. A person can be a superb preacher or an excellent counsellor, yet not be called to be an accredited minister. These practices, valuable though they are, should not be allowed to displace or replace the Great Commission and our Lord's command to 'make disciples'. It is too easy for the accredited minister to lose this focus. Whether called to lead a Christendom-tradition model of church, church plant or pioneer, the accredited minister's focus must be on making disciples. The question then becomes, 'how can I best do this?' The accredited minister needs to keep their eyes on what the church is meant to be under God: a growing community of disciples.

The second observation is that there has to be a conviction, formed under God, of what is essential to the nature of church. We will return to this observation after giving some consideration to the first.

Spearheading initiatives: **interpersonal and interdependent**

One of the difficulties that can arise in conversations over church-planting and pioneering lies in the use of vocabulary. Terms that presuppose an understanding of ministry designations and of the nature of church, taken as definitive regardless of the culture and context that we seek to operate in, are problematic. Where we look for definitions by engaging with Biblical narratives, looking for a 'this is that' and the 'then is now' understanding from Scripture, terms of vocabulary will need to be shaped both by that usage and by our own context today. We need to locate ourselves in a narrative that is true to the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ and to the metanarrative of God's dealings with mankind expressed through Him; and also be aware of the cultural environment and social structures that we are dealing with today. Looking to define church planting and pioneering in generic, abstract terms is therefore unhelpful.

Vocabulary does, however, matter. Especially in an Age where we witness the growing fragmentation of society and atomisation of people. In this regard, I suggest the use of words such as 'individual' and 'independent' is profoundly unhelpful in promulgating Christian discipleship. We might recall that there is no word, in the Bible, for an 'individual'. It is good to refresh our understanding that 'individual' is a concept that arises out of Enlightenment, Western philosophy. Likewise, the invoking of 'independent' can too easily arise from a context where fragmentation and atomisation of social groupings and people is accepted, embraced and even valued.

Profoundly true to the way that God works with His world are values generated by seeking to be 'interpersonal' and pursuing 'interdependency'. This is the context in which discipleship is formed. Life is about relationships. For people in modern society there are multiple, interpersonal relationships. No person is an island. The establishing and continuation of healthy, human society requires that we interact with others. Indeed, the revealed character and nature of God is profoundly interpersonal. God reveals Himself to us in His Oneness as a Being of Triune, interpersonal connectivity. We are to be connected with this interpersonal God as well as with one another. This is how we become better established in our identity as those formed in the Image of God. The Body of Christ is a complex, organic entity, where interpersonal communications and communion have to take place, else we are likely to be found guilty of not discerning the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

In the same way, seeking to establish and affirm the presence of the Gift of the Holy Spirit upon a person, other than their owning and being affirmed as part of the community constituted by Jesus Christ, is unhelpful. The giftings emanating from the Gift of Holy Spirit through the Body of Christ are dispersed to the church in her organic nature as persons gathered in unity, in Jesus' name. The Holy Spirit's giftings are not endowed upon each of us partitively. Giftings are aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry, manifested to and through the unity of the church. A tireless quest of seeking to identify, express and affirm the giftings and ministry of an isolated person, an individual cut off from Christian community and the corporate identity into which their humanity has been called to be reshaped by God, is nothing less than religious narcissism.

Spearheading initiatives: **community Hermeneutics**

Religious narcissism leads into false prophecy, where illusory visions are articulated, out of a sense of self-need or the requirement to perform before others. There is an ever-present danger of self-deception when we seek to steer a course by ourselves. The necessary corrective of others and their insights and wisdom is made even more important in the context of radical, innovative and experimental mission. Community hermeneutics, listening to the Holy Spirit and also evaluating what we are hearing from others in the culture and context that we have been called into, is no less important in pioneering than in Christendom-model church.

Interconnectivity is the essence of life. God looks to resource fullness of life in and through the person of Jesus Christ. This is communicated, interpersonally, between those full of the presence of the Holy Spirit, out into the world to others.

Pioneers need to be recognised and commissioned by church to forge a way forward in looking to establish new, radical, disciple-making communities. This should be undertaken in a way that does not disavow or renounce that community is of the very essence of our renewed humanity. Each Christian is called to be constitutively part of a group who are seeking to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Pioneers need to be affirmed by church in their vocation and calling to make disciples and establish yet further expressions of Christ's community.

Pioneers, in turn, need to formulate an understanding and articulation of what it means to be part of a community that belongs to Jesus Christ, to be true to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom mission. That articulation may well vary, depending on exigencies of culture and context; but it does, nonetheless, need to be articulated, if the pioneer is not to be lost in the mists of post-modern relativism.

The essence of church: an opportunity to radically reconfigure

The recent crisis, occasioned by the Covid epidemic, allows us to opportunity to reconsider many things, including:

- What it means to gather as community in Jesus Christ
- What it means to be addressed and challenged by the Word of God in Scripture
- What it means to engage in mission

Where access to church buildings has been inhibited or even prevented, the use of Internet technology has accelerated experimentation in alternative and supplementary ways of gathering, discussing and discerning together. Likewise, the use of platforms such as *Youtube* and *Facebook Live* to broadcast teaching and sermons has alerted many to the multitude of different preachers and teaching materials that can be accessed through the Internet. All of this invites us to reconsider and evaluate what are the most effective ways of engaging in mission and ministry together. Experimentation needs to take place; and results need to be evaluated.

It makes sense to pursue pioneering as a generic activity, encompassing all of M1 to M5 on the *Pioneer Spectrum*. In doing so, asking which of the following are of the essence of church, as Christian community, invites critical consideration:

- Preaching as a congregational address
- Teaching as a multilateral conversation
- Praising God together, in song or in prose
- Praying to God together, through liturgy or spontaneously
- Communal reading and discussion of Scripture
- Communal discernment and encouragement of what it means to obey
- Collective mentoring and accountability
- Celebrating ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- Sharing food and hospitality together
- Collective action and support in mercy ministries

o Collective action in evangelism

Pastors have preached to cameras rather than congregations. Groups have met from across the world, in 'Zoom rooms', for testimony, teaching and discussion. People have learnt to praise without singing and to pray on the phone. The act of being together, of relating to one another, has been the activity most missed by many.

I invite you:

❖ to reflect on what is, for you, within the context you minister and aspire to do mission, the essence of church.
❖ to reflect on what way your present model of church might be improved upon, transitioning to a way that enables your values and convictions to be more effectively practiced.

The path before us invites further experimentation and allows opportunities for discovery and renewal of focus and purposefulness. May that journey be, for you, to the glory of God and the greater advance of His Kingdom upon Earth.

Jim Purves
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