

Temple Tracts: Issue 1, Volume 3

From the Ground Up: Creating Community Cohesion through Incarnational Mission

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William Temple
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Introduction - Discontinuous change

Social division – the physical and psychological distance between people with diverse views and life experiences – has become a much debated issue in 2017. The political and social tumult of 2016, full of unexpected outcomes and unintended consequences, has left many feeling fearful about the future, or at the very least, aware that there is no longer a political ‘business as usual’. Whether intrigued, excited or appalled by the events of the last year and the debate surrounding poverty, marginalisation, immigration and social cohesion which accompanied the EU referendum; it seems apparent that Britain is home to extremely diverse beliefs about how the world works and what constitutes a good society. The challenge, in the light of this, is how to become a cohesive society.

In this ebook I will offer a response to this challenge drawn from my research into the experiences of Christians doing incarnational mission in urban neighbourhoods. The nature of the relationships created between in-coming Christians and local people is distinctive, involving affirming one another’s personhood while accepting and understanding the differences between them. This can offer insight into increasing social capital and building strong, mutual relationships among people of difference in our society as a whole. I will explore the form of these relationships and the way in which they are created, a way of life I call missional pastoral care. I also acknowledge the costs of mutuality, recognising that social cohesion requires personal change from all of us. For faith communities this can present a challenge to theology, therefore I explore *missio Dei*, charismatic theology and kingdom theology as resources which can provide the confidence and imagination for faith groups to ‘faithfully improvise’ in their communities. I conclude that community cohesion is a shared task requiring the willingness of every person to engage with someone different to themselves in mutual relationship. Prioritising and enabling such interactions requires specific responses from both local and national public services and faith groups to address inequality, make space for communities to come together and to affirm the agency of each person in a community. However, the first step is to understand the context of social fracture.

Chapter 1 - The challenge of creating cohesion

The Casey Review, published in December 2016, was the outcome of an eighteen-month process of qualitative research into issues of integration and opportunity in our communities (Casey, 2016, p. 7). Its aim was to consider how the most marginalised communities could be better included in the opportunities and benefits of British life. Casey concluded that while there have been extensive efforts made by successive governments to create community cohesion over the last fifteen years these were largely unsuccessful. She argues that 'communities have not been engaged adequately' and that programmes have not been implemented consistently or linkages made between community cohesion and 'socio-economic inclusion' (Casey, 2016, p. 16). As a result the review suggests there is still much to be done to heal the fractures in our communities and enable the whole population to enjoy the opportunities available in our country.

Comments made in the review indicate the limitations of government approaches to addressing social division. Firstly, by failing to address the broad issues of inequality in our society, programmes have attempted to encourage divided communities to unite while leaving disparities in their opportunities and experiences unchallenged. Secondly, by focusing on programmes and services as modes of delivery, efforts have failed to achieve the full participation of local communities.

These issues illustrate the challenges of social cohesion in both ideological and methodological terms. Ideologically the dominance of competitive capitalism in British society, both as an economic system and as a framing cultural lens (the 'consumer society') has perpetuated inequalities. Our economy is perceived to need inequality in order to grow, and aspiration becomes the upward-tilted face of marginalisation. This results in a lack of political will to address inequality as a broad structural issue in British life; further affirmed as other developed and prosperous Western countries, most notably the U.S., adopt similar approaches (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010, pp. 263-272; Atherton, 2014, pp. 29-40).

Methodologically the reliance on deficit, or needs-based service delivery as the primary mode of action among statutory agencies is shown to be insufficient to mobilise local people to create social change. It may be argued that such an approach is particularly unsuited to working towards community *cohesion* for a number of reasons I and colleagues identified in

the 2015 paper *Fullness of Life Together* (Eckley, Ruddick, & Walker, 2015). There we highlighted the ways in which service delivery starts from an assumption of need, and concludes that external expertise and resources are required in order to meet that need. This fails to take a holistic view of a community as a resource in itself, containing expertise at many levels.

It defines people by their problems, ignoring their capacities. It relies on processes and programmes rather than relationships in order to address these problems and it divides communities according to need, age and stage; for example day centres for isolated elderly people or self-help groups for people with mental health problems. The consequence of this is the neglect of the whole person, all of us a combination of needs and strengths, creating dependency and poverty of identity. This approach also neglects the importance of relationships to well-being, exacerbating isolation in communities. Instead it results in over-stretched services with professionals weighed down by entirely unrealistic expectations for their programmes to 'fix' people and communities (Eckley, Ruddick, & Walker, 2015, pp. 5-6). As the outcomes of The Casey Review demonstrate, this approach is fundamentally unsuited to overcoming fracture in communities, and in fact may perpetuate the problem.

The role played by faith groups in issues of cohesion and fracture is significant, with many working hard to contribute positively within their spheres of influence. Along with other community groups they are also responding to a political and economic environment of funding cuts. The Big Society agenda turned attention from government provision to the contracting of services delivered by charitable and community organisations. However, the critique of service delivery models above applies equally to those run by churches or other faith groups. 'Picking up the slack' for cuts in government spending on welfare or social care may simply perpetuate an austerity agenda, failing to offer a prophetic critique of the inequalities and injustices of our society. Furthermore the co-option of faith groups into funded service provision allows a quiet slide into a particular relation to the local community: a provider – client relationship. While it can be argued that some Christian traditions sit quite easily (if unconsciously) with the idea that the church is 'provider' to the world's 'client', I suggest that this is in fact a corruption of the role of the Christian community, not its calling (for a development of this see Ruddick & Eckley, 2016).

So where might we look for an alternative? Perhaps surprisingly, we could look to the experiences of Christians involved in incarnational urban mission and the people they have met in their neighbourhoods. In this regard I draw on my previous research into the relational dynamics between evangelical Christians participating in the incarnational urban mission of the Eden Network and the urban people they lived alongside in their communities. In the interactions between these two very different groups, a mutuality has emerged, one which respects and values difference while also finding commonality.

Researching evangelical incarnational urban mission

The Eden Network is an initiative of Christian charity The Message Trust. It involves developing partnerships with local churches or church planting denominations and recruiting teams of Christians to relocate into communities identified as among the 20% most deprived in the country.¹ Eden teams then remain in their communities indefinitely, engaging with local people in a variety of ways. This often includes running programmed activity such as youth clubs or work with younger children; it also involves being a pro-active neighbour and prioritising local amenities and services. This is understood as sharing life with the community and may lead to other forms of participation such as residents and tenants groups or governorships for local schools.²

My research sought to consider what was happening in the relationships between evangelical Christians relocating into urban communities, and those urban community members who encountered them. I conducted qualitative interviews with both Eden team members and community members and analysed these alongside my personal and professional participant observation of Eden Network's urban mission. This investigation led to findings relating to shifts in evangelical identity among Eden team members and the naming of a distinct model of ministry which was emerging through their practice: missional pastoral care. Missional pastoral care is a form of missional living made up of seven components: difference, locality, availability, practicality, long-term commitment, consistency and love. It enacts the mission of God in three specific ways:

- in a holistic sharing of life for the good of one another;

¹This is done using ward statistics on the government website: www.neighbourhoodstatistics.gov.uk

² For more information on the Eden Network see www.message.org.uk/eden

- in an articulation of life narratives, including faith narratives;
- and in hermeneutical play, reshaping the meaning-systems of all involved.

Foundational to this ministry is a positive engagement with difference and therefore it has a contribution to the current political and social debates around community cohesion. Based on this work I argue that community cohesion is created, not by services or programmes, but by an intentional way of life which enables the sharing and reshaping of worldviews.

The mode of living evident in my research is one which can offer ways forward for addressing the divisions in our neighbourhoods. It shows that cohesion between people with different worldviews can be achieved by intentionally developing mutual relationships. Furthermore it demonstrates that this is consonant with Christian mission in that it involves aligning with the kingdom of God in the world. Therefore Christian communities must step back from service delivery as a default mode of engagement, instead prioritising developing such relationships and, more structurally, creating spaces in which mutual relationships can be cultivated across communities.

Chapter 2 - Community cohesion from the ground up

My research focused on what was happening to the self-understandings of both practitioners of incarnational mission and so-called 'recipients' of such mission. The broad scope of 'community cohesion' might seem to require a macro analysis, however, immersion in the experiences of people in relationship with 'others' enables an understanding of cohesion to emerge from the ground up, and one person at a time. An opening question might be:

What is cohesion? What do we mean when we hope for a cohesive society?

Cohesion occurs when people who are 'other' to one another become involved in a relationship consisting of the exploration of worldviews, and find a degree of shared language and mutual respect together. This leads to the possibility of adapting worldviews to embrace the other. So cohesion necessarily involves changing one's mind, inviting a consideration of cognitive processes.

The fields of psychotherapy and pastoral counselling have long been wrestling with the question, how do people change? Pastoral theologian Charles Gerkin draws on hermeneutics in order to understand the relationship between the pastor and the one seeking help. In his model the task of pastoral care is to create 'dialogical space', between the Christian narrative and the worldviews of individuals seeking help (1997, p. 111). This process involves the carer and care-seeker cultivating a 'fusion of horizons' (Gerkin, 1984, p. 44); a shared language world in which both understand the other's meaning-systems and can explore new meanings together. This safe space allows the care-seeker to change their worldview, their understanding of reality and how the world works, by changing their interpretations of particular life events or the actions of significant people. By gaining insight into different possible meanings of events, experiences, or the actions of others, the care-seeker can come to see the world differently and live in it differently as a consequence. This exploration is understood by Gerkin as spontaneous, fun and even joyful, a space in which the Spirit can work (1984, p. 124), leading him to describe it as 'hermeneutical play' (1984, p. 153).

This model, while applied by Gerkin to the very specific context of Christian pastoral care, has wider implications for ideas of cohesion. In the stories of my participants and in my participant observation the same dynamic of hermeneutical play occurred in the daily formal and informal interactions between Christian practitioners of mission and urban community members.

This everyday hermeneutical interaction between Eden teams and community members sometimes occurs as literal play, for example community member Paul described the way he and his friends behaved when they were young teenagers: '...if it was still raining we'd go and cause trouble [so] we'd get to go in his [Eden team member's] house, so that's what we used to do all the time...'. Other times it is accidental, for example community member Clare, not anticipating the challenge to her meaning-system that would follow, coming to church and discovering 'they weren't like the people you'd normally meet you know'. Eden team member Sally tells the story of a friend on the estate:

There's a mum of a lad who was about eight or nine when we moved here and his mum is the same age as me... and our lives are just worlds apart and yet she was always just so interested in me... And there was a couple of things that happened a

few years ago that she was quite distraught about and we were able to put her in touch with some people who could offer some counselling... and she so appreciated that, like no one would've ever thought that she was worth taking the time to sort something out for... the family that she's a part of are quite influential on the estate as well as quite vocal and actually she's always been sort of a positive advocate for us because she's our neighbour...

The formation of a fusion of horizons and the creative space that it opens up is developed over time in the course of being neighbours and friends in a community. In these relationships enough common ground is found, enabling hermeneutical play to occur, such that long-held worldviews, including prejudices relating to class or ethnicity can be challenged and changed.

In my research several practices or habits emerged which enable such relationships to develop and hermeneutical play to occur. Firstly creating this kind of cohesion involves proximity, simply being around each other enough in mutual and varied settings. Locality and availability are key features of missional pastoral care, the way of living practised by my participants. Community member David described the way that Eden team members commit to inhabiting a place:

...they can see around 'em like what's going on and they became part of the community rather than just being an outsider who's trying to come in and improve it just to make themselves look good, they were part of the community and said let's be the change of the community ourselves.

Locality involves affirming contested and fluid urban spaces and the people who find themselves there, as Eden team member Louise said: '...it's the longest amount of time I have ever lived in one place which is just really cool, [it] really feels like my home'. Eden team members also demonstrated availability, which may be described as an intentionally open orientation, rather than a lack of boundaries. Their availability changed over time according to circumstances but they maintained a commitment to hospitality and a willingness to engage.

Secondly hermeneutical play is enabled by doing things together as well as by talking. This could be the challenge of enacting a different worldview in the way that you treat a marginalised person, or taking shared action as one Eden team member described:

...then it's like they join in with you and it's when people join in with you and support the cause that you both believe in and it's like wow this is really collaborative and I never expected it to be like this. (Thompson, 2012, p. 56)

The practical nature of missional pastoral care gives opportunities for discovering common ground and tempers a reliance on words which may be politically charged or even discriminatory given potential differences in language or levels of literacy.

Thirdly it involves acknowledging, rather than seeking to dissolve, the differences between people. In the context of ongoing, local and practical relationships difference can emerge naturally rather than being overstated. Acknowledging difference creates questions, opening up the possibility of a different kind of world. Clare is a community member in her thirties and she reflected on the impact of acknowledging difference among Eden team members:

I think it was the people who went there as well, it wasn't like the people you'd normally meet, they thought a lot of themselves, they thought a lot of their health, you know of each other, things like that... there's some, ...live here there's a lot of drugs... and you have to get yourself away from it d'y'know what I mean, but I think going to church helped me do that, to think this is not all of – you don't have to be like this to be cool, to be good.

Richard Osmer describes this kind of experience as being 'brought up short' (2008, p. 22), it can be an occasion for the re-evaluation of worldviews and, when occurring over a period of time and accompanied by an affirmation of the self, can lead to personal change.

In any missional initiative it is important to understand how power is experienced by those involved. Clearly there is the potential for objectification in the ministry of the Eden Network and my participants acknowledged the imbalance of power in many of their early assumptions. However, as their ministry, with its commitment to remaining long term, developed and hermeneutical play began to affect their own worldviews, these assumptions

fell away. Eden team member Sally describes a change in her worldview during the ten years she has lived in her community:

...when we first came here I was like “why have all these people got all these problems, why don’t they just you know pick themselves up and get on with it”.
...God’s just really enabled me to see that there’s so many complexities to life that mean that people find themselves in these situations and actually you just need to get alongside them and just understand that and then find a way to help them to help themselves rather than just being impatient... So I think God’s really softened me around the edges with that.

Alongside receiving the challenge of the other, affirming the sense of self of each individual is essential to creating mutual relationships and enabling a change in worldviews. This allows people to remain themselves while experimenting or ‘playing’ with new worldviews and it is the way in which love is shown in missional pastoral care relationships. My participants articulated that they were ‘still them’ even when describing profound changes in their outlooks and life choices. Eden team member James describes his Christian conversion as: ‘...about... becoming comfortable in who I was actually...’. While Kevin, a community member with a complex history of abuse and self-harm, refers to the way that the Eden group that he is involved with makes him feel about himself: ‘...it gives you a reason, you know to, to live, so yeah it’s good, I feel dead uplifted, I feel more confident, it gives me more reason you know just to be, just to be me...’.

Hermeneutical play is the process of change in a person. When people interact in these informal and yet intentional ways difference is acknowledged while shared understandings are developed. This leads to mutuality – being for one another, as community member Jess described it: “like family”. In this way community is created, not through the denial of difference but through the affirmation of each person’s sense of self alongside the expression of difference.

Chapter 3 - The cost of mutuality

The Casey Review suggests that efforts to cultivate integration have focused too strongly on the positives of diversity, enjoying sharing the fun, interesting and tasty elements of different cultures. While this is good, Casey argues that it fails to address the hard questions posed by diverse religious and cultural traditions (2016, p. 16). These comments hint at the need for vulnerability and for change in order to create community cohesion.

The stories of those I interviewed demonstrated genuine mutuality in which participants had experienced the costs and ambiguity of changing their worldviews to incorporate the other. Mutuality and cohesion are costly. They require each of us to give of ourselves, to be willing to engage with challenge and to change. This becomes difficult to talk about in a public sphere which is heavily shaped by party politics. Governments are keen to emphasise the gains to be made by embracing diversity, but this becomes counter-productive when the reality of people's experience is of misunderstanding, unequal opportunities and not feeling heard. Honest conversations about the mutual dependence of every person and the costs of community cohesion for us all require a different quality of space from that often found within the media and political forums. A compelling vision for good change must sit alongside acknowledgement of the loss that change involves; a conversation about the costs, as well as the benefits, of the common good.

So what are the losses and gains of mutuality?

The potential for this kind of cohesion is that it can enable human flourishing. Flourishing emerged in my research as growth in a number of areas: self-esteem, capacity to take action, a positive approach to life choices, an awareness of a good God and solidarity in mutual relationships. These outcomes led to significant changes in the lives and worldviews of my participants. Community member Paul met the Eden team when he was just beginning to be involved in gang activity locally. He described the different choices he had made:

Say if I carried on on the streets... half of us probably be in jail now... but knowing [Eden team members] and starting getting into all more activities and helping out... I see my change, ...obviously we still went back to do our own stuff while we was with

them but instead of just climb one ladder causing trouble I was climbing two so I was still messing about causing trouble but also climbing the ladder to gain respect you know... 'cos I was being with them and then... things move on like so I was climbing two instead of one and obviously you only want to climb one ladder and I just jumped back on to the good ladder to go the good way.

However, these gains are just one side of the coin, necessarily accompanying them is a sense of loss, ambiguity and tension. This complex picture is due to the way in which cohesion is achieved. As I have described, cohesion happens when two people, previously 'other' to one another, spend sufficient time in close enough proximity, and with an openness of heart in order to build a relationship in which they come to understand and value one another as persons. They forge a shared language, accounting for their differences, with which to understand how the world works and their place within it. This combination of challenge to perspective plus the affirmation of unique personhood felt in the friendship enables each individual to adjust their personal worldview, allowing the other to shape them. But changing your worldview, accommodating to the other and navigating the tensions of difference is a costly process, requiring a realistic hope for community cohesion.

The initial challenge of seeking cohesion is the need to choose to share yourself with a new person. Eden team member Sally described this as: "...allowing yourself to be quite vulnerable with your neighbours... actually letting them see that you have got struggles and issues...". By investing in building relationships with others, inevitably participants have to engage with their own expectations and, over time, whether they are frustrated or fulfilled. Louise articulated it this way:

I suppose there are still some you wish you could say "oh there's been this transformation" and there hasn't been and... [I] think I am annoyed... which has been hard in a way. ...what I can do is pray...

Louise's words indicate the pain caused by becoming aware of the limited nature of change. While worldviews do shift, this is not an easy or smooth process and significant barriers to flourishing may remain, as community member Clare describes:

...to me you can't just be one day something and one day something else, I mean it might have happened to people but personally, it's not happened to me so I'm going through like a bit of a battle so I'm not transformed at the minute...

In his analysis of disability theologies, Swinton sees vulnerability as central to human experience and 'hospitality', receiving and welcoming vulnerability in mutual relationship, 'is a manifestation of the divine' (2011, p. 293). This dynamic of vulnerability and hospitality occurs in the openness of missional pastoral care relationships and the presence of ambiguity and limitation as outcomes of hermeneutical play.

Seeking mutuality involves being willing to subject your worldview to the scrutiny of others, and to see the darkness in ourselves. This is uncomfortable and is often a reason for people to remain apart, afraid or unwilling to let themselves be seen. Service delivery provides a safe place in which to hide in community. It enables groups to 'do something' without entering into an exchange of worldviews. It fixes the power dynamics in the favour of the service provider and removes the possibility of mutuality, and therefore the possibility of lasting change.

In order for our communities to grow stronger and build resilience we need to overcome this fear and reticence, and to find our way out of the hiding places of service delivery. Fear usually derives from and is perpetuated by ideology, and for faith groups, ideology is essentially theological. In my research the evangelical Christians among my participants found their theological frameworks challenged by their experiences of mutuality. Arising from their stories was a reformulation of their evangelical theology, shaped by their investment in their communities. These theological resources can inspire Christians seeking to respond to social fracture.

Chapter 4 - Confidence and imagination

...you have all the experiences that you have to deal with... when someone dies or gets beat up by their boyfriend and all sorts of mad stuff and you don't know what the answers are... yeah, I think my theology has changed quite a bit since coming on Eden. Say, it was a nice little pretty box all wrapped up, it's just been opened and has been a bit messy... (Louise, Eden team member)

These comments from Louise highlight the theological as well as personal risks taken in the course of incarnational ministry. There is challenge here to any group who take an absolutist ideological approach. In my research it was the evangelical tradition of the Christians I interviewed which came under scrutiny, but this could apply equally to a myriad of other religious and non-religious ideologies. George Newlands argues that Christianity is well placed to respond to these challenges as it acknowledges that there are unknowns concerning God and the world, thereby creating room for reciprocal learning (2004, p. 124).

Newlands clarifies that this does not equate to complete relativism, however it does establish 'epistemological humility' which then facilitates a 'humility of praxis' (2004, p. 124). His understanding of humility can allow us to offer an affirmation of the personhood of the other, while receiving the challenge of difference that they bring.

Acknowledging the risk and vulnerability of this kind of engagement has taken my participants back to their Christian tradition, looking again for resources with which to frame and inspire their community building. Looking beyond their inherited subcultural versions of Christianity they have sought a different kind of spirituality which is capacious enough to hold the tensions and flourishing of missional pastoral care. There are three theological themes which have shaped this journey and which can contribute to a search for cohesive communities: *missio Dei*, charismatic theology and kingdom theology.

Missio Dei - God is at work in the world

Missio Dei has emerged as a significant missiological theme since the 1930s, developing the classical doctrine of *missio Dei* and describing mission as 'not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God'. Therefore the task of the church is to find ways to participate in the activity of God in mission. This activity includes 'all people in all aspects of

their existence' and happens through the Spirit at work in human history, not just through the activity of the church (Bosch, 2011, pp. 400-401). The concept of *missio Dei* was popularised in the work of Anglican missionary and Bishop John V. Taylor in *The Go-Between God* published in 1972. He set out a missiology based on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world working in three specific ways: to enable numinous experiences of awareness of a 'greater whole'; to enable and require people to take personal responsibility and to call out of people 'self-oblation and sacrifice' (1972, p. 39).

Within my research the influence of *missio Dei* theology was evident in participants' conviction that God was there ahead of them in their communities and in the lives of individuals before they had met them. This was a surprise to many, with one Eden team member "...realising that actually sometimes you're better than me, and you really get that about God and I never really understood that before." (Thompson, 2012, p. 56).

Participants referred to the work of God the Holy Spirit in their communities outside of their efforts; for example Louise described a woman from her estate seeking her out to ask about church: '...obviously God was doing something in her, his Spirit was moving in [name]...'. *Missio Dei* language gives a theological rationale for the urban experience of Eden teams, underpinning their affirmation of the world and the self as sites of God's activity. If God is at work in the world and in people then the risk of mutual relationships also become the gift of meeting something of God in the 'other'. Rather than being 'godless' or alien, those with different worldviews are equally surrounded by a loving God, who is urging all to greater wholeness. *Missio Dei* becomes an invitation to encounter the work of God in an 'other', and in doing so to know God more richly.

Charismatic theology

For the Christians I interviewed the understanding of God going before them in mission was partnered with a charismatic spirituality. This meant an expectation, typical of charismatic evangelicalism, that God was present and accessible, through prayer and the exercise of spiritual gifts, in the course of everyday life (Cartledge, 2004, p. 180). This charismatic 'presence' of God enables 'dialogue', Jon Bialecki's 'intimate' exchange (2009, pp. 143-151) in the daily lives of Eden team members in an informal and often incremental process.

The combination of *missio Dei* and charismatic spirituality has led my participants to a sacramental view of experience. Both personally and in ministry, Eden team members have understood their experiences as the activity of God and therefore have allowed them to generate insight, including theological insight. Hannah describes the evolving nature of her theology:

I think one key thing that has changed is the way that I think about the gospel actually, it's evolving still ...there's a traditional church way of preaching the gospel, that you have to acknowledge that you're a sinner and that you repent and that you come to God and you believe and then you're baptised... while that's true I think that round here it's very interesting that there's a lot of people who are in certain lifestyle habits... I don't say this lightly... But not necessarily of their own volition... they've got very low self-esteem some of them, and to come along and say that you're a sinner isn't necessarily the most helpful to them, so ...I'm slowly thinking about some of the ways other people do it and it's basically showing God's love and his acceptance and that he is for them first and realising that Jesus really does love the sinner.

As Eden team members recognise the activity of God in their own experiences they also draw attention to the sacramental quality of experience in their communities, inviting others to recognise God at work. This is a further element of hermeneutical play, as friends call one another's attention to God in their shared experience.

Kingdom theology

Ideologies often suffer from a sense of threat from prevailing cultural forces, leading to an entrenchment which becomes insular and protectionist. Contemporary evangelicalism can be defined by the tension between a need to resist the world and a degree of cultural accommodation (Smith, 2000, pp. 157-159; Strhan, 2015, p. 17). For example, Strhan describes the negative evangelical perception of cities as spaces of 'moral disorder' while acknowledging that they are also considered to be places of opportunity, particularly for conversion, leading to the growth of evangelicalism in capitalist, industrialised cities (2015, pp. 31-33). Evangelical identity has also accommodated the individualism, intellectualism and globalisation of middle-class, Western late modernity (Guest, 2007, pp. 74, 202-3).

Despite, and perhaps because of, such accommodation evangelicals maintain a concern for 'policing their own boundaries' (Guest, 2007, p. 53).

This kind of identity politics is counter to the impulse to unite communities. It tends towards homogeneity rather than receiving the challenge of difference. My participants drew on a charismatic evangelical understanding of the kingdom of God in the world as both now and not yet (Cartledge, 2004, p. 186), coupled with *missio Dei* theology and their charismatic spirituality, to avoid protectionism. Rather they oriented themselves toward seeking out and aligning with the good, that which reflects the character or activity of God in a community, person or situation. Eden team member Adam articulated his awareness of the goodness in his community: '...it's not just people moving into the area that wanna change the area, there are people dotted around the streets that have the same heart as us...'

This kingdom theology is used in missional pastoral care as an expression of opposition to certain behaviours and aspects of culture alongside a positive intention to build on and with the good in others and in their communities. Eden teams are more concerned with a theology of the in-coming kingdom of God than with protecting their Christian identity from the influence of non-Christians in the community, as Louise expressed: '...I've learned things and I really love them, like [local friend], not like your middle-classy friends but I would enjoy her company more to be honest...'. Such openness is also evident in Mike Pears' analysis of convictional communities, in which he identifies the relinquishing of control as a feature of an incarnational approach (2013, p. 104). My participants see the good they seek to build up not in terms of what they bring to the community but rather in identifying the goodness already present in the community. This approach acknowledges the initiative of God in the world and therefore prioritises aligning with and participating in his activity while resisting what is destructive of this in-coming kingdom.

'faithful improvisation'

The combination of kingdom theology, *missio Dei* and charismatic spirituality lead to my participants conceiving of their friendships and activism as participation, alongside God, in an in-coming kingdom. Their community building is not rigid or programmatic, instead it accepts that the outcomes may be unknown. However, it is emboldened by God's presence with them and his action before them, enabling creativity, a lightness of spirit and a

willingness to be 'brought up short' as their worldviews are shaped and challenged. Ann Morisy writes: "when we journey out, without power, aware of our vulnerability and all the time risking that we may be overwhelmed, we will find ourselves being church and doing holistic mission..." (2004, p. 223). It is this confidence which is evident among my participants, and which is vital for creating cohesive communities.

Tom Wright calls for 'faithful improvisation' (2005, p. 28) in the practices of the contemporary church in mission. A willingness to admit that the path forward is not clear, and that humility regarding what we know and how we engage are the tools needed to begin addressing the social fractures in our communities. However, this is not without focus. The biblical concept of Shalom is defined by Nicholas Wolterstorff as 'the human being dwelling at peace with all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature' (1983, pp. 69-71). Shalom, or its less religious iteration the common good, are the end of this kind of action. To use such language may seem grandiose or idealistic, however the micro-practices of missional pastoral care and the hermeneutical play that they effect lead to genuine, while imperfect, expressions of community: being for one another and struggling alongside one another. This is rightly understood as a ministry of reconciliation, enacting the rhythms of Shalom.

Conclusion – From the ground up

Investing in interpersonal relationships with ‘others’ is the primary way in which social capital can be created and strengthened. These relationships occur through proximity, sharing tasks as well as conversation and over time. They result in mutuality, which itself involves risk and cost and therefore requires humility, confidence and imagination in order to both embrace the challenge of the ‘other’ and receive the affirmation of oneself in our difference. The effectiveness of this kind of relationship in allowing for changes in worldview highlights their significance in overcoming fractures in communities and bringing about social cohesion. If the process of change is through long term, mutual relationships in local neighbourhoods then the statutory sector and faith communities seeking to contribute toward community cohesion must take this into account.

There are three ways in which the government and statutory services can (and in some cases already do) respond to the need for community cohesion to emerge from the ground up. Firstly by reshaping their services to prioritise the cultivation of agency among individuals and the building of community relationships between people. Secondly by accepting their role as supporting the agency of local community groups and by creating and holding space in which local community relationships can be developed. Thirdly, by addressing structural inequality on a national and international scale.

Cultivating agency

The statutory sector has tended to adopt top down and service oriented approaches to issues of integration and cohesion, which have been criticised for failing to enable full participation in communities. Given the emphasis in my research on informality, mutuality, and affirmation of personhood it is unsurprising that approaches focused solely on need and addressing issues in a programmatic way have not proved fruitful. However, there are encouraging shifts taking place within public services, particularly in health and social care. New models, derived in many ways from the foundations of community development theory, take an asset, or strengths-based approach to community engagement. This acknowledges the place for services, particularly in ensuring universal access to essential public goods, but it acknowledges that service delivery, focused as it is solely on the *needs*

of a community is unlikely to create the conditions for a healthy and vibrant community life (Eckley, Ruddick, & Walker, 2015, p. 5).

Asset-based approaches seek to focus on what the community or individual already has: their skills, experience and material assets. They deliberately cultivate personal agency as a primary source of wellbeing, and acknowledge that community relationships are a vital part of the solution to personal problems. Isolation, inactivity and loneliness all exacerbate a range of mental and physical challenges. Given that the detrimental effects of social fracture are felt most keenly by communities experiencing poverty, it is significant that taking an asset-based approach to addressing health or employment issues can also contribute to building community bonds and social capital. Asset-based models such as co-production³, social prescribing⁴ and local area co-ordination⁵ are being developed within the public sector as ways that statutory services can change their ethos and practices in order to promote the kinds of mutuality between local people that I have described occurring within missional pastoral care.

Creating space

While this is helpful and necessary it is clearly a limited, and specific, contribution to community life. The broader picture of residents building mutual friendships is, to a large extent, beyond the gift of statutory agencies. Therefore both policy and models of practice must affirm the contribution of local community groups, including faith communities. Providing space, both physical space such as community centres and libraries, and interpersonal space, such as facilitators for local groups, are important ways that statutory agencies can reconceive their role and contribute to the building of mutual relationships. This is an important point in the light of the progressive closure of community spaces, particularly in marginalised communities. If spaces for people to meet and begin to get to know one another are removed, the potential for developing mutual relationships with 'others' is dramatically reduced, making fragmentation, segregation and isolation more likely.

³ See Boyle D. and Harris M. (2009) *The Challenge of Co-production*.

⁴ See the Social Prescribing Network: <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/patient-outcomes-in-health-research-group/projects/social-prescribing-network>

⁵ See Broad R. (2015) *People, Places, Possibilities*. Published by the Centre for Welfare Reform.

Tackling inequalities

Addressing inequality as a structural problem for the UK is vital in order to enable community cohesion. As the Casey review highlighted, the relationship between economic wellbeing and community cohesion has not been given sufficient consideration in previous government policy on integration. Inequality directly mitigates against community cohesion. This is evident at the local level, for example in the well-publicised views of some Brexit voters for whom leaving the EU held the promise of regaining access to essential services such as affordable housing and a GP appointment. It also features in the national polarisation of caricatures such as “London elites” and “UKIP voters”. These caricatures are uncomfortable reading, they highlight the worst of our society, but they expose the costs of inequality and the extent of fragmentation which can only be addressed through both structural action to address inequalities and local action to build local social capital through mutual community relationships.

For faith communities this research offers a model of being in community which is local, relational and missional. Faith communities are particularly concerned with worldviews, and carry an inherited vision of the common good; therefore there may be particular ways in which they can act between statutory services and local communities. Many faith communities, including churches, have followed the pattern of the statutory sector, adopting needs-based service delivery as their mode of community engagement. When considering how they might contribute to their community many start by asking: ‘what are the needs?’ This immediately mitigates against mutuality, establishing from the start a client-provider relation with the neighbourhood. Despite this, many faith communities have a rich community life, which they hope to welcome others into, and which has a very different character to service-delivery.

I have shown here that this recourse to service delivery is not the only option. By prioritising cultivating community above meeting needs faith communities can enter into more mutual relationships. Within Christian theology this means leaning in to the resources I have described above: God’s mission in the world ahead of us, his dynamic presence in and alongside us in daily life and his in-coming kingdom of Shalom. This can enable Christian

communities to enter into truly mutual relationships, embracing their vulnerability and holding their worldview with humility. In this way patterning the life of Jesus and thereby seeing their own lives and the lives of others around them become more characterised by reconciliation and peace.

The example of the Eden team members and urban community members in my research is that by choosing openness to relationship, humility and vulnerability, personhood is affirmed and difference can issue its challenge. In the hermeneutical play of missional pastoral care relationships incremental steps are taken together, imagining Shalom vividly and living toward it. This research is of course partial, issues of power and inequality are embodied in the act of relocation requiring self-awareness and humility. Despite this, the vulnerability of encounter with the 'other' which knocks us all off kilter prevents paternalism in the practises of my participants. In this way it offers the hope of creating genuine community cohesion in which the personhood of each individual is affirmed while the challenge of difference enables us all to change.

For reflection

Where do you see the separation of people with differing worldviews in your community?

In your experience of community engagement, has it been focused on the needs or on the gifts of those in the community?

Are there any spaces in your neighbourhood where different people can meet and get to know one another?

What would it mean for you to spend more time with people who think differently to you?

What theological resources do you use to underpin your community engagement?

Where do you see signs of the in-coming kingdom (Shalom) in your community? How can you affirm and support this?

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